Unaccompanied Minors - The Right to Express their Views

a study of inter-personal and communicative aspects of the asylum interview with unaccompanied minors as experienced by their guardians

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13. november 2009
Abstract

This study explored inter-personal and communicative aspects of the interviews with unaccompanied minor asylum seekers. The aim was to explore how child-specific aspects are being taken care of through the interview form and guardian’s support.

Six persons voluntarily engaged as guardians of unaccompanied minors were individually interviewed with the purpose to address the research question. Data material was collected using qualitative, semi-structured interviews. The research material was analyzed and discussed in the light of the dialogical perspective on communication. Children’s specific status as informants and all children’s right to express their views as emphasized in the Convention on the Rights of the Child were central in this study.

The study showed that the guardian’s role was a significant one with respect to the formal and emotional preparation of the child for the asylum interview, support during the interview, and the follow-up of the child after the interview. The results indicated that guardians could contribute to a profound background for the minor’s asylum claim. The quality of the rapport between the interviewer and the child proved to be varying, from caring and less formal to businesslike and impersonal. Report writing and interpreter-mediated character of the interview tended to challenge the rapport building. The study showed that the communicative process could be described as schematic and highly structured, which limited the interviewer’s possibilities to follow the minor’s initiative. When open-ended questions were asked, children seemed to narrate their asylum stories on the layer of action and that of context, while the emotional layer stayed untouched. This indicates the possible weakness of the asylum interview with respect to its purpose, which is getting a profound and complete understanding of the child’s situation from the child’s perspective.

The child’s right to express his or her views is about a fundamental right of the child to be heard and influence decision-making. However, conducting interviews with children in a way that enables them to come forward with their views proves to be
challenging. With a dialogical perspective on communication, it is possible and realistic to take care of both child-specific and legal aspects of the asylum interview. The study indicates that communication skills, which are likely to include personal elements such as skills to establish a rapport and communicate, is an important area for further development. More research on the processes in the asylum interview is needed.
Acknowledgements

First of all, I would like to thank the participating guardians for their willingness to share the experiences and thoughts with me. I would then like to thank the person in the Norwegian People’s Aid who helped me to find informants for this study.

I wish to thank my supervisor Åse Langballe from the Norwegian Centre for Violence and Traumatic Stress Studies (NKVTS) for sharing her enormous scientific competence and experience with me and for being such a skilled, curious, and encouraging supervisor throughout this learning process.

Special thanks to friends and colleagues Merete, Arne, and Per Jan for willingness to read and discuss the paper. I would like to thank my dear friend Svetlana for her skilful help in getting the written English right.

And, finally, my thanks go to my families in Norway and Belarus: thank you for your support and patience throughout the whole period of my studies.
Abbreviations

CRC – Convention on the Rights of the Child

DCM – Dialogical Communicative Method

NPA – Norwegian People’s Aid

NSD – Norwegian Social Science Data Services

UDI – Norwegian Directorate of Immigration

UMA – unaccompanied minor asylum seeker

UN – United Nations

UNHCR – United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
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1. Introduction

This study is about young people from war and conflict ridden countries of the world, who come to Norway without their parents with the purpose of seeking asylum. It concerns unaccompanied minor asylum seekers that have experienced war, conflicts, violence, loss of family, relatives, and friends, neglect, and often traumatic and exhausting flight. Those are children who are often lonely, fragile, and uncertain in a foreign country.

Unaccompanied minor asylum seekers (hereafter referred to as UMAs) are persons under the age of 18 who come to Norway without their parents to apply for asylum protection (Norwegian Directorate of Immigration [UDI], 2003b). The Immigration Act of 1988 makes no distinctions with regard to the age refugees. Therefore, children who have well-founded fear of persecution, death, torture, and other cruel or inhuman treatment in their home countries are entitled to asylum in Norway. In addition, there has been growing awareness about child-specific forms of persecution as, for example, risk of mutilation, under-age recruitment, trafficking of children for prostitution (Ayotte, 2000, Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2005, Lidén, Rusten, & Aarset, 2008). According to Halvorsen (2004), Norway has a relatively low refugee recognition rate and a higher recognition of protection or residence on humanitarian grounds. As I see it, low percent of claims resulting in granting of asylum is surprising, taking into account the countries unaccompanied minors originate from.

The phenomenon of UMAs has become more visible due to the high number of children coming to Norway alone and coverage of this phenomenon in mass media and research. The character of official procedures after their arrival to Norway connected with child-specific questions of seeking asylum still needs to be looked closer at, even though it has already been discussed at the UDI’s Spring Conference 2006 (UDI, 2006a), as well as in research (Halvorsen, 2004, Lidén et al., 2008). The child’s right to express his or her views is about a fundamental right of the child to be heard and to influence decision-making (Convention on the Rights of the Child...
It is also about taking care of the child’s dignity and integrity as an independent individual. The Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) ensures in article 12 children’s right to express their views. For this purpose, children should be provided the opportunity to be heard in any judicial or administrative proceedings affecting them.

According to Lidén & Rusten (2007), the realization of the children’s right to participate in decision-making processes involves numerous judgments, including judgment about the weight to be given to their views and the most appropriate and effective means to elicit their views. Indeed, our understanding and knowledge of communicating with children in difficult situations has undergone considerable changes and development during the last few decades, which is reflected in the profound research material in the field of forensic interviews with children, as well as in the field of Child Welfare (Barnevern) (see for example, Cederborg, 2002, Gamst & Langballe, 2004, Øvreeide, 2000). Consequently, the best way the immigration system can improve the interview situation for children is to ensure that asylum interviews are conducted in accordance with current knowledge concerning listening to children.

This inquiry holds its focus on the asylum interview with unaccompanied minor asylum seekers conducted by the Directorate of Immigration in Norway or the UDI. This interview is the second and, probably, most important meeting of an UMA with the Norwegian authorities. Deprived of parental care and supervision, these unaccompanied minors are supported by guardians that follow them up before, through, and after the asylum interview, as it is emphasized in the Norwegian Official Report No.16 (NOU 2004:16) (Ministry of Justice and Police, 2004). A guardian together with an UMA, an interviewer, and an interpreter constitute participants of the asylum interview. In the planning phase of the project the question of who should be the research participants was thoroughly considered. To interview children would have been the desirable way to go. Nevertheless, ethics and recourses available recommended the exclusion of unaccompanied minors as informants. Therefore, guardians of these children were asked to report their observations and experiences.
This is an attempt to throw light on the guardians’ perspective as valuable and rich on information, and to learn from their experiences. The informants spoke mostly about unaccompanied minors who are the age between 15 and 18. Therefore, this study is about the asylum interview with this group of children.

The empirical material for the present study has been derived mainly from personal interviews with six guardians of unaccompanied minors. I have also been engaged as a guardian for UMAs from 2008 on a voluntary basis. This experience has made it possible to gather more extensive field notes, which include field notes from introductory course for guardians at Norwegian People’s Aid (NPA), network meetings, and conversations with other guardians.

### 1.1 Presentation of the Research Question

Taken into account the topic of this study, the following research question was formulated:

*What experiences do guardians of unaccompanied minor asylum seekers possess of the asylum interview and its attendance with regard to the right of the child to express his/her opinion in the context of the United Nation’s Convention on the Rights of the Child?*

The phenomenon of the interview with unaccompanied minor asylum seekers is extremely complex. Even though, the field of immigration is often experienced as controversial and complicated, recommendations about how to interview children in this specific context seem to be consistent with those given to individuals conducting other types of investigative interviews with children (Keselman, Cederborg, Lamb, & Dahlström, 2008, Lidén et al, 2008). Previous research on investigative interviews has shown that the quality of the information yielded by children depends on the quality and type of questions asked and the interviewer’s communicative skills (Cederborg, 2002, Gamst & Langballe, 2004, Langballe, 2007). Free narratives seem to be the most adequate and safe method to elicit information from children in investigative situations (Melinder & Magnusson, 2003), while Langballe (2007)
points to the importance of the child’s inner condition, relational aspect, the character of the events in focus, and the communication in the interview situation.

Then, attention is directed to how this right is being practiced in reality in asylum interviews with UMAs. The main focus of this study is to throw light on how the child-specific aspects are being taken care of through the interview process and guardian’s support. Therefore, I constructed three sub-questions to complement the research problem:

1. What is the guardian’s role in the process of facilitating the asylum interview situation for unaccompanied minors and making it child-sensitive?
2. What characterizes the inter-personal aspects of the asylum interview with unaccompanied minors?
3. What are the common communication patterns identified in the asylum interview with unaccompanied minors?

The first question seeks to explore how guardians understand and practice their role with the goal of taking care of the UMAs’ rights and needs. The question is meant to describe the guardians’ experience of their possibilities of improvement of the asylum interview situation for this group of children.

With the second question I direct attention to the inter-personal issues relevant to the asylum interview situations. These issues are connected, first of all, to the informants’ experience of the atmosphere at the asylum interview. Thus, I explore the interviewers’ inter-personal skills relevant to the asylum interview and how they promote the children’s right to express their opinion.

The third question aims at grasping the guardians’ experiences of the communicative aspects of the asylum interview. It is important to emphasize the character of information accessible for the analysis: my answers to the research question are based on the second-hand source (guardians), which makes it impossible to provide the content analysis of communication between the participants in the asylum interview (for example, according to the type or number of questions asked, the character of the child’s replies, the exactness of the interpreter’s work, etc.). Nevertheless, my data material gives the possibility to throw light on the guardians’ perceptions and
descriptions of communicative issues, while the informants’ examples make it easier to visualize the phenomenon in focus from their perspective.

1.2 Relevance for the Field of Special Needs Education

Unaccompanied minor asylum seekers bring together two different fields: the field of children and children’s rights and the field of immigration and asylum politics. According to Danielsen and Seeberg (2006), there is a tension between these two fields. In order to understand such complicated topics, there is a need for co-operation between the researchers belonging to various scientific areas. In my opinion, it should be at least important to know more about how children are interviewed and listened to, and what is characteristic of such interviewing situations, as a means of protecting children’s rights and emotional well-being.

Issues concerning children and young people are central for the field of special needs education. Befring (2006) emphasizes that the community is responsible for providing a safety net for all people to use when needed and enabling each of its members to develop a rich personality and achieve his or her full potential. When it comes to interviewing children in the field of immigration, we know very little about how they are being listened to and how child-sensitive and child caring these procedures are. We also know very little about how taking part in asylum interviews impacts UMAs. This study is aimed at getting more knowledge about children’s experiences and how they manage interviews where they have to narrate about difficult and traumatic events. I am interested in the guardians’ perceptions of how UMAs are met by the Norwegian authorities because this encounter provides the background for protecting children and their rights, as well as determines these children’s destiny and future. I would like to cast light on how we, as adults, can contribute to giving the best possible protection and care for unaccompanied minors.

When an UMA arrives in Norway, he or she is placed in an asylum centre awaiting the decision on the asylum application. While in the asylum centre, the youth attend Norwegian language courses, before they are enrolled in the Norwegian education
system. At school, as well as further in life, many of these children will need support from teachers and pedagogic-psychological services. In order to understand the life situation in which these children find themselves, helping professionals and those working with unaccompanied minors need to know their life stories, the background for and coincidences before, during, and after flight, as well as they should possess knowledge of the present situation (Eide, 2000). The more we know about unaccompanied minors’ experiences, the better care we as adults can offer them in this vulnerable period of their lives.

Moreover, my theoretical perspective gives me grounds to think that this study can contribute to the field of communicating with children, regardless of their origin, age, past experiences, and goals. The way we meet children and communicate with them may have a profound influence on their social and personal development.

1.3 Presentation of the study

This report is the result of a long process presenting study course in six chapters. In chapter 2 a presentation of the contextual frame of the asylum interview with unaccompanied minors is provided. Chapter 3 is a presentation of the theoretical framework for the study, which embraces the understanding of children’s perspective, children as informants, children and trauma, dialogical communicative perspective, empathy and recognition. Chapter 4 is a methodological part of the thesis. It presents the research perspective and method. In chapter 5 the results of the analysis are presented and discussed, while in chapter 6 my purpose is to summarize the main findings and reflect over possible implications of this study.
2. The Contextual Frame

This chapter is an attempt to place the asylum interview with unaccompanied minors in a broader contextual framework. The following paragraphs discuss the phenomenon of UMAs in Norway, the legal framework for the child’s right to be heard, and the asylum procedures including the asylum interview.

2.1 Unaccompanied Minor Asylum Seekers

Who Are They?
The Norwegian authorities consider all persons under the age of 18 who come to Norway without their parents to apply for asylum protection as unaccompanied minors, regardless of whether or not they are accompanied by adult caregivers (UDI, 2003b, Immigration Regulations, 1990).

In 2008, 1,374 unaccompanied children applied for asylum in Norway (UDI, 2008). This is a peak year since 1997, characterized by a considerable increase in the percentage of UMAs if compared to 2007 (9% in 2008 compared to 6% in 2007). Statistical data on gender composition indicate that 89% of asylum-seekers who claimed to be UMAs were boys, compared to 81% in 2007 (UDI, 2007, 2008). When it comes to age, four of five UMAs were at the age between 15 and 17 when they applied for asylum (UDI, 2008). This age breakdown is not surprising, given the considerable physical and emotional demands and dangers confronting children on their journeys (Bhabha & Crock, 2006).

Country-of-origin demographics largely depends on the situation in sending countries but also the diverse geographical, historical, economic, social, political, and linguistic realities that lead children to head for one receiving country rather than the other (Bhabha & Crock, 2006). In Norway, three out of four UMAs originated from Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia, Eritrea, and Sri Lanka (UDI, 2008).

In summary, unaccompanied children applying for asylum in Norway tend to be predominantly male, are likely to be 16 or 17 years old and are mostly from
Afghanistan and Iraq. Even though the phenomenon of UMAs seems to be relatively small in scale, their age and vulnerability place them in a particular group, which according to international and domestic law possesses special rights.

Why Do They Travel?

Children who leave their home countries to seek asylum are a diverse group. Ayotte (2000) conducted a relatively comprehensive research under Save the Children’s direction, trying to answer these questions. Ayotte (2000) suggests several categories, which seem to be the main reasons for the children’s movement. They are: armed conflicts or serious disturbances, different forms of direct and indirect persecution as per the 1951 UN Convention on the Status of Refugees\(^1\), separation from parents in the country of origin or a third country, serious deprivation and poverty, hunger, lack of opportunities, or sense of having no future, living in brutal conditions in orphanages and living as street children, and being trafficked for different forms of exploitation in Europe.

Undoubtedly, economic motivation may also play a role in the decision of children, or more probably their parents, to leave their home country. However, several international researches suggest that the “anchor child” phenomenon plays a secondary role in most unaccompanied children’s migration (Ayotte, 2000, Bhabha & Crock, 2006, Engebrigtsen, 2002). In Norway, country-of-origin statistics show that most UMAs come from conflict or post-conflict zones, or from countries where political repression is widespread (UDI, 2008). It appears that the “anchor children” theory is not borne out by the facts, and cannot be used as a legitimate explanation for the growing migration of children, as very few UMAs are granted family reunion (Ayotte, 2000, Bhabha & Crock, 2006, Eide 2000, Engebrigtsen, 2002).

\(^1\) According to Convention relating to the Status of Refugees (UN, 1951, p. 2), the term “refugee” is being accorded to persons who “as a result of events occurring before 1 January 1951 and owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.”
2.2 The Child’s Right to Be Heard

The special vulnerability of unaccompanied minor asylum seekers has long been recognized in international law. Their double claim to state protection, as particularly vulnerable children (because they are refugees) and as a special group of refugees (because they are children), has been addressed in several key contemporary international law instruments (Bhabha & Crock, 2006). This chapter addresses children’s right to express their views as expressed in the CRC.

The 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child is a central human rights convention for children. It is more widely ratified all over the world than any other human rights treaty. The CRC is incorporated into the Norwegian law by amendment to the national Human Rights Act of 1999. The CRC brings together both general human rights protection, but also child-specific measures. It provides a set of guiding principles that fundamentally shape the way in which we view children, based on humanistic thinking. According to the CRC, the protection of the child must go together with the recognition of the child as an independent, rational, and active person, capable of being a subject in its own and society’s life (Hodgkin & Newell, 2007). Thus, children are dependent on what others promote or bring further their rights, a responsibility that rests on society, parents, guardians, and authorities.

Article 12 of the CRC (1989) assures to the child capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child. The child’s views should be given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child. In order to use this right in practice, the child shall be given the opportunity to be heard in any juridical and administrative proceedings affecting the child, either directly, or through a representative or an appropriate body, in a manner consistent with the procedural rules of national law.

The principles of article 12 should be applied in all immigration procedures including asylum seeking, in relation to article 22 concerning the right for protection and article 3 on the “best interests of the child” (Hodgkin & Newell, 2007). The principle of the
“best interests of the child” should be the basic guiding principle in all procedures of listening to children (Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2009, UNHCR, 1997).

The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child have worked out several general comments concerning children’s rights. General Comment No. 6 on “Treatment of unaccompanied and separated children outside their country of origin” (2005) encourages states to consider interrelation between the right of the children to express their views and the assessment process. The Comment urges the states to appoint a guardian for each unaccompanied child and carry out the assessment process in a “friendly and safe atmosphere by qualified professionals who are trained in age and gender-sensitive interviewing techniques” (ibid., p. 9).

General Comment No. 12 on “The Right of the Child to Be Heard” emphasizes that “expressing views is a choice for the child, not an obligation” (Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2009, p. 8). Hence, the child has the right not to exercise this right. Nevertheless, the Committee points to the importance of child-friendly and accessible procedures in judicial and administrative procedures, where asylum hearings belong. The Committee (2009) recommends that the context in which a child expresses his or her views is enabling and encouraging, emphasizing the responsibility adults have in making the child sure that they are willing to listen and take the child seriously.²

To sum it up, the child’s right to express his or her views is about a fundamental right of the child to be heard and influence decision-making (Lidén et al., 2008). The most direct manner in which the Norwegian authorities have sought to ensure the unaccompanied minor asylum seekers’ right to participate is through the asylum interviews as emphasized in the Immigration Regulations of 1990, § 55 and § 55a. Appointment of a guardian to each UMA is one of the ways to secure these children’s

² Some countries have taken a step further and worked out guidelines for conducting asylum interviews with unaccompanied minors, for example Finland (Directorate of Immigration, Finland, 2002).
right to be heard and the principle of the “best interests of the child”. The next paragraph explores the role and functions of the guardians.

2.3 Guardians of Unaccompanied Minor Asylum Seekers

Unaccompanied minors are a vulnerable group of children and young people who need that someone understands their situation and takes responsibility for their well-being in the Norwegian society. According to the Guardianship Act of 1927, every child has the right to have a guardian. This right is strongly supported by the Immigration Regulations of 1990, § 55a, which ensures UMAs a provisional guardian present during the interview. The guardian’s role is legalized by a number of official documents: Norwegian Official Report No. 16 (Ministry of Justice and Police, 2004) and Guidelines for Guardians of Unaccompanied Minor Asylum Seekers (Ministry of Justice and Police, 2003). The Office of Guardianship in municipalities carries out the responsibility for the assignments.

One of the major functions of the guardians concerning the asylum process and asylum interview is to ensure the children’s legal protection and offer support during the asylum process. The guardian is always present at the asylum interview at UDI as the UMA’s spokesperson. The guardian is encouraged to meet the minor at the reception center before the interview if it is practically possible with the purpose to prepare the child to the interview. If the first encounter between the guardian and the minor takes place in the asylum interview situation, then it is an ordinary practice in the UDI that the guardian gets time to get acquainted with the minor and explain his or her role before the interview starts (Ministry of Justice and Police, 2003).

The guardian carries several functions and responsibilities referring to the asylum interview. According to the Guidelines for Guardians (ibid.), the guardian should ensure that the interview is being carried out in an orderly and correct way so that the minor is not tired needlessly. The role of the guardian under the interview is described as passive, but he or she has both the right and obligation to intervene in situations deserving criticism. The guardian can ask the interviewer to explain
difficult notions, as well as encourage the interviewer to ask more follow-up questions if there are special topics, which the guardian feels need to be investigated more profoundly. The guardian should also react in case the interpreter and the minor are opposed.

The guardian has a responsibility to read through the interview report together with the minor, to ensure that no misunderstandings and inaccuracies appear in the report, to support clarifying information if necessary, and to sign the report, which is an important document for the minor’s asylum claim. Immediately after the interview, if the guardian feels that the minor needs special care, he or she is encouraged to contact the reception center where the UMA lives at the moment (UDI, 2009).

The non-governmental organization Norwegian People’s Aid (NPA) has long been engaged in guardians’ work, including recruiting and educating. NPA, on assignment from the UDI, has worked out a model for recruiting, educating, and counseling guardians of UMAs (Norwegian People’s Aid, 2005). This model seeks to take care of the guardian’s role and to ensure that each unaccompanied minor gets a competent guardian.

2.4 Asylum Procedure

As the asylum interview is only a part of a more comprehensive process, the latter will be described in short before proceeding to the phenomenon of asylum interviews. This presentation of the asylum process is based on the information provided by the UDI (2003a) and the Immigration Regulations of 1990, § 54, § 55 and § 55a.

The Directorate of Immigration is subordinate to the Ministry of Labour and Social Inclusion and is Norway’s central executive body for immigration and refugees (UDI, 2006b). Therefore, the UDI is in charge of the asylum procedures in Norway. After registration with the police, which involves an initial interview, the minor becomes an unaccompanied minor asylum seeker. The Norwegian Organization for Asylum Seekers (NOAS) assists all asylum seekers in the application phase by providing general information on the asylum process. Thereafter, a provisional guardian is
appointed by the state to help UMAs and represent their interests. The Directorate of Immigration gives priority to UMAs’ applications, and an asylum interview is supposed to be conducted as soon as possible. Following age assessment procedures necessary for distinguishing adults from children in cases of uncertainty, UMAs get accommodation at a reception centre for children between 15 and 18 years of age and get judicial help if they prove to be younger than 18.

Based on an asylum interview, age assessment and country-of-origin information, the Directorate makes its decision. This implies the determination of the asylum seeker’s status (recognition of refugee or humanitarian status) or refusal to stay (the Norwegian asylum system provides for a right of appeal).

2.4.1 Asylum Interview

Child asylum seekers are interviewed directly by the Norwegian Directorate of Immigration (Immigration Regulations, 1990). The legal aspect of the asylum interview dictates that children have special needs during the interview situation, independent of asylum grounds and their life situation as stated in § 55a (ibid.). In other words, one must take into consideration the child’s age, and maturity level in forming out and conducting interviews.

The interview takes place at the Directorate’s premises or at the reception centre for UMAs under 15. The UDI provides an interpreter whose task is to accurately communicate what is being said. A guardian is also present at the asylum interview. The interview is the major opportunity UMAs get to provide information about themselves, their family, reasons for applying for asylum, the route they took, etc. This transforms the interview into a significant procedure determining the whole life platform for many of these children.
3. Theoretical Background

An asylum interview ensures the children’s right to express their views. From a dialogical perspective, meaningful communication in an interview is more than just the right to be heard. It is also the right to be seen and taken care of in the process. Listening to children focuses on the role of an adult in relation to the child.

I start the presentation with the dialogical perspective on communication, which is central in this study. Having a dialogical perspective means that the interviewer illuminates recognition and empathy, and in order to view the child as a subject, the interviewers must keep the children’s perspective in mind. This chapter presents several concepts used for understanding and discussion of the empirical material in the study: children and traumas, children as informants, and the sense of coherence.

3.1 Dialogical Perspective on Communication

Dialogical perspective forms the background for my understanding of communication between the interviewer and the child in the asylum interview. It is influenced by works of Buber (1987), Schibbye (1996, 2002), Linell (1998), Bakhtin (Holquist, 1990). Gamst and Langballe’s (2004) study of forensic interviews with children, in which dialogical perspective is central, is significant for my understanding of communication in this project.

The asylum interview differs a lot from everyday conversations we have with children. It can be characterized as the institutionalized conversation (Gamst & Langballe, 2004, Lidén et al., 2008), which presupposes placing it in the frame of communicative genres. An institutionalized conversation as a communicative genre is characterized by specific purpose, core activity and phase structure, asymmetrical question-answer sequences, and the professionals’ dominance in perspective setting (Linell, 1998).

Asylum interview is an investigative one - its purpose is to reveal the child’s grounds for seeking asylum in Norway. The communicative situation the asylum interview
represents is not aimed at creating a change. However, Gamst and Langballe (2004) emphasize that the interviewer should to a great degree show attitudes and skills, which are necessary in therapeutic situations aiming at creating a change, and which are described by a dialogical perspective on communication, recognition, and empathy.

3.1.1 Dialogical Communication

Buber (1987) introduces the description “I - Thou” with the purpose to understand what happens in human encounters. Buber says that a person is both a being among other beings in the world and a thing among other things. Buber (1987) makes a distinction between I – Thou and I – It. To really understand another person, I must enter into an I - Thou relation with him or her, which is described as subject-subject relation. “The relation to the Thou is direct” (ibid., p. 25, the author’s emphasis). In an I – Thou relation the words I say to another person are directed to this person, and not to any other. In a real meeting there is no place for deception and representations, according to Buber. Consequently, another person will experience being taken seriously.

In communication, we attempt to transfer information, but we measure the successfulness of communication in terms of understanding (Nynäš, 2006). Meaningfulness and understanding in communication are closely connected to the relation between the two parties, degree of trust and mutuality. According to Friedman (1992) cited in Nynäš (2006), faith in the possibility of communication is faith in a person with whom we can communicate. Hence, through the quality of rapport, mutual trust and what kind of attitude the person has with regard to the other, an important aspect of communication is established.

For Bakhtin, life is dialogic by its very nature (Holquist, 1990). Dialogism argues that meaning comes about only in the relation between two people. Dialogue includes at least three elements: an utterance, a reply, and the relation between the two. In this phenomenon, the relation is considered to be the most important component, which makes occurrence of meaning possible (ibid.).
If communication is aimed at mutual understanding that, in its turn, is determined by the quality of the relationship between the participants, then, recognition as described by Schibbye (1996, 2002) and empathy as presented by Rogers (1990, 1995) and Nerdrum (2000, 2002) seem to be “baked into” the dialogical communication. The next paragraphs describe empathy and recognition in more detail.

3.1.2 Empathic Communication

The concept of empathy is central within several disciplines, which share the view that “empathy focuses on aspects of how one person is coming to understand another person’s experience” (Nerdrum, 2000, p. 2). Rogers (1990) refers it to sensing a person’s inner world and communicating that sensing. Rogers (1995) in his later definitions believes empathy to be a process, rather than a state, thus paying considerable attention to communicating empathic understanding. He gives the following definition of the concept:

It means entering the private perceptual world of the other and becoming thoroughly at home in it. It involves being sensitive, moment by moment, to the changing felt meaning which flow in this other person, (...). It means temporarily living in the other’s life, moving about in it delicately without making judgements; it means sensing meanings of which he or she is scarcely aware, (...). It includes communicating your sensing’s of the person’s world as you look with fresh and unfrightened eyes at elements of which he or she is fearful (Rogers, 1995, p. 142).

Rogers (1995) emphasizes that empathy dissolves alienation as a result of the client’s feeling of being understood, accepted, and heard. The second consequence of empathic understanding is that the client feels valued as a person, cared for and praised. The feeling of being accepted without judgement and evaluation creates an atmosphere where a person is more inspired and less scared to reveal information about himself or herself.

The asylum interview is already coloured by power structure, as the interviewer represents the authority in Norway. An unaccompanied minor might feel himself or herself in a more powerless position if compared to Norwegian children or accompanied asylum-seeking children exactly because of being alone, unknowledgeable, uncertain and awaiting. Therefore, the situation can hardly be
described as symmetric, as well as the rapport between the interviewer and the UMA can hardly be coloured by empathy, recognition, and equality to the degree described in psychotherapy and without participants’ conscious attitude to it. Empathy in the asylum interview, as empathy in forensic interviews, is to be viewed as a part of professionalism, as a means (Gamst & Langballe, 2004). The contextual framework of the asylum interview puts additional limitations on the inter-personal aspects of the interviewer-child encounter, where the interviewer should have a neutral attitude instead of communicating his or her experiences and feelings to the client as Rogers (1990) describes it.

3.1.3 Professional Empathy

“In principle, to feel as the other, as a way of gaining information about another person, may be used and applied in any kind of behaviour toward another person” (Nerdrum 2000, p. 12). However, Nerdrum (2002) underlines the importance of modifying empathy when it is used as a method and attitude in professional work. The researcher sees professional empathy as both an extension of and something different from empathy in daily life. From being empathic in informal situations, the professional worker integrates and uses his/her empathic capacity as a part of professional repertoire (Nerdrum, 2002). In a professional context, one is supposed to use empathy by keeping concentrated and positively interested in the client’s experiences.

Nerdrum (1997) speaks about professional, empathic, and not idealized relationship. As far as I see it, the interviewer’s understanding of the asymmetry in the asylum interview is an important starting point. It is the child’s life story that is the main point of attention and concentration. The interviewer should, in principle, work to investigate and understand the child’s story, even if the child is not willing to cooperate. The interviewer being awaiting, patient, appropriately involved, and positively interested in the child’s story is an important clarification for my understanding of the empathy concept in the framework of the asylum interview.
Nerdrum (2002) emphasizes the importance of imparting empathic understanding explicit in professional encounters. The asylum interviewer expressing his or her empathic understanding to an appropriate degree, will give emotional support to the child and show acceptance, thus strengthening the atmosphere of trust, the child’s feeling of confidence, and motivating the child for further co-operation. Being in contact with his or her own experiences and being concentrated on the children’s perspective and experiences, is an essential focus (Gamst & Langballe, 2004).

### 3.1.4 Recognition

Eide (2007) emphasizes that recognition is a concept frequently used to describe a high-quality human relationship. Schibbye (1996, 2002) describes the concept of recognition as encompassing complex ways of being at different levels. Schibbye (1996) emphasizes that empathy and inter-subjectivity describe recognition on the theoretical level. The core idea is to understand another person’s experiences. Recognition on the philosophical level means, for example, that parts in a dialogue experience one another as equal, in other words, they value each other. This is described by self-respect on the theoretical level. In practice, recognition encompasses listening, understanding, accepting, tolerating and affirming (Schibbye, 1996, Schibbye, 2002).

Subject-subject view, as opposite to subject-object, is central for Schibbye’s understanding of recognition. By a subject-subject view Schibbye (2001) means that each individual possesses his or her own experiences, thoughts, meanings, and goals. We cannot understand an individual as separated from the relations he or she is a part of. It means that in a dialogue each part should have an overview of his or her own contributions to communication and relationship. In an asylum interview situation the interviewer must take into consideration those premises he or she creates for the child to come forward with information, experiences, and feelings. By accepting the child as a subject and expert on his or her own life situation, the interviewer expresses recognition and takes the children’s perspective.
Eide (2007) points out that unaccompanied minors, due to their vulnerability, are particularly dependent on receiving confirmation of who they are in three areas, which are the private sphere, the legal sphere, and the sphere of solidarity. Recognition in the private sphere is experienced through the emotional support provided by family and friends. In the legal sphere individuals achieve recognition through the human rights they are accorded in a society. Relations of recognition in the legal sphere may be interconnected to universal human rights, which are granted on the grounds that all people are equal and morally responsible human beings. In the solidarity sphere, recognition is confirmed by being positively valued in the cultural, political and work setting. It implies an acceptance of a person’s individuality and uniqueness (ibid.).

3.2 Children’s Perspective

Recently, there has been an increasing interest in accessing and understanding children’s perspectives on their own lives and experiences. This has been linked to debates and academic research about “listening to children” and “children’s participation in issues concerning them”. Discussion of the notion “children’s perspective” is central for all research concerning children, and is also essential for my study.

One won’t find a clear definition of “children’s perspective” – it belongs to the kind of notions, which are diffuse and inspire one’s thoughts to wonder in certain directions. That is why, there doesn’t exist one children’s perspective but many of them (Gullestad, 1991). Norwegian researchers working in the field of child research seem to agree about this (Gamst & Langballe, 2004, Gullestad, 1991, Tiller, 1991). Tiller (1991) defines children’s perspective as knowledge about how the world looks like for children. It is a matter of seeing the child and being thoughtful of it. It is about being able to hear the children’s voices and being sensitive to information coming from children.
Research with a children’s perspective puts the child at the centre (Gullestad, 1991). One should notice that it is not a perspective on children but first of all, a view on the society and culture from the child’s perspective. Researchers aim at getting closer to children’s world and points of view. From these positions they work systematically with descriptions, analysis, and eventually clarifying the child’s interests (ibid.). In this study I aim at presenting the phenomenon asylum interview in a new and critical light. This is done by analyzing it from the angle of the child’s interests, where my purpose is to get an understanding of how the encounter between the interviewer and the child seems to be for the child.

There don’t exist universal standards for the understanding of children and childhood, and variations become more defined in the dynamics of time and space. Approaches to and experiences of childhood vary widely across cultures and contexts (De Berry & Boyden, 2000), which means that our understanding of these notions does not always correspond with the cultural idea of them. In many societies, there is no strict separation between the children’s and adult’s world, with sometimes children fulfilling tasks that in other societies are reserved for adults (Derluyn & Broekaert, 2008). Engebritsen (2002) emphasizes the fact that the understanding of parental care is also culturally and socially determined. And finally, there are also individual differences in personal experiences of unaccompanied minors. Indeed, researchers should be aware of the fact that categories “child” and “childhood” can be defined in a variety of ways different from contemporary western definitions (Gullestad, 1991). One should be careful when expressing how the world seems to look like for these children. Taking into account the dynamic character of the notions “child”, “childhood”, and “children’s perspective”, this should be made the subject of continuous research and discussion.

In the situation when the UDI seeks information from unaccompanied minors about their life experiences, the interviewer meets the same challenges as the researcher does when children are research participants. Tiller (1988) emphasizes that it is through the relation between the researcher and the child as an informant the knowledge is being developed. Gamst and Langballe (2004) link this relation to the
aspect of power and point to the fact that in order to accept and get closer to the children’s perspective, researchers must strive to establish symmetry in their relation to children as informants. The recognition of children as “social actors” whose ideas, approaches to life, choices and relationships are of interest in their own right places children in the rank of precious informants. This change in emphasis places great importance on children’s perspective, contributes to balance between the child and the researcher, which in its turn increases credibility (Tiller, 1991). It is adults who are responsible for establishing a relationship to children based on respect and recognition. Striving towards symmetry in this relationship takes us closer to children’s perspective.

3.3 Children and Traumas

Research conducted by the Norwegian Institute for Public Health (Oppedal, Jensen, & Seglem, 2008) has shown that 75% of unaccompanied minors experienced war and conflicts at short range. These children have been exposed to the most serious forms of traumatic experiences. Therefore, traumas related to children are in focus in this paragraph.

Trauma can be defined as “… overwhelming, uncontrollable events that include extraordinary psychic strain for children or young people experiencing them” (Dyregrov, 2000, p. 11, my translation). There are two factors central to the experience of trauma. They are overwhelming and unexpected happening(s) and feelings of helplessness and vulnerability triggered by those happening(s) (ibid.). The trauma begins with events outside the child, and is followed by internal changes in the child (Terr, 1991).

Terr (1991) divides childhood trauma into two basic types, that is type I traumas, the results of one sudden event, and type II traumas, the results of long-standing or repeated ordeals. Both types of trauma may affect the personality profoundly, although both objective and subjective features of traumatic experiences have to be taken into account when their degree of seriousness is being evaluated (Dyb, 2005,
Varvin, 2003). The degree of trauma should be seen in the light of consequences for the child experiencing it. The child’s vulnerability will vary depending on the intensity of exposure to the traumatic event, as well as personality factors, background, development, age, earlier traumas, degree of social support.

### 3.3.1 Posttraumatic Reactions in Children and Adolescents

It is difficult to escape reactions to traumatic experiences, but their intensity, duration, and influence on the person’s daily functioning are decisive for if they are abnormal and qualify for posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) diagnosis (Dyregrov, 2000). Most common posttraumatic reactions in children are vulnerability, anxiety, and fear, memories, nightmares and disturbances of the sleeping rhythm, shame, problems with concentration, aggression, etc. Even though these reactions can be described as normal and will disappear after a while, the research indicates that traumas can influence the child’s development in a long-term perspective (ibid.). Traumatic reactions seem to vary depending on children’s age. As unaccompanied minor asylum seekers are predominantly adolescents between 15 and 17, I will focus on the description of affects of trauma related to this age.

Varvin (2003) and Dyregrov (2000) express the view that trauma in the period of adolescence may resemble both childhood trauma and adult trauma mainly because young people find themselves in the period of identity formation. According to Dyregrov (2000) young people show reactions, which are comparable to those of adults to a great degree. They often understand the meaning of the events they have experienced, and they can reason over their negative and positive features. Adolescents may experience extremely intense feelings, but they often have difficulties expressing them and verbalizing their thoughts. They can defend themselves against the intensity of feelings by diminishing them. At the same time, it is often a child’s soul hidden in a grown-up body. Dyregrov (2000) finds it little surprising that adolescents often have difficulties getting a sound grasp of the traumatic experience.
Traumas influence children in a variety of ways. Children often feel that they re-experience parts of or whole traumatic events. These visualizations are often vivid and unwelcome and may last into adulthood. Many of these sense memories are “disgusting” and remain unspoken (Dyregrov, 2000, Terr, 1991). The occurrence of specific fears is often characteristic of traumatized children. Traumatized children also tend to fear mundane things such as the dark, strangers, being alone, etc (Terr, 1991). Limited future perspective, along with changed attitudes about people and life, appear to be important in the trauma and extreme stress disorders of childhood (ibid.). These characteristics seem to reflect the child’s feeling that more traumas are bound to follow, the recognition of their vulnerability, and the feeling of distrust.

Terr (1991) emphasizes that children with type I traumas do not often forget and seem to remember the event and are often able to give clear, detailed accounts of their experiences. Children with type II trauma, on the other hand, often show considerable time distortions. They may forget whole segments of childhood. Children can remember an event as if it happened after the trauma, although it happened before. Memories of prolonged abuses “appear to be retained in spots”, and children may “waver in the completeness and the detail of their memories” (Terr, 1991, p. 14). Memories can also be characterized by misconceptions, omissions, and vagueness (Dyregrov, 2000).

There are reasons to suppose that a great deal of unaccompanied minors have experienced multiple traumas (Dyregrov, 2000, Raundalen, Lorentzen, & Dyregrov, 2005). Often the family and the child have lived under difficult conditions during a long period before the flight. War, conflicts, and political suppression may imply serious traumas for the whole family (Neumayer, Skreslett, Borchgrevink, Gravråkmo, 2006). The flight itself is often a traumatic and exhausting experience for children, which is characterized by danger, uncertainty, instability, and loss of contacts, contributing to the risk for traumatic reactions. The first time in a new country and a new culture represent a strain for young people. It is connected with the feelings of loneliness, uncertainty, fear, anxiety, etc., while living in an exile environment may produce a psychic disease or make it worse (Varvin, 2003).
3.4 Meeting Children

One of the conditions for conducting a good interview is awareness about how difficult it is to evaluate what and to what extent children are capable of recalling. Knowledge of developmental psychology is quite essential in this respect. I do not find it necessary to provide a profound review of psychological research on children’s development in this inquiry. However, this chapter gives a picture of the knowledge about children as informants and factors, which may influence children’s capabilities to recall.

Extensive research in the field of witness psychology and memory processes has gradually changed the view on children as informants. We now know that they are more competent to provide detailed information about experienced traumatic events than it was considered before. However, research proves that there are many variables, which influence children’s ability to recall (Gamst & Langballe, 2004, Gee & Pipe, 1995, Melinder & Magnusson, 2003, Saywitz, 1995).

It is widely recognized that children from three years of age can be considered credible witnesses (Melinder & Magnussen, 2003), and they cannot be categorized as competent or incompetent informants on the basis of age alone. Children’s abilities to remember and provide detailed information about happenings in their lives develop as they become older (Saywitz, 1995), and are dependent on the quality of events to be remembered (Christianson, 1992). Each child’s performance seems to be jointly determined by his or her own unique development and by the support and obstacles provided within a particular interview context (Saywitz, 1995). Children of the same age may provide information of varying amount and richness. However, the physical, social, and psychological environment in which remembering happens influences ability to recall (ibid.). Children’s maturity and understanding of their experiences, the feeling of anxiety for consequences, being afraid of disbelief on the side of their adults are factors, which may influence effort and motivation to recall emotionally laden events (Langballe, Gamst, & Jacobsen, in press).
Children can have different reasons for not to remember. Many researchers seem to agree that children’s credibility has much to do with the competence of adults to communicate with children (Cederborg, 2002, Gamst & Langballe, 2004, Gee & Pipe, 1995, Melinder & Magnussen, 2003, Saywitz, 1995). If the interviewer expects the child to tell about sensitive events, it is necessary to ensure that the child feels himself or herself comfortable and confident in the situation, and that the child is being seen, heard, understood, and given the time needed to answer the questions. Saywitz (1995) points to the importance of an age-appropriate word choice and the use of short sentences and short constructions. It is vital for the child to understand questions and why these questions are posed.

Interaction between the interviewer and the unaccompanied minor is critical for the quality of information provided by the child. Indeed, there is need to develop appropriate interview techniques so that “children can be empowered to become their most reliable selves” (McGough, 1991, p. 167). It points to the need of qualified interviewers, who illuminate recognition and empathy, possess profound knowledge of children’s development and the influence of traumatic experiences such as violence, sexual abuse, and neglect on children, as well as they should have a good command of communicative skills necessary for empowering the traumatized child to tell about experiences of sensitive character (Gamst & Langballe, 2004, Langballe, 2007).

3.5 “Sense of Coherence”

The concept of resilience has been often used with respect to unaccompanied minors due to its focus on health promoting aspects (see for example, Neumayer et al., 2006). Many people experience traumas, stress, and extreme conditions of living. Nevertheless, they retain their health – a process or outcome defined as resilience. In this study, I would like to use Antonovsky’s (1987) salutogenic orientation and his concept “sense of coherence” to understand why one maintains one’s position on the health continuum and moves towards the healthy end.
Antonovsky (1987, p. 19) defines the sense of coherence in the following way:

The sense of coherence is a global orientation that expresses the extent to which one has a pervasive, enduring though dynamic feeling of confidence that (1) the stimuli deriving from one’s internal and external environments in the course of living are structured, predictable, and explicable; (2) the resources are available to one to meet the demands posed by these stimuli; and (3) these demands are challenges, worthy of investments and engagement.

The researcher identifies three themes, which he sees as the three core components of the sense of coherence: comprehensibility, manageability, and meaningfulness.

*Comprehensibility* refers to the extent to which a person perceives the stimuli he or she is confronted with as “making cognitive sense, as information that is ordered, consistent, structured, and clear, rather than as noise – chaotic, disordered, random, accidental, inexplicable” (ibid., p. 16-17). The person possessing the sense of comprehensibility will experience stimuli or events he or she encounters as predictable, orderable and possible to explain. According to Antonovsky (1987), such persons will make sense of all kinds of stimuli, whether it is death, war, and failure.

*Manageability*, the second component of the sense of coherence, is defined as “the extent to which one perceives that resources are at one’s disposal which are adequate to meet the demands posed by the stimuli that bombard one” (ibid., p. 17). Resources at one’s disposal may refer to resources at one’s control or resources controlled by significant others. The sense of manageability makes the person cope with life challenges.

The third component, *meaningfulness*, is seen by Antonovsky (1987) as representing the motivational element. The meaningfulness component of the sense of coherence refers to the extent to which one feels that life makes sense emotionally, and that at least some of the dilemmas are worthy of commitment and engagement. A person high on the sense of meaningfulness will often have some areas in life, which are important in both an emotional and a cognitive sense. This person is willing to take up the challenge and will seek meaning in it, and will do his or her best to overcome it with dignity (ibid.). Antonovsky (1987) points to the motivational component of meaningfulness in this process as the most crucial.
The world of many UMAs may be characterized as chaotic and unpredictable. It makes it difficult to think that one can manage it. Arrival in Norway will represent relief and hope for many of these children. At the same time, it is the start of a new and challenging path where they must go through the asylum seeking procedures, one of which is the asylum interview. UMAs have to understand the situation they are experiencing (comprehensibility), believe in the existence of solutions to it (manageability), and find good reasons to try to do their best (meaningfulness) with the purpose to manage their new environments. Even in the situation of extreme uncertainty these children find themselves in, the focus on helping UMAs to create the sense of coherence will ensure them a healthier and more meaningful round of everyday life. Making the world more understandable, manageable, and meaningful at each point of the path may be an investment into a healthier life for these children.

3.6 Dialogical Communication Method

Lidén et al. (2008) emphasize that the field of immigration communication with children is particularly demanding, and it can be compared to communication with children in the field of child welfare and forensic interviews. Many dilemmas that authorities meet in institutionalized conversations are in a comparable position - adults meet children in difficult situations; they meet children who may be traumatized, stand in the loyalty conflicts, and who are in the need of confidence and safety – children who may have difficulties to talk freely and openly. Interviewing children in the field of immigration is complicated by the necessity of an interpreter and considerable cultural differences. The researchers emphasize that it is still important and useful to trace parallels with forensic interviews and conversations with children in the sphere of child welfare (ibid), parallel used in present inquiry.

Gamst and Langballe (2004) conducted an extensive research of the communication between adults and children in forensic interviews of children, as mentioned in chapter 1. As a result, the Dialogical Communication Method (DCM) for purpose-oriented and institutionalized communication with children was developed with the
goal to ensure children opportunities to provide reliable information from their perspective.

The DCM takes legal (formal) issues and child-specific (informal) considerations into account, and highlights the interviewer as a co-creator of meaning in the child’s replies. Phase structure, thematic progression, verbal formulations, and physical framework are factors that need to be strongly regarded in institutionalized interviews between children and adults (ibid.). In this presentation I will touch upon just some of the aspects emphasized by Gamst and Langballe (2004), such as phase structure, and encouraging and restraining communicative forms.

3.6.1 Phase Structure

The phase structure described by Gamst and Langballe (2004) includes seven stages:

1. The preparatory phase.
2. The rapport-building phase.
3. The introductory phase.
4. Introduction to the focused theme phase.
5. Free narrative phase.
6. Probing the validity phase.
7. Closing phase.

The phase structure of the interview is process-oriented and not linear (Gamst & Langballe, 2004). In a dynamic communicative process, phase borders become diffuse, and phases may be repeated following thematic development of the interview from general to essential and specific issues. The purpose is to support communication between the interviewer and the child, so that the latter becomes confident and motivated to narrate his or her story freely and openly. This implies that communication between the interviewer and the child is “a dialogical project” in

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3 The Dialogical Communication Method is further developed and adjusted to asylum interviews with children in the project European Asylum Curriculum (EAC). EAC is established with the purpose to enhance the capacity and quality of the European asylum process and to strengthen practical cooperation, and to develop system of education among the European immigration systems. “The Interviewing Children Module” describes asylum interviews with children and implies the implementation of the Dialogical Communication Method. See www.gdisc.org for more information.
which the participants support and influence each other and in which the child’s experiences are central (ibid.).

Gamst and Langballe (2004) conclude that interview phases are necessary, but in no way sufficient characteristic of the forensic interview. Interviewers affect children by their choice of the physical environment, their demeanour and non-verbal communication, and their selection of questioning strategies (Gamst & Langballe, 2004, Poole & Lamb, 1998).

### 3.6.2 Encouraging and Restraining Communicative Forms

Gamst and Langballe (2004) emphasize that free recall at three descriptive layers characterizes ideal communication in forensic interviews with children. This means that children narrate freely and spontaneously at the contextual plan (the middle layer), the plan of actions (the exterior layer), and the emotional plan (inner layer) if the demands for detailed information are expected to be satisfied.

Gamst and Langballe (2004) have found out that the way the interviewer expresses himself or herself influences both the child’s understanding and the rapport between communicative partners. In this respect, the researchers distinguish between encouraging and restraining communicative forms. Among the encouraging communicative forms Gamst and Langballe (2004) emphasize the importance to rely on open-ended questions, imperatives in forms of invitations, descriptive formulations, specific questions to the information already provided by the child. Active listening in form of repeating, summarizing, confirming the child and using the child’s language are considered as appropriate and necessary. Among restraining communicative forms, the researchers suggest closed and cause-oriented questions, suggestive, broad and general questions (ibid.). Passive listening in the form of press, ignoring, doubting and interrupting, as well as intensive questioning and the use of difficult (adult’s) language are emphasized as having negative influence on communication.
Øvreeide (2006) also means that in order to communicate successfully an adult person needs to give room for the child to be a subject, which presupposes to give the child time to find words, respect his or her initiative, and let the child complete the topic. Indeed, the child will feel that the adult is listening, engaged, and interested.
4. Methodology

This master degree project seeks knowledge about the asylum interview with unaccompanied minors. The main question I ask is as follows: What experiences do guardians of unaccompanied minor asylum seekers possess of the asylum interview and its attendance with regard to the right of the child to express his/her opinion in the context of the United Nation’s Convention on the Rights of the Child?

This chapter presents a description of how this study was carried out, from the planning period, through the conducting of interviews, and to the analysis of the data material. This will hopefully make the research process, including the final thesis, vivid and transparent to the reader. The research approach and design, population and sampling, data collection methods, procedure of the study, ethical considerations, validity question, and limitations of the research are further highlighted.

4.1 Philosophical Underpinnings

Creswell (2009) points out that the worldviews, the strategies, and the methods all contribute to a research design. However, the philosophical paradigm forms the background for how the research is being planned and carried out (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

Hermeneutic perspective forms the general background for this study. Hermeneutics is often defined as the science of interpretation of written text (Dalen, 2004, Wormnæs, 1987). According to Gadamerian hermeneutics (Fay, 1996), the meaning is both multivalent (there will always exist many meanings depending on the interpreter(s) involved) and dyadic (meaning always emerges out of the relation between the text and the interpreter). Hence, the meaning is a product of an interaction between the text or act and a person trying to understand it, which leads to non-existence of one correct interpretation of the text. This poses the question of subjectivity in hermeneutics. Explicit formulations of research questions posed to the text are vital, as well as what aspects of a theme are being analyzed and in what
context (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). The way the research question is posed determines the aim of the study, which in case of this project is to develop, through the guardians’ descriptions, a broader interpretation of the meaning of the asylum interview for unaccompanied minors.

Hermeneutical tradition shows itself in acknowledgement of the hermeneutical circle that is meant to capture the continuous back-and-forth process between parts and the whole (Fay, 1996, Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). The interpretation process in this study started with a vague and intuitive understanding of the whole (interview sound files and transcriptions), proceeded to the interpretation of different parts (themes and categories evolved), and returned again to the main research question and sub-questions posed to the interview material. Theoretical understanding was obtained when needed and contributed to the process of my understanding of meaning.

Researchers bring their knowledge of the theme and their experiences into their understanding of data material. Therefore, an interpretation of a text is not presuppositionless. The researcher always needs to make choices concerning the data material. The choice of what is considered to be “central” is dependent on the researcher’s experience and pre-understanding. Even though one cannot escape from his or her presuppositions, one may attempt to make them explicit, and attempt to become conscious of how they influence interpretations (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). I attempt to do this by being explicit about choices and steps I have taken in this study.

4.2 Qualitative Interview as a Research Method

Data material needed to answer the research question was collected mainly by using interviews. Qualitative interviews are now increasingly employed as a research method in many disciplines (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). The researcher is then driven by the purpose to understand the world from the subjects’ points of view, and possesses the assumption that the perspective of others is meaningful, knowledgeable, and possible to be made explicit (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, Patton, 2002). Kvale
and Brinkmann (2009) add that it is an Inter-View, where knowledge is constructed in the inter-action between the interviewer and the interviewee, where an inter-change of views between two persons conversing about a theme of mutual interest takes place.

My choice of interview to be a central data collection method applies to the purpose of this study (see chapter 1.1). Advantages of the interview were taken into consideration while planning the research study. It was considered to be especially useful as interviewing would allow the researcher to probe more deeply using open-ended questions to obtain additional information (Patton, 2002), as well as rephrasing the questions if the respondent has not understood.

4.3 Procedures of Data Collection

4.3.1 Selection of Informants

According to Patton (2002) decisions about samples, both sample size and sampling strategies, depend upon specifications of appropriate units of analysis. Informants in this study can be characterized as purposeful sampling. This refers to the idea of strategic sampling where the researcher pursues a goal to be able to say something about at the end of the study (ibid.). The idea behind this research was to achieve rich and varied information of the phenomenon under investigation. The logic behind and power of purposeful sampling lies in selecting information-rich participants who have experienced the target phenomenon, and who can contribute qualitatively with respect to the purpose of the inquiry (Creswell, 2009, Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, Patton, 2002). Consequently, purposeful criterion sampling was used to select the informants, and three main criteria were set up. (1) Informants should have experience of representing UMAs at asylum interviews. This criterion is chosen to make sure that informants possess experience of the phenomenon in focus. (2) Knowledge about and experience from the field of immigration, refugees, and asylum-seekers were considered important criteria when searching for information rich guardians. (3) Furthermore, it was
relevant to delimit to geographical district. The geographic space was delimited to the districts of Oslo and Akershus. As the process of finding informants went further, it appeared to be difficult to fulfil this criterion. Some of the informants in the final sample came from other districts, but distances were estimated as reasonable for the project’s frame.

The process of locating information-rich informants often begins by asking central or well-situated people to recommend persons who know a lot about the phenomenon in focus (Patton, 2002). Obtaining pre-knowledge of the subject matter to be investigated and gaining cultural competence in the research field was significant at the preparatory stage of the research. Using Internet search and personal knowledge of being a guardian, I found out organisations that were engaged in refugees’ issues. The sampling process began with contacting Norwegian Peoples’ Aid (NPA) to identify guardians who corresponded to the sampling criteria and were willing to share their experiences with the researcher. Short information about the topic, purpose of the inquiry, and sampling criteria were given to the person contacted at NPA who turned out to be positive to the idea of this study. Therefore, she contacted guardians who could have been my potential informants according to the sampling criteria. Five of the contacted persons responded positively to this inquiry. Four of them were still willing to take part in the project when I got final permission from the Norwegian Social Science Data Services (NSD). One of the informants was recommended as information rich by my supervisor. This informant again put me into contact with an informant who turned out to be the last one in my sample.

As a result, the final sample of six (6) informants recommended as information-rich was decided as satisfactory on the basis of the purposeful criteria described above, and time and resources I had at my disposal to gather the data material and to analyse it.

**Presentation of the informants**

The informants in this study are Norwegian citizens voluntarily engaged as guardians for unaccompanied minors. Their age varies from approximately 25 to 60 and they all
have experience of representing UMAs at the asylum interviews. All of the informants except one are of Norwegian origin. Further in this paragraph I present the participant in this interview inquiry with regard to sampling criterion 1 and sampling criterion 2.

All of the informants possess experience of representing UMAs at the asylum interviews. Two of the informants have been at two interviews at the moment of data collection. There is one informant who has been at four interviews, and one who has been at nine interviews. Two of the guardians possess a profound experience of representing UMAs, 14 and 50 interviews.

With regard to the second sampling criterion (possession of knowledge and experience from the field of immigration, refugees, and asylum-seekers), all of the informants have much competence. Three of them have long experience in working with refugees, including refugee pupils and women. Two of them have worked in voluntary organizations working with refugees. There are two informants who work in the sphere of education, and their job is closely connected to communication with children.

### 4.3.2 Interview Guide

With the purpose to address the research question and sub-questions posed in the study, semi-structured interview guide was used for interviewing the guardians of the UMAs. Kvale and Brinkmann (2009, p. 27) describe semi-structured interview as “neither an open everyday conversation nor a closed questionnaire. It is conducted according to an interview guide that focuses on certain themes and that may include suggested questions”. The semi-structured interview guide was prepared in order to get systematic information from the participants and ensure that the same basic lines would be pursued in interviewing (Patton, 2002). Careful use of limited time available in an interview situation was also a matter of prime importance.

The process of preparing an interview guide started with developing a conceptual and theoretical understanding of the phenomenon under investigation with the purpose to
establish the base to which new knowledge could be added and integrated (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). It was valuable with respect to posing relevant questions and deciding which aspects were central and which aspects could remain in the background. Reflecting upon my personal experiences of being a guardian of UMAs proved to be necessary for getting familiar with the topic. Special attention was paid to wording question, and the aim of asking open-ended, neutral/non-leading, singular, and clear questions was pursued (Patton, 2002).

The prepared interview guide consisted of initial focused questions and a set of probes or follow-up questions used to deepen the responses, increase the richness and depth of the responses (ibid.). The questions in the guide were put under the following topics: (1) background information of the interviewee, (2) experiences concerning the role of being a guardian of the unaccompanied minor asylum seekers, and (3) key questions concerning various aspects of the asylum interview as, for example, preparation to the asylum interview, the interview itself, and after the asylum interview. The interview questions were deliberately constructed as open ones with the purpose to initiate thick descriptions of the informants’ experiences. Follow-up questions were more specific as the phenomenon in focus is complex and it can be difficult to hold focus. I found it helpful to ask for examples as it gave opportunity to get closer to the informants’ experiences, and I noticed that they became more engaged in the topic (see appendix 2 and appendix 3).

It is important to underline that the informants were not asked to think about one definite experienced asylum interview when they answered the questions out of respect for the parties indirectly involved (NESH, 2006). This decision was due to the ethical reasons: possible sensitive character of the information and the guardians’ boundness to confidentiality. Thinking about one exact child could have placed the informants into loyalty conflict and made them reluctant to take part in this research, on the one hand. On the other hand, it could have produced more accurate and specific information.
4.3.3 Data Collection

Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) postulate that the better the preparation for an interview, the higher the knowledge produced in an interview interaction. With the purpose to increase the quality of this project and to develop cultural knowledge of the research field, I took part in network meeting for guardians arranged by NPA and followed with the coverage of the topic in mass media and UDI’s Internet site.

Probe interviews can help the researcher to secure the quality of the study (Dalen, 2004). A probe interview with one guardian I got acquainted with was conducted as a final preparation for data collection. The interviewee was informed of the fact that it was a probe interview and the reasons for conducting it. Conducting a probe interview was useful in many ways: the interview guide was examined and refined and testing myself as an interviewer proved to be useful for gaining necessary confidence and practice the skills of active listening, asking appropriate follow-up questions, and giving feedback. The decision to proceed with the interview guide with some adjustments was taken, some of the questions were dropped, while more follow up questions appeared to be both relevant and necessary.

It is important to point to the fact that the study was approved by the Norwegian Social Science Data Services (NSD), and is performed in accordance with their directions. The final permission from NSD included the possibility to interview guardians of unaccompanied minor asylum seekers (see appendix 6 and appendix 7). After that an inquiry about participation in the study was sent to the guardians with the aim to explain the topic, focus, and goals of the study (see appendix 4 and appendix 5). The inquiry about participation in the research also assured the informants’ rights to anonymity and confidentiality, the voluntary character of participation, the use of sound recorder.

All of the interviews were conducted in Norwegian. Each interview lasted between 50 and 120 minutes and was recorded. According to Patton (2002), tracking analytical insights that occur during data collection is a part of fieldwork and the beginning of qualitative analysis. During the whole process of my working on this
project, I have been carrying an accurate account of my thoughts and commentaries to the literature review, informal conversations, and final interviews. After each interview I wrote down notes as memos, things that happened during the interviews, face and body expressions, my thoughts. Summarizing analytical insights and interpretations that emerged during data collection is an important part of my data material.

4.4 Analysis of Data Material

4.4.1 Transcribing Interviews

According to Kvale and Brinkmann (2009), transcribing interviews from an oral to a written mode is in itself an initial analytic process. Most part of the recordings was of good quality, and I transcribed all of the interviews verbatim. The final transcriptions were checked for accuracy afterwards in order to ensure their correctness. Transcribing the interviews by myself was a process of great value as I got to know the data material better, and had the emotional and social aspect of the interviews reawakened. At the same time, it strengthens the validity of the transcriptions when they are done by the participant of the interviews (Malterud, 2003). The interview transcripts were treated carefully respecting the anonymity and confidentiality of the informants. All names of persons and places were omitted. In transcripts I noted pauses, laughter, sighs, and movements. All of the interruptions and disturbances were recorded in the transcripts. I wrote commentaries to the excerpts where I felt that the informants were emotionally engaged or touched by the topic of our conversation.

4.4.2 Analysis

To begin with, I found it necessary to organize handwritten field notes into a separate document, which could be consulted while analyzing the interviews. I then read the interview transcripts over and over again. This was done out of consideration for getting a sense of the whole in the material (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009, Patton, 2002). At this point, it was decided to take a distance from the research question, interview
guide, and theoretical assumptions. The reason for this was to let empirical material lay the ground for my communication with the collected data and to get the feeling of the whole (see chapter 4.1).

After repeatedly reading each interview and memos, I could identify preliminary themes, which were relevant for throwing light on the research questions. Those were the experience of the guardian’s role in the asylum interview, the issue of trust and UMA’s confidence in the interview situation, the co-operation between the guardian and the interviewer, the co-operation between the interviewer and UMA, the rapport between the interviewer and UMA, the spectrum of the child’s feelings at the asylum interview, the communication between the participants of the asylum interview, the experience of the asylum interview’s frame, and the experience of the interviewers and their competence in communicating with children (UMAs).

These themes were chosen on the background of information rich replies given by the interviewees. This was done without taking research question and theoretical assumptions into consideration. The reason for this was to let the empirical material lay the ground for the “dawning” analysis. By observing the engagement of my informants in the interview situation and by listening to the interview recordings, I paid attention to the themes, which were especially interesting and vital to them. This was taken into consideration in the final analysis of the data material.

As the second step, I read the interview transcripts systematically in the search for the significant and relevant expressions that provide descriptions of the experience. I then coded those meaningful excerpts into my preliminary themes. The focus was then moved from the whole to its parts (hermeneutic circle).

When all interviews were coded, the passages/statements that weren’t relevant for the research question were disregarded. For example, I experienced the question about the guardians’ role after the asylum interview as a topic of a great concern for many informants. They expressed their points of view and “frustration”. Therefore, I considered their replies in the aspect of relevance for the focus of this study. Only the excerpts revealing the guardians’ role related to the experienced asylum interview
situation were coded and used in the analysis. In this phase of the analysis I found it necessary to turn back to the research question and theoretical framework. Further systematization of the findings led to the formulation of four central themes: (1) role of the guardian, (2) framework, (3) rapport, and (4) communication.

While reading the data material gathered into each of four themes, I could observe more or less definite categories. Each statement was read, interpreted for meaning and placed in a category. Each category was then properly defined to ensure reliability. The result of further systematizing of the categories was three levels: theme, category, and under-category. For example, the theme Communication has two categories defined as (1) communicative issues and (2) challenges in communication. Each category includes two under-categories, which are (1) communication between the interviewer and the child, (2) children’s opportunities to express their views, in the first one, and (1) challenges related to language, and (2) challenges related to culture, in the second one. The figure below is an example of this categorization, while appendix 1 presents a comprehensive picture of the research results.

Figure 1. Presentation of the Results (extract)
I have been mainly responsible for the analysis, but has in dialogue with the supervisor interpreted statements and made categorizations to ensure agreement upon the categories. The selection of statements to represent each theme, category, and under-category has certainly been difficult, and may reflect the need to support a certain point of view. Constant listening to the interviews and reading of transcripts make it possible to claim a good knowledge of the extensive data material I’ve got. At the same time, I have attempted to select passages that present salient features in my data material, while I have all the time striven to introduce the reader to the nuances in it.

The citations I use in the presentation of the research results have been edited to ensure the informants’ anonymity. All the names have been left out, the gender may have been changed, and locations have been omitted. In my opinion, this hasn’t altered the meaning of the informants’ statements, as well as this hasn’t influenced the presentation significantly. I have used the following transcription notations: G1, G2, … = guardian 1, guardian 2, …, (…) = passage left out, … = pause. I have omitted many of my non-verbal comments (“hm”, “mm”), for the reason of clarity in presenting the informants’ statements.

4.4.3 Translation

The statements presented in each theme have been translated into English, and I have tried to remain as close as possible both to the style and content of the utterances. The translation sought to preserve sentence structure and “flow” in the informants’ reflections. That is why some sentences may be perceived as incomplete or extremely long or following Norwegian structure of sentences. I have also tried to preserve the informants’ vocabulary use. For example, all of my informants use the word “child” and pronoun “he” when they talk about UMAs, which I preserved in the final thesis. There were some Norwegian words that I found difficult to find an English equivalent for. Therefore, I chose to use either a Norwegian word in italics or explain my interpretations by using footnotes.
Translation of the statements used in the final thesis was validated by one of the informants: this informant’s utterances were sent to her with the request to give a response if she recognizes herself in them. A limited amount of other utterances was chosen from the thesis and presented to the teacher of English working in one of the schools in Norway. I got the response that the content of the utterances was unchanged after the translation from Norwegian into English.

4.5 Reflections on the Quality of the Study

The quality of qualitative research has long been an object for discussion among the researchers. Maxwell (1992) emphasizes that validity is not an inherent property of a particular method, but it refers to the data, accounts, or conclusions reached by using that method in a particular context. In other words, validity strongly depends upon a researcher’s methodological, ethical, and theoretical choices and reflections, and the ability to demonstrate the credibility of findings (LeCompte & Goetz, 1982). In the following paragraphs, theoretical and practical questions concerning the quality of this study are presented.

4.5.1 Validity and Reliability

Validity in qualitative studies is concerned about the accuracy of scientific findings and the extent to which conclusions effectively represent empirical reality (LeCompte & Goetz, 1982). In other words, validity is about whether a study represents what it means to investigate. According to Kvale & Brinkmann (2009), validation does not belong to a separate stage of an investigation, but permeates the entire process of knowledge production. Maxwell (1992) speaks about validity as relative to and dependent on the researcher’s perspective, although he argues that it doesn’t make comparability impossible.

With the purpose to secure the validity of this study, it was important to make reviews on its quality throughout the entire process. In an attempt to give detailed descriptions of choices taken and thoughts behind those decisions lies the desire to make the study transparent for others. Throughout the whole process, I aimed at
checking, questioning, and analyzing this study within a theoretical framework built on previous research and related literature within the topic of research. The research results are grounded in statements that go through all of the conducted interviews, and the voice of each informant has been made explicit in the final thesis.

Criteria-based choice of information-rich participants also aims at providing credible knowledge about the topic in focus. All of the informants possessed both the experience of asylum interviews and the knowledge of the field of refugees. This project has a children’s perspective in the sense that it is focusing on a child-oriented working procedure. I wish to gain an understanding of how children feel themselves at the asylum interviews and how the child is being taken care of through the interview form and content. However, in my research I do not meet children personally. Nevertheless, through analysis and interpretation of guardians’ observations I try to get a deeper insight into which possibilities the child gets to come forward with his or her history at the asylum interview. Experiences from my own childhood, meeting children in my personal and professional life, as well as theoretical knowledge about children give me possibilities to get closer to children’s perspective. My minority background and knowing what it means to be a “newcomer” to the country, give unique opportunities for inside, although never the same, perspective that representatives of cultural minorities may have and challenges they face.

I experienced that I to a considerable degree managed to adapt myself to each informant. In two of the interviews there was a need for more follow up questions, while in others it was more important to hold focus. Having transcribed all of the interviews, I noticed that their quality was positively increasing. More research experience would have strengthened validity.

In qualitative research, it is often an advantage to use triangulation, that is, to use multiple methods, data sources, and researchers as a strategy for increasing the validity of research findings (Mathison, 1988). This study includes primarily interviews. Observation, interviews with other groups of participants, and analysis of
interview reports would have provided deeper and more complex understanding of the phenomenon. However, in the framework of a master degree project I consider memo to be a kind of triangulation.

Reliability is considered to be another criterion, which is important to address in this study. It addresses the issue of whether a finding is trustworthy and reproducible at other times and by other researchers (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, LeCompte & Goetz, 1982). To follow a systematic process seems to be the most important contribution to the research reliability (ibid.). My being prepared, open, and sensitive in interview situations, being careful and systematic in the process of analysis, and doing my best at being transparent in this presentation - all refer to the purpose of addressing reliability of this research.

To contribute to reliable and valid knowledge about communicative and relational aspects of the asylum interviews raises a question of whether they may be transferable to other subjects and situations. Findings in this research cannot be transferred to the population of interviewers, unaccompanied minors, and guardians in general, and to all interview situations. Nevertheless, these findings can be used as a knowledge proposal or as a guide to what might occur in other situations. And in this way, they can contribute to a better insight into the phenomenon in focus.

4.5.2 Ethical Considerations

The awareness of ethical considerations embedded in all stages of the inquiry protects the participants and secures the transparency of procedures and research professionalism (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009). This concerns the informed consent, confidentiality, data storage, presentation of the research results, etc (NESH, 2006). Ethical considerations central in this study are discussed in more detail in this paragraph.

Respect for the informants’ identity was considered as significant in this study. As the group of people engaged as guardians for UMAs is relatively small, it was decided that neither their names nor names of interview locations nor names of the reception
centres were to be used in the final report. Background information is only given in general terms in the paragraph *Presentation of informants*. The descriptions provided are short and abstract, so that it is impossible to trace back to the research participants. Examples used were cautiously considered with respect to the confidential character of information, although the informants never used either names of children or countries they originated from or places of living in Norway. Nevertheless, descriptions and characteristics that are being presented in this study are relevant for many unaccompanied minors and procedures they go through, which makes it possible to reflect about issues in focus in general.

The question of the informed consent is essential in each study (NESH, 2006). The inquiry about participation in an interview study was worked out with the purpose to mediate all aspects concerning participating in this project to the informants (see appendix 4 and appendix 5). The issues of the protection of the confidentiality, the purpose of the research, and the possibility to withdraw at any time, storing of the interview material were made explicit before the conduct of each interview (see appendix 2 and appendix 3). The choice of the theme and focus for the study was chosen with respect to protect the informants or children they are talking about, so that they were not influenced negatively by participation in the study.

The scientific value of each research is to be cautiously considered in each and every case (NESH, 2006). As there is little systematic knowledge gathered about listening to children in immigration procedures, the topic of the study was evaluated as relevant. An ambition to contribute to the knowledge about UMAs and awareness of positive and negative aspects of the existing practice, and possibilities for its improvement has been guiding throughout the whole research process.
5. Presentation of Analysis and Results

The presentation of results is often considered to be a further development of analytical work (Thagaard, 2003). Thus, my reflection over the research questions proceeds from the analysis process to the presentation of central findings. The theoretical perspective that forms the background for the analysis is mainly a dialogical perspective on communication, which implies recognising, empathetic attitude, and having the children’s perspective.

The process of data analysis has resulted in formulating four central themes. They are: (1) the role of the guardians, (2) the framework of the asylum interview, (3) rapport, and (4) communication. The results of this study indicate that the role of the guardians is important before, during, and after the interview. By performing their role guardians can take care of both the legal and psychological interests and the needs of unaccompanied minors. The physical framework of the interview is described as satisfactory. According to the informants the rapport between the interviewer and the child is varying – from businesslike and impersonal to safe and confident. Communication is described by being structured and schematic in some parts of the interview. The informants experience that children are given opportunities to recall freely, but questions can sometimes be difficult and very general. In the following paragraphs I will present the results of the study in detail.

5.1 Role of the Guardians

The appointment of a guardian for each asylum-seeking child is acknowledged as a significant step towards securing respect for the best interests of the child (Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2005, Immigration Regulations, 1990, UNHCR, 1997). The role of guardians is described in numerous international and Norwegian documents. This theme contains descriptions and opinions about the informants’ experience of their role at the asylum interview. The data analysis has also focus on how they feel they can contribute to making the asylum interview situation more adjusted to the child’s needs.
The guardians’ experiences of their role at the asylum interview are various. However, the leitmotif is the perception of their role as important at different stages of the interview. Several dimensions seem to appear in their descriptions, which are presented as categories: (1) preparatory phase, (2) during the interview, and (3) after the interview.

### 5.1.1 Preparatory Phase

*To prepare the child both formally and emotionally*

To begin with, the informants understand the significance of their role in the preparation of the child for the interview. They emphasize that this preparation covers two dimensions – the formal and the emotional. Under the formal dimension the guardians present themselves and their role to the children, inform the children about the interview and point to the importance of being honest. The emotional dimension covers the reflections about the interview’s significance and the importance of motivating the children.

G2: In a pre-interview conversation, it is important to prepare both the child and myself. At first, I introduce myself and say that I do not represent the UDI, police or government in Norway, and that I am here with the purpose of helping the child and working for the child’s best interests... I have also understood after a while, that it is important to inform them about the asylum interview, tell them that they won’t experience violence, physic pressure, and that it is more like a conversation. It will be a long and tiresome day, but it will also be a very important day. They must be ready for this, and speak honestly.

G4: I encourage them to tell their asylum story as it is, as they experienced it. I know that there are a lot of control questions they are asked, so that the child does not get into desperate situation because the child mixes up which story he or she has really experienced and which one he or she is instructed to tell. I must also tell them (UMAs) that it is the most important document in their claim, which lays the ground for whether they get a residence permit or not, and what kind of residence permit they get. The latter is difficult to explain, but it has enormous consequences.

By these statements informants emphasize that they consider both the formal and emotional dimensions of the preparation phase as vital. The following citation “…

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4 As I interpret it, the informant means ”awkward, embarrassing” and ”painful” by using the phrase ”desperate” (fortvilet) situation.
tell them that they won’t experience violence, physical pressure, and that it is more like a conversation” gives the reason to think that the informants deem important to calm the child down.

**Preparation influences the interview**

One of the informants draws a connection line between the pre-interview phase and the interview. She emphasizes that a good preparation of the child influences the interview, which follows, in a positive way. The following comment supports this thought:

G6: It looked like he understood what was important to take up (*ta opp*) in the interview. He was more prepared and motivated during the interview than another boy.

This informant underlines that the prepared child is more motivated for the interview and possesses a better understanding of its importance. On the contrary, the child who has not been through the preparation phase has a poorer understanding of the interview process.

Based on the material presented, emphasis on the guardian’s role in the preparation of the child to the interview is an important one. This role is also of significant character in the light of both international and Norwegian legal documents. The Norwegian Directorate of Immigration (UDI, 2009) encourages guardians to perform this part of their role by meeting the child at the reception centre preferably several days before the interview day with the purpose that the child can get to know his or her guardian better, and hopefully will feel some confidence in having the guardian by his or her side. Nevertheless, it has not always been the practice that guardians have a real possibility to meet the child before the interview, and this is due to short notice from the UDI or because the reception centre is far away, according to the informants in this study. Even though guardians manage to meet the child before, the quality of this meeting is not necessarily satisfactory taken into account language and emotional

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5 The informant compares two UMAs here. The guardian has had a pre-interview conversation with the second one, but she didn’t manage to have it with the first one.
barriers. The discussion presented here was topical in the period of gathering data material, but it is somehow different at the current moment. The reason for this is the introduction of a new pre-interview arrangement (*vergevaktordning*), which provides for the conversation between the guardian and the unaccompanied minor before the real interview (field notes). It is a desirable change in UDI’s routines with regard to making the process of asylum claim assessment more child-sensitive, safe, and predictable.

A preparation phase is included in the majority of interviewing methods used in forensic interviews with children and in the field of Child Welfare (Gamst & Langballe, 2004, Langballe et al., in press, Poole & Lamb, 1998, Øvreeide, 2000). This phase creates a framework for a common understanding between the child and the adult in the interview, which in turn creates the background for confidence, understanding, and good contact between the participants. When it comes to asylum interviews, they can be defined as investigative (see chapter 3.1), and it’s not unusual that the child and the interviewer meet each other before the real interview. Data material in this study gives possibilities to say something about how a preparation phase is conducted by guardians on both a formal and a psychological level, so that the aim of the interview becomes clearer for the child, and the child experiences more support and confidence in the situation. The child’s motivation seems to increase when he or she gets a better understanding of the situation. In order to ensure the appropriateness of the conversation, the child must gain profound information about its purposes and the process the child is about to go through (ibid.). As I see it, the preparation phase can give a profound background for the child’s sense of coherence in the world full of changes and instability. If the child gets a good understanding of what is going to happen at the asylum interview, his or her feeling of manageability and meaningfulness will increase (Antonovsky, 1987).

### 5.1.2 During the Interview

This category includes descriptions in which the informants experience that they are able to contribute qualitatively to taking care of the UMAs and their interests during
the asylum interview. Three main findings in this category emphasize the significance of the guardians’ role because they can ensure that all information relevant for the asylum claim is brought forward, contribute to the atmosphere of trust and confidence, and make sure that the child is not being unnecessarily pressed or exhausted. The way informants understand their role at the asylum interview is in line with the Guidelines for Guardians worked out by the Ministry of Justice and Police (2003).

**Follow up that all relevant information comes forward**

When it comes to the first idea, in which the informants express their concern about the amount and quality of information that comes forward at the asylum interview, they consider their role to be significant. Through their attentiveness and knowledge of the child they can contribute to building a profound background for the application. G3 explains it in the following way:

G3: I have written down the answers the minor (*vergebarnet mitt*) has given to the interviewer. At the same time they (answers) come from UDI later, when they read their report at the end of the interview. Then, I could often come up with some supplementary commentaries, which I thought were important. In both cases I met the children a few days before the asylum interview, and they told me about themselves. Thus, I could add some details, which didn’t come forward at the interview because the interviewer never asked about it, but the details I estimated as significant for their asylum application later on. I said then: You told me yesterday… With the goal to expand a little, to get a best possible report, to bring forth all the information that can be decisive.

The level of initiative demonstrated at the asylum interview varies from guardian to guardian. One informant says that she very seldom breaks in, in critical situations. She perceives the interviewers as very professional in their work of interviewing children. Several informants say that they feel free to ask relevant questions.

**Contribute to the atmosphere of trust**

The second finding, which needs to be underlined, is the informants’ experience of their contribution to the atmosphere of trust during the asylum interview. The

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6 I interpret the informant’s use of the word "professional" as a highly skilled, qualified, and experienced person.
guardians experience that their presence at the interview makes children think that they are not alone in this situation and that there is one here who they can ask for help. All of the informants consider their role as important here, and the following statement illustrates this:

G5: There is an adult person who, they know, represents the Norwegian government, and there is an interpreter, and to sit alone there when you are just 15, 16, 17 years old on the other side of the table makes one feel rather small. It’s good to have a person who can sit by your side and who is there for you during the whole interview. I think it is very important.

According to the informants, it is not only the legal aspect they have in mind while being together with UMAs at the asylum interview. They also express the importance of making UMAs feel safe and confident. Further, the informants say that they can also contribute a lot to making the situation less stressful during pauses – “by being by the child’s side”.

Follow up that the child is not being exhausted

The third idea, which is emphasized by the informants, is the importance of following up that the child is not being unnecessarily pressed or exhausted. The informants pay special attention to numerous repetitive and controlling questions, which often make children confused and uncertain.

G4: My role in the asylum interview is to ensure that it is an interview, not a hearing/interrogation (avhør), that a good atmosphere is present, and that the child gets an opportunity to tell his or her story (asylhistorie), (…), that the child is not being exhausted. Certainly, that it is taken into account that it is a child and not an adult person, who is being interviewed.

When saying, “that the child gets an opportunity to tell his or her story”, G4 refers to the interview’s form and content as important for the child to get a real chance to express his or her views. Further in the interview, the same informant adds, “the interview is not adjusted either psychologically or mentally for children”. Another informant says that she has met interviewers who were predisposed in their way of communicating with UMAs. The informant had to break in and direct the

7 The informant’s word ”small” is understood as ”insignificant” here
interviewer’s attention to this fact, which resulted in the change of the interviewer’s behaviour. Several informants point to interviewers’ positive reactions to commentaries or constructive critique from the guardians. This supports the idea that guardians have a real opportunity to contribute positively to the situation of the asylum interview.

An asylum interview as a communicative situation is characterized by asymmetry and stress. It represents a dilemma, where legal (formal) and child-specific (informal) elements co-exist (Gamst & Langballe, 2004). By being by the child’s side, guardians contribute to the reduction of stress and tension. As presented in the chapter Children and Traumas, quite a few refugee children have experienced traumatic events in their home countries, during the flight or after their arrival in Norway (Dyregrov, 2000, Raundalen et al., 2005). By following up that unaccompanied minors are not being unnecessarily pressed or exhausted, guardians help to avoid that the asylum interview becomes a re-traumatizing situation. Simultaneously, by making the situation less stressful and by contributing to the child’s feeling of being safe and calm, interviewers increase the reliability of the information provided by the child (Gamst & Langballe, 2004, Langballe, 2007). This will also increase the children’s opportunities to tell their life stories as they have experienced them from their own perspective (Tiller, 1991).

I interpret the informants’ descriptions of their role as persons securing children’s legal protection and emotional well being in the light of Antonovský’s sense of coherence (1987). “By being by the child’s side” before, during, and after the asylum interview guardians can contribute to the sense of coherence unaccompanied minors may or may not feel. The preparatory phase conducted by guardians together with introductory procedures done by interviewers will hopefully make the situation more comprehensible for UMAs. When guardians perform their role at the asylum interview as described in my data material, they make the situation easier for children to cope with, or manageable, in Antonovský’s terms (1987). Meaningfulness, the third component of the sense of coherence, will then serve as a motivational element
for children, taken into account that they get a real opportunity to come with their life stories.

Emphasis on the sense of coherence may contribute to the process of setting the interview in a life-long perspective, where the child’s future life in many ways depends on this event, and what happens after the interview is important. The next paragraph takes up this question.

**5.1.3 After the Interview**

This paragraph presents the third category within the theme *Role of the guardians*, which is their role after the asylum interview. I concluded that the guardians’ role after the asylum interview is a topic of a great concern for the informants. In general, the informants feel a lot of responsibility beyond the formal interview. At the same time, I had to evaluate replies I got according to their relevance for the focus of this inquiry. Only the excerpts revealing the guardians’ role related to the experienced asylum interview situations were coded and used in the analysis.

The informants express a thought that UMA feel “exhausted”, “happy that the day is over”, and “uninterested” in discussing how they experienced the asylum interview immediately after it. Nevertheless, one of the guardians mentions that UMA often can wonder what her impression of the interview is. Another one has experienced twice that UMA called her to say that they had forgotten to give some information, which can be important for their application. These answers can be perceived as contradictory. They point to the fact that children do think about the interviews in many cases and that it is probably adults (in this case, guardians) who are in a better position to show initiative due to their understanding, experience, and confidence.

G4: No, it’s rather me who had to keep at it (*stå på*). Because I could have seen reactions or there were things that deserved attention, and which I took up with the children afterwards, and we then estimated if we needed to contact the lawyer in order to give extra information. Many of them are in a loyalty conflict. I also think about cultural differences – many of them are not used to talking about themselves. They must keep silent in an assembly, be quiet and unobtrusive (*tilbaketrukne*).
This quotation underlines the importance of being attentive to and observant of the UMAs’ verbal and non-verbal reactions during the asylum interview day with the purpose to follow up on them later. By pointing to the cultural peculiarities, this statement emphasizes the significance of the preparation phase as the possibility to over-win them by motivating and making the child more confident and less stressed. Situations like this may have clear connections to respect for authorities both in the families and the communities that unaccompanied minors come from (Eide, 2007).

Data material doesn’t give the possibility to say anything about how unaccompanied minors are being followed up by UDI after the interview. However, guardians are encouraged to contact the reception centre where the UMA lives if there is a need for special care (UDI, 2009). There is only one informant who told me that she needed to do this on behalf of the child and with the child’s agreement, so that the reception centre could be more attentive to this child.

According to Neumayer et al. (2006), it is important to have the possibility to follow up with children after they have told about traumatic and emotionally laden experiences. It is clear that the UDI’s purpose with the asylum interview is investigative, and it is important that this purpose is not combined with any other purposes (Øvreeide, 2000). Therefore, guardians may play an important role in the process of setting the interview in a wider perspective for unaccompanied minors. This can be done either as in the example presented above or by giving care and moral support to the child.

5.2 Framework

The experiences the informants have of the asylum interview framework are presented in two categories, which are (1) interview day, and (2) physical frame. These categories are further discussed in this paragraph.
5.2.1 Interview Day

I would like to start the presentation of this category with the following statement of one of the informants:

G6: (…) yeah, it is a very odd (underlig) day, a very odd day.

All informants agree that the asylum interview day is a long and tiresome one. They describe it as “challenging” and “split up” by long and frequent pauses. G6 says:

(…) It is very long, with very long pauses, it is tough and exhausting. They bring up a lot of emotions, and then there is a break, so there’ll be like a distance (…).

She adds afterwards that while she understands the rationale behind it, she is also worried about “breaking up the child’s story and thinking process”.

The informants describe the asylum interview as emotionally laden. They speak about children feeling nervous and worried, children who are tensed up and having a tough day. As one of the informants says:

G2: It might be such a strain for children.

In a sum, informants describe the asylum interview day as a long and tiresome one. The day is coloured by many emotions, feelings, nervousness, strain and tension. The significance of good and reassuring atmosphere can hardly be overestimated. According to Saywitz (1995), high levels of anxiety can divert children’s attentional resources, or reduce effort and motivation. The informants’ descriptions seen in the context of the interview’s purpose may indicate possible disadvantages of the interview form. If the purpose of the interview is to provide most credible information from unaccompanied minors, then the creation of a calm and positive atmosphere in the room so that the child feels confident and taken care of is vital. From the interviewers this demands high professionalism to talk with children about emotionally laden topics, which will reduce the disadvantages to a great degree.
5.2.2 Physical Frame

This category includes the informants’ experiences of the physical setting for the asylum interview: room, equipment, seating arrangements. They describe the interview room as neutral and comfortable enough for the situation. One of the informants adds:

G6: The interviewer’s relaxed and informal attitude is of higher priority than the interior of the room.

According to Poole and Lamb (1998), interview locations should be comfortable and neutral. At a minimum, the interviewer has to mind practical issues as, for example, checking that the children are not hungry or thirsty, giving them the opportunity to use the bathroom during the interview, planning breaks and pauses, checking that the recording device is functioning properly.

When it comes to the seating arrangements, the informants underline that they find it important that they sit by the child’s side. The interviewer and the UMA sit aslant. Such placement is recommended by, for example, Øvreeide (2000) as giving opportunities for easy eye contact and at the same time making it possible for the child to escape direct eye contact when he or she feels like doing that. However, the guardians experience that the computer takes a lot of attention and complicates eye contact between the child and the interviewer. In this respect, it is important to emphasize that the computer and report writing in general should attract as little attention as possible (Directorate of Immigration Finland, 2002, Øvreeide, 2000).

5.3 Rapport

This theme appears in the tension between the formal demand for neutrality and child-related need for a good and caring atmosphere, an atmosphere of safety and confidence. Analogically with other themes, I have coded data material into three categories, which are (1) rapport between the interviewer and the child, (2) eye contact, and (3) interpreter-mediated interview. They are presented in the next paragraphs.
5.3.1 Rapport between the Interviewer and the Child

What are the informants’ experiences of rapport and contact between the interviewer and the UMA? These aspects were mentioned and reflected over at different phases of the interviews with the informants. Statements coded under this category are further summarized here.

Impersonal and businesslike

In general, informants express their impression of the rapport between the interviewer and the child as impersonal and businesslike.

G4: These children are very aware of the fact that they meet a person who works in the UDI, presents himself or herself as one, and says that it is the only interview you’ll have and this will make a background for handling your application. So I think that they meet a person from the government, and not someone who is an equal footing with them. This is said explicitly, and I cannot see that this person is someone who wants to be extremely open (ønsker å åpne seg noe voldsomt). So there is an impersonal (kjølig) contact between them, if I can use this word.

G4 says that there is little contact generally, and this contact is described as impersonal. She explains her perception on the basis of the power aspect, where the interviewer plays a dominant role. Five of the informants perceive that there is little contact between the interviewer and the UMA, and this contact is impersonal.

Difference in the quality of the rapport

All of the informants consider the rapport between interviewers and unaccompanied minors to be important. However, they report variation in its quality from interview situation to interview situation. Interviewers who manage to establish a “good contact” with children are described as caring, showing interest, and being less formal. One of the consequences, then, is that children get possibilities to talk freely and expand their replies to a greater degree. This is a situation where inter-personal aspects support the thematic development of the conversation. As a result, children get a better possibility to express their opinion in relation to article 12 in the CRC (1989). On the contrary, the rapport between the interviewer and the child defined as “bad contact” in the analysis is characterized as “businesslike, formal, and impersonal”. As a consequence, children feel nervous, uncertain; they let themselves
be subordinate and led, which influences both the amount and reliability of the information given by the children. G4 says that young people try “to play into the interviewer’s hands: What does she want to hear now? What should I answer now? What is the right answer?” Informants describe this situation:

G1: Rapport? It is businesslike, in a way. It is questions and answers. And some of the interviewers are better than others in creating a good safe atmosphere, so that the child feels being taken care of. (...) There is no relation between them because they are doing a job together. Some interviewers are very good at giving the child an opportunity to talk freely, while others are more engaged in asking questions.

G5: Some interviewers are very clever, but generally there is little contact between the interviewer and the child. It is a relatively impersonal contact. It is very little the interviewer gives both of himself or herself and the way he or she conducts the interview, I mean body language. It is very little that promotes for trust (...).

The reported contact is based on “businesslike” grounds and question-reply sequences which may be interpreted as giving little space for the child’s initiative. Both G1 and G5 express their experience of variation in the character of the established rapport: from businesslike to caring and thus, giving the opportunity to freely express one’s thoughts.

**Possibilities to create a better rapport**

Some of the informants signal their “faith” that there are possibilities for the creation of a better rapport between the interviewer and the UMA.

G6: I think that the most important thing is that they mediate recognition… To my mind, the difference between those two interviewers was that one of them showed it more than the other one, he responded in an O. K. way, and met more input on what was told instead of proceeding to a new question without giving any response, in other words, being controlling – “It sounds strange…” or “How can you say this, on the one hand, and that, on the other hand?” Then, it will be a confronting control mediated through questions.

G6 mentions recognition as important for establishing a good rapport between the interviewer and the UMA, which can be done by giving response to the UMA’s answers instead of “speeding” to a new question. “Being controlling” represents a dilemma in the interview, which all of the informants are aware of – interviewers do have to control information coming forth through the children’s replies and, at the
same time, remember that they are interviewing minors who may have been traumatized.

G3: To arrange a good basis for communication, there should have been more time to develop this contact, during the interview, as well. But one also is pressed for time, and it’s really a lot that must be done during the day, and they are after definite information. This interview is very structured. There is no possibility for the child to inform more than he or she is asked in the question.

G3 points out the importance of maintaining contact throughout the whole interview process. In addition, she suggests that a highly structured interview form gives few possibilities for the UMA to come up with his or her own way of telling his or her story and expand its content. G2 expresses her “belief” in humour as a possible way of making the situation less stressful for UMAs. G2 introduces a thought that some interviewers hide behind the “cold disguise” in order to protect themselves, as she thinks that they (interviewers) also experience the situation as difficult. Several informants expressed the same idea in various phases of their reflections about the phenomenon of the asylum interview with minors. At the same time, all of the informants underline their experience of the UDI’s interviewers as extremely nice, pleasant, and caring when they communicate with UMAs in pauses.

Øvreeide (2000) emphasizes that relationship and production of content is inextricably linked to each other. He means that the relational aspect is fundamental, and is a precondition for a qualitative communication in the intersubjective framework. A “good” conversation, then, will always be a balanced use of rapport- and theme-enhancing principles.

There seems to be a mutual dependence between the degree of confidence and trust among the participants of the interview and the quality of the rapport. The more uncertain the child is about the adult person he or she is dependent on, the more it will reinforce the tendency to express something, which is in line with the child’s ideas of what is expected from him or her (Øvreide, 2000). Therefore, there should

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8 Pauses is interpreted as periods of time when interviewers follow a guardian and an UMA to/from pause room
be space for developing this rapport during the interview, in other words come back to the rapport-building phase even though one has already been through it. Gamst and Langballe (2004) conclude in their study that phase organization of interviews facilitates their quality and children’s possibilities to give reliable accounts of experienced events, even though the phase structure is not meant to be linear. This argument seems to be relevant in connection with asylum interviews.

As it has already been emphasized, an asylum interview as a communicative situation places interviewing persons in front of a dilemma, in which the field of immigration and asylum politics and the field of children meet and are in tension (Danielsen & Seeberg, 2006). In the context of an institutionalized conversation the asylum interview represents, interviewers should manage to relate to both the formal and psychological sides of it. This includes that they need to work professionally and, at the same time, show themselves as human beings. Einarsson (1997) writes that when professional competence is about to be realized in an encounter with a user, it is personal competence, which serves as a triggering factor making professional competence “live” in meeting with another person. To provide detailed information about grounds for seeking asylum is the central purpose of the asylum interview. Recognition of children’s “special needs during the interview situation” (Immigration Regulations, 1990, my translation) in my opinion means to include the child-specific aspects into interviewing children, where good and safe rapport is one of them. In this respect, professional empathy and recognition as described in chapter 3.1.3 and 3.1.4 can be seen as significant. One needs to establish the necessary distance, but at the same time one should see the child as a subject, a person one cooperates with, gets involved with, and is influenced by.

There is a demand for good command of the interview guide and good communicative skills if an interviewing person is expected to be professionally empathetic and recognizing, flexible and able to move attention from the interview “routine” to its relational aspects. This will give the possibility to distance oneself from the interview guide and structure, and let the child come forward with his or her
initiative and subjective experience, but still remain in control of the focus and theme of the day.

Motivation to establish a good rapport in the context of the asylum interview is closely connected to the view on children dominating in the society and in the field of immigration. Asymmetry experienced by the informants leads to the situation when one person is up (interviewer) and another person is down (child), and therefore no real contact can take place (Satir, 1976). By striving towards the symmetry in their rapport with children, interviewers get closer to the children’s perspective (Gamst & Langballe, 2004) and to the possibility to establish a good contact.

5.3.2 Eye Contact

The category of establishing eye contact between the participants in the asylum interview and the category of the rapport between the interviewer and the UMA are interconnected. Some of the informants mention the issue of eye contact while reflecting over the preceding question, while others were asked about it in a follow up question. Although I see these two categories as closely connected to each other, I split them with the purpose of creating a clear picture of the research results.

Varying eye contact

Generally, I experienced that the notion of eye contact was a topic all of the informants reflected on. Some informants describe it as “varying” from interviewer to interviewer, which I present as “good interviewers” and “bad interviewers” when it comes to the quality and amount of eye contact with unaccompanied minors. Statements from two guardians illustrate this.

G1: It varies a lot because some of the interviewers just sit with the PC, throw a glance at the child from time to time, while others lean back, ask a question and then write. The latter category is those who, … the best atmosphere is there.

G2: It varies. But I experience it as important. I have experienced one, who was very like this …(the informant performs a movement showing that a person keys on a keyboard, looks up, and keys on a keyboard again) It alters the atmosphere. Yes, you notice, in a way, that it is all about asking questions, not about creating a safe situation.
For all informants there is a variation in the degree of eye contact between the participants of the asylum interview, ranging from little to satisfactory. Satisfactory eye contact includes giving more attention to the UMA while asking questions, and this one is reported as positively influencing the atmosphere of the asylum interview. This kind of eye contact is characteristic of the “good interviewers”. The informants possess experiences with “bad interviewers” who have little eye contact with children they are talking to and are preoccupied with report writing. It should be emphasized that informants are aware of and notice the connection between the quality of eye contact and that of the atmosphere at the interview.

*Influence of report writing on the quality of eye contact*

Three informants include an interpreter in their reflections about the eye contact. They introduce two perspectives in their reflections over the eye contact in the process of the asylum interview. The first one is the perspective of the communication via the interpreter and the second one is report writing. Communication via the interpreter makes the communicative process triangular, which includes that information goes through an extra link. However, informants consider report writing to be a significant negative element in the communication between interviewers and children. The following statements support these ideas:

G6: There are two things. The interviewer is writing a lot on the PC, so that he or she looks at the PC, and the informant is sitting there (points in aslant direction). Although he looked at the child when he asked questions (...), he was busy writing when the child answered. It is clear that there will be triangular communication, in a way, but when the answer came via the interpreter, it was often that they were not directed\(^9\) to children.

Even though communication via the interpreter makes the communication between the interviewer and the UMA triangular, it is report writing that is experienced as making the interview less child-sensitive and expressing little interest in the child’s world. Another informant expresses her opinion in the following way:

\(^9\) The informant’s word “not directed” is interpreted as not having a direct eye contact with the UMA
G4: In my opinion, a PC should be used afterwards. Nobody can refrain from looking at it. Many are good at the “touch” method, but they must use PC, too. In this type of interviews it could have been great if the interviewer concentrated his or her attention on the questions and interviewee, in other words, a child or a young person. (...) For the children and young people sitting on the other side of the table and originating from the cultures where modern technology has not come so far ... they get affected by it. I really mean it.

G4 describes report writing as disturbing, and views this as a limitation as it draws attention from the subject, current activity, and from the focus point.

As Øvreeide (2000) emphasizes, language and action are closely connected to each other. Therefore, it is not enough just to ask questions and suppose that one shows his or her interest in the child’s world through them. Authentic interest in the child’s world is also expressed through non-verbal communication. Little eye contact as signalized by the informants is likely to influence children in such a way that they very likely become less motivated to talk. Observation can be a good way to obtain information. One may observe the over all emotional condition and sudden changes in the interviewee’s behaviour. This will give clues to what the child is experiencing and how the interviewer should proceed (Directorate of Immigration Finland, 2002).

To establish and maintain eye contact with the child during the interview is important with regard to both the information one gets through observation and the atmosphere in the interview room (Øvreeide, 2000). As I interpret the informants’ descriptions, the asylum interview is in many ways controlled by report writing, which influences communicative process in a negative way. It makes it difficult to be present for the child or to see the child (Kinge, 2007), and therefore show recognition by being an active listener (Schibbye, 2002). Active listening embraces both verbal and non-verbal communication with the purpose to get a deeper insight into the child’s world (ibid.).

5.3.3 Interpreter- mediated Interview

There are situations where language barriers are so significant that participants need to use an interpreter in order to communicate adequately. This leads to an unusual situation: communication goes via the third person that contributes to the process and
direction of an interview (van der Veer, 1994). In the framework of this study, it was only possible to say something about the relational aspects of the interpreter-mediated interview, while I could only scratch the surface of communicative issues.

**Neutrality. Uncertainty. Concerns.**

Almost all the informants presented their experience of the interpreters as highly professional, anonymous and neutral participants of the asylum interview, reporting that they “are used as an instrument” in the situation. Later, some of them recount explicitly about limitations following communicating via an interpreter. Some of the informants express uncertainty when it comes to the information coming forth in the interview where communication goes via a third person. I begin with the passage that seems to condense the basic elements of the informants’ opinions; concern about the content of the child’s answers, extra link in communication, opportunity to give cultural information.

G6: I experience that they have been very neutral, but I am not sure about how they have altered the content of information given by the child. I experience that it had functioned all right. But it prolongs …, and there will be a stop in communication when it goes via an interpreter. But there is little that can be done with this. But they are neutral, and they have given some extra information, for example “He uses a word, and it can be understood in two ways. He says both of them, and I don’t know what he means with this”. Then you are informed that it can be interpreted in both ways.

G6 expresses juxtaposition of her uncertainty about how the UMA’s utterances are being altered in the process of interpretation and her general satisfaction with interpreters’ work and contribution to the communication. She also expresses her concern with extra link and stops in communication, which she views as disturbing for the UMAs’ thinking process\(^\text{10}\).

Several informants report their concern with the fact that the child, in a way, loses a communicative line directly to the interviewer. I understand this to be an expression

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\(^{10}\) This explanation was expressed by G6 in her reflections about frequent pauses. I find it reasonable to suggest that her concern with "stops in communication" includes to an extent the same understanding.
of a negative influence on the interviewer/UMA rapport and on the UMA’s motivation for dialogue and interaction.

*The interpreter’s personal contribution to the communication*

Four of the informants describe the interpreter–UMA rapport as neutral and impersonal. Nevertheless, I would like to direct attention to the answer G5 gives to the question about her experiences with communication via an interpreter in the asylum interview, even though there is some vagueness in her presentation. She describes interpreters as “good at translating in the way the UMA is talking and good at giving the UMA a Norwegian voice”. On the contrary, this informant expresses that “the interpreter often translates the formality imprinted in the interviewer’s questions”.

G5 introduces a perspective of the interpreter making a personal contribution to the communicative situation of the asylum interview. As I understand this, G5 perceives that interpreters tune themselves into the style of different contributors to the communication. Later she describes her thoughts about the role of the interpreter in making the situation safer and more reassuring for UMAs.

G5: (…) even though it is not right to have a personal contact with the interpreter, I think that they (children) feel safety when there is person speaking their language. I think they have a feeling that the interpreter is more on their side than …

G4: (…) Interpreters used in interviews with children have expressed trustworthiness (*tillit*). I see this because these children pose a lot of questions to the interpreters. I have experienced, although I had explained my role, that children asked the interpreter “Who is she? Is she a lawyer? Is she from the police?”

For G5 and G4 the presence of the interpreter introduces some kind of safety and confidence in the relationships between various participants in the asylum interview. This contribution is due to the fact that the interpreter and the UMA share a common language, and probably, a common cultural background.

Like study of interpreter-mediated interviews with unaccompanied minors conducted in Sweden (Keselman et al., 2008), my findings indicate that the interpreters participate in the co-construction of the dialogue and atmosphere at the interview. The interpreters hold very powerful positions in the asylum-hearings as they
determine, which messages the minors receive. Therefore, interviewers and interpreters should work together in order to ensure an accurate information flow (ibid.).

The atmosphere in interpreter-mediated interviews is influenced by the specific dynamics of the communicative process as all of the information goes through an extra link. As my findings indicate, children and interviewers often lose eye contact with each other. Despite language barriers it is the interviewer and the child who are communicating, which presupposes direct contact between. This seems to ease the comprehensibility what of is being said (van der Geer, 1994) and of the situation on the whole. A profound explanation of the interpreter’s role contributes to the child’s understanding of his or her role, and therefore influences comprehensibility of the situation. In this situation it is important to evaluate the sitting arrangement of the participants with the aim to facilitate eye contact between the interviewer and the interviewee.

The presence of a person speaking the same language can both calm the interviewee down and make him or her unconfident (van der Veer, 1994). In this situation it is important that guardians are attentive to the child’s reactions and follow up that the relationship between the interpreter and the child is satisfactory as it is emphasized in the Guidelines for Guardians (Ministry of Justice and Police, 2003).

My findings indicate that the communication process in the asylum interviews with minors is characterized by many stops, which seems to be unsuitable when we think about the emotionally laden character of the information and special vulnerability of these children. Often interruptions may inhibit the children’s opportunities to give a free narrative of their experiences. As the interpreter influences the flow in the conversation between the interviewer and the child, it may be necessary to change between consecutive and simultaneous interpreting (Neumayer et al, 2006).

The interpreter’s competence is vital for good communication. Even though it is important that the interpreter has a fluent command of both languages, it is also vital that he or she possesses cultural and child-specific knowledge. This emphasis is
Relevant with regard to the informants’ experiences of trustworthiness and child-sensitiveness of the interpreters in the field of asylum interviews that was described in the category *Interpreter-mediated interviews*. It is absolutely an advantage when interpreters can understand the way children and young people speak, see how they express themselves, and be able to reproduce this in the same way but in a different language (ibid.).

The child needs to trust the interpreter for the communication to be successful. Interpreter-mediated interviews demand a lot of energy from the participants. In addition, one needs practice in order to communicate successfully. As children rarely have this practice, it should be the interpreter’s responsibility to ensure that the child’s rights and interests are been taken care of through this interview form. Both interviewers and interpreters must facilitate communication as much as possible and treat the minors appropriately, and this process demands collaboration and a mutual understanding between them (Keselman et al., 2008).

### 5.4 Communication

The theme *Communication* contains the participants’ reflections about communication at the asylum interview and challenges connected to it. It also includes accounts of their own participation and their own reactions in this complicated interview form. This theme appears on the edge between formal and child-related aspects of the interview, where the demands for accurate, detailed information and dialogical form and possibility to provide qualitative information co-exist (Gamst & Langballe, 2004). The demand for objectivity, on the one hand, and directedness towards the child’s reality in his or her country of origin, on the other hand, is another dilemma addressed when coding data material. This theme is divided into two categories: (1) communicative issues and (2) challenges in communication. The category *Communicative issues* includes two under-categories: (1) communication between the interviewer and the child, and (2) children’s opportunities to express their views, which are described in the following paragraphs.
5.4.1 Communicative Issues

*Communication between the interviewer and the child*

This under-category describes various aspects of communication expressed by the informants.

*Interview is a highly structured process*

Reflections about the communication at the asylum interview seem to constitute experiences of a highly structured process. These are related especially to the interviewers following the interview guide, which is characterized by little flexibility from the interviewers’ side concerning the way of asking questions, as well as their succession. According to the data material, the asylum interview is built up in such a way that the questions proceed from the general information part (descriptions of roles and interview premises) and information supplied by the National Police Immigration Service (checking if information is right) to the actual content of the child’s “asylum story”.11 The informants tell that the interviewers open up for speaking about grounds for seeking asylum and, then, fill up with personal information, education, and specific information concerning the UMA’s asylum story. Reading a report and commentaries if any, summarize the interview.

Going through a relatively extensive amount of topics seems to be experienced as a reason for some interviewers to be quick with their questions when it comes to formal information, for example, family, flight, identity of the UMAs. Some informants specifically comment on the “schematic” character of communication between the interviewer and the child. One informant comments:

G3: There are no possibilities for a dialogue, not for a real dialogue. It is a child who replies, but questions give few opportunities to come up with extra information. It is like they are expecting a definite answer.

11 The informants use the phrase ”asylum story” (*asylhistorie*) when they speak about grounds for seeking asylum in Norway. I keep to this phrase in the thesis.
This finding points to the idea that the questions asked do not always give possibilities to tell freely. One of the informants experiences that this makes it challenging for the interviewers to respond to the UMAs’ initiative.

G5: I experience that many interviewers start interviewing with personal data. It happens that the child begins to touch things connected to the grounds for seeking asylum. (...) Many interviewers interrupt, then, and say, “We are going to talk about this later”. I don’t think it’s all right. (Later in the interview) They are often interrupted by the interviewer saying, “It is not that important”. And it is probably not so important, but they should let children finish talking.

A real chance to express views – different opinions

“Do unaccompanied minor asylum seekers get a real opportunity to express an opinion about their situation at the asylum interviews?” was the main question I asked both to my informants and, afterwards, my data material. What participants experienced by observing UMAs and standing by their side at the asylum interviews can be sorted into two plans. The informants report the existence of the “only chance to throw light on the asylum claim”, and this “chance” formally exists. Nevertheless, the informants often point out an experience of “insufficient” attendance to the child’s “psychological or mental needs”.

G2: I think that they get a good chance to tell their “story”, but on the other hand, they don’t have this chance nevertheless because they sit and wonder what is important to say, what these people want, and how I should conduct myself. And then, there is too little time to grasp the situation this young person comes from, because children don’t manage to speak openly (fortelle fritt) under such circumstances.

G4: (...) It is difficult to evaluate what is important to tell the interviewer. In my opinion, it is strange that only few unaccompanied minors get a refugee status. There are many who get residence on humanitarian grounds when we know which countries they come from. I think that in many cases they do not understand the questions or questions have not been asked in a way, which can reveal grounds for seeking asylum.

These statements underline that it can be difficult for children to evaluate what is important to tell in the interview situation. Informants mention that questions are asked in a way, which is not always easy to understand, and that they are not adjusted to the interviewees’ age and state. In this respect, guardians do have an important role when it comes to reminding the child about significant facts (if the guardian is acquainted to the child’s history) or motivate and support the child (Ministry of Justice & Police, 2003).
Unaccompanied minors are a diverse group

Several informants point to the difference among the unaccompanied minors when it comes to the ability to express their opinion and throw light on their asylum claim in the framework of the asylum interview. They state that there are children who are very good at speaking and “they handle it well”, which makes it easier to interview such a child, while others “give nothing of themselves”, which makes it difficult to conduct the interview and demands a lot of proficiency, understanding, and patience from the interviewer. Thinking about how unaccompanied minors manage the asylum interview situation, some informants report admiration for the children’s performance. One of the informants expresses this idea in the following way:

G 3: Those children I have been at interviews with, they have been very consistent (konsekvente). It was not as they doubted what they wanted to say – it was amazing to see how they managed the interviews. It is expected a lot from them: that they understand questions they get, and those questions are often abstract, but they have been good at answering them.

Emotional feedback

The participants recall that interviewers often encourage the children to tell more, they encourage them to provide more detailed information. Several informants experience that the interviewers comment little and provide little emotional feedback to the interviewees, which is sometimes perceived as “strictness”.

G5: In my opinion, it happened more often before that the interviewers said, “You have been very good at telling me your history today”, and give them (UMAs) feedback on their opinion about the day. (…) It is often those good interviewers who praise the child, motivate, and say that the child is clever. It makes the child more open, of course, and it is easier to keep a conversation.

This informant experiences this change as negative as it contributes to the UMAs’ feeling of uncertainty. G5 also mentions that it is the guardian’s “job” to compensate for this or remind the interviewer about the importance of giving a feedback to the child. In the same context another informant says:

G6: They do not comment on the content of the child’s reply, but then it is the follow-up questions that can mediate that they are listening and understanding, and it is as important as to give them emotional support.
I interpret this expression as emphasizing the importance of recognition, which can come forth through recognition and neutral acknowledgement that they are listening (Schibbye, 2002) and the art of asking follow up questions (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Wilson and Powell (2001) recommend encouraging each positive thing the child does or says by giving a friendly response in situations when children are not motivated for communication. However, special carefulness is required when praising children in investigative interviews, and this is because in uncertain situations, when children feel that they are dependent on interviewing adults, they may tend to give replies, which they think will suit interviewers (Cederborg, 2002, Øvreeide, 2000).

*The way questions are asked is important*

Another recurrent topic in the collected data material is the abundance of situations when UMAs are confronted through controlling and repetitive questions. These questions include inquiries about details and time that are often experienced as difficult for children to provide information about. One informant, for example, feels that children “are being pressed” and “have to defend themselves” in such situations, which makes it difficult for children to express their views.

Four out of six informants report that interviewers often use phrases like “It sounds very strange that you can say this, on the one hand, and that, on the other hand” or “I don’t understand then …”. The informants also notice that the interviewer’s voice and intonation mean a lot in such situations for the perception of these utterances – if they are perceived just as inquiries or some kind of scepticism. They experience it as all right that children are being asked for extra explanations and information but emphasize the importance of how it is being done. One of the informants points out:

G1: Sometimes they say, “Then, I can’t understand …” (...). They become somewhat aggressive in tone, and this is not beneficial because the child feels anxious and frightened.

*Drawing is positive*

Data material gives reasons to think that few alternative ways to support communication are used in the interviews. Especially in situations where children are
asked to describe their place of origin, they are given the possibility to draw. The informants, with great reservation that children can and wish to draw, experience this as positive and child-sensitive. It is relevant to reflect over the purpose of using drawing in the interviews. If the purpose is to support the child by creating some kind of visual support for talking, then drawing can ease communication. However, using drawing as a form of control gives few possibilities for communication support. One of the informants mentions that there exist a lot of techniques, which can help interviewers and children to communicate in a more child-sensitive way. She especially mentions the network map that can give visual support and a natural basis for communication.

The results of several studies show that the way in which children are interviewed is of major importance (Cederborg, 2002, Gamst & Langballe, 2004, Lamb, Hershkowitz, Orbach, & Esplin, 2008, Poole & Lamb, 1998). Gamst and Langballe (2004) and Langballe et al. (in press) emphasize that phase-structure, thematic progression, verbal formulations, and physical framework are factors, which have to be strongly regarded in communication between children and adults. The researchers describe the dialogical communicative process and point to the importance of supporting the child by helping to express his or her experiences and feelings, acknowledging the child in the form of repeating and summarizing his or her statements, and by providing information (Langballe et al., in press). Nevertheless, the main goal is to let the child narrate freely his or her experiences. There seems to be a general agreement that reliance on the open-ended questions affects accuracy and completeness of the children’s narratives (Cederborg, 2002, Gamst & Langballe, 2004, Korkman, 2006, Poole & Lamb, 1998). It should be noticed that the interpreter-mediated interview (the situation quite unavoidable) could be a hindrance to free narratives.

The informants describe the “schematic” character of communication in the asylum interview, which is grounded in a large number of topics to be discussed. Several researchers recommend directing the thematic content from the general to the specific in an open form (Cederborg, 2002, Gamst & Langballe, 2004, Poole & Lamb, 1998).
The dilemma the asylum interview poses includes the necessity to control information. However, it demands conscious relation to at what point of the interview it is most suitable to use it with respect to the research knowledge in the field. The informants describe that the interview is coloured by strictness and abundance of controlling questions and is, therefore, not sufficiently adjusted to children’s psychological needs. With respect to traumatized children, Neumayer et al. (2006) emphasize that unaccompanied minors who come here have often lost important parts of a normal developmental process. As a consequence, they will need procedures that are normally used with younger children. Findings in this study describe that in some cases there is a need for making a greater difference in interviewing UMAs from interviewing adults. Indeed, the child gets a real opportunity to express his or her views if both legal (formal) and child-related (informal) aspects have been taken care of (Gamst & Langballe, 2004). Through considering the child-specific aspects, the asylum interviewer creates better possibilities for the child to come with qualitative information, which in its turn is significant for the legal side of the application.

**Children’s opportunities to express their views**

This under-category aims to describe one particular part of the interview in which the child’s ground for seeking asylum in Norway or asylum story is the main purpose to throw light on. They seem to consider this part of the interview as the most important one. In this respect, the informants point to the open-ended character of questions used by the interviewers. The interviewers ask an open question as, for example, “What are your grounds for seeking asylum?” and invite the child to provide a free narrative of his or her asylum story. The interviewers also encourage UMAs to give as much information as possible, and express their interest in all possible details.

**Abstract character of questions**

Several informants point to the abstract character of questions concerning the child’s grounds for seeking asylum. They experience that few UMAs really understand what is significant to tell the interviewer, and this contributes to the feeling of uncertainty in children. The informants emphasize that the questions are not adjusted to the
reality that it is children who have to answer them, and this may be seen as weakness of the interview.

G 6: It is often different, but some questions are formulated in a way, which is too abstract, in my opinion, and they need to “interpret” what they actually intend to ask about. (…) Some questions are concrete enough, but there are many that need to be concretised. Some interviewers manage to do it, but others don’t do it well enough. The weak point of the asylum interview is that it is not adjusted, questions as well, to the reality that it is children who have to answer them.

According to the informants, interviewers largely aim at posing recommended open-ended questions when they expect the child to provide his or her asylum story. However, the use of language is often experienced as problematic. Interviewers do not always succeed in adapting their language to the age and cognitive-developmental level of the child. This finding is in line with, for example, Korkman’s (2006) study of forensic interviews with children.

**Importance of good follow-up questions**

Several informants reflect on the importance of the interviewers’ skills of posing good follow-up questions to the general information provided by the child. This is especially important taken into account that it takes many hours to come through the asylum interview. Even though the interviewer wonders at the end of the day if the child has something to add, the children seem to feel exhausted and not motivated to provide any extra information. I would like to emphasize G3’s comment about the impact of follow-up questions on the information provided by UMAs:

G 3: In this case the child had told me about threats against her, but there wasn’t any question about this in the interview. I said then “Can you tell us more? Things you have told me before…” This means that not all comes forward during the interview. I asked her to speak about the facts that there was no room for in the interview. Therefore, there is a lot of information that is omitted because questions give no room for it. And this can have serious consequences for the child’s asylum claim.
In-depth interviews are time consuming. They tax the minors’ cognitive and verbal abilities (Keselman et al., 2008). Children will often need adults’ support in order to express their thoughts and experiences, and relevant follow-up questions may be such kind of support.

Reactions to children’s emotions
The part of the asylum interview where its participants concentrate on the asylum story is reported as extremely emotionally laden. The informants recall that UMAs often collapse, even become aggressive in their way of speaking, start crying, stop, and then it is difficult to start talking again.

There is a considerable variation in how the guardians experience the interviewer’s reactions and attitudes in such situations. The majority of informants experience that unaccompanied minors are met with respect and consideration. Children are asked if they wish to stop and take a break or if they wish to go on. At the same time, informants perceive that interviewers keep a distanced relation to UMAs and show little empathy in such situations. One informant recalls:

G 2: There is little about how they have experienced things, how they felt. (…) When I think that these children probably had seen their parents being raped or killed, for example, but they never get a question about how it was, what happened with them afterwards, if there was anyone who took care of them – there is very little about this. (…) There is no place, or very little place, for human aspects in these interviews, and it is something I experience as strange.

This statement also underlines that interviewers get information about the topics in focus, but this information is not being deepened. This finding shows that UMAs get possibilities to tell about the experienced events and their context, in other words they stay at the exterior and middle layer as suggested by Gamst and Langballe (2004).

Another informant points to the character of the rapport established between the interviewer and the child as important in such situations with regard to both information that comes forth and emotional handling.

G6: I think that one of them managed this situation well, and another was more distanced. But he never came so far that the feelings could really come forth. And that is because he never established a relationship, in which the child could show the feelings and in a way go into and stay there … as when he told me about highly
traumatic experiences, which I know he thinks about all the time, but it was very little he told the interviewer in that situation. Then, I think if he could have told more about those experiences, it would have been more credible. But it was a blue uniform and not a brown one that was in focus then.

This statement shows the significance of the interviewer-child rapport as a component of child-sensitive asylum interview, which would provide a credible background for further assessment of the asylum application.

The part of the asylum interview concerning grounds for seeking protection can be compared with what Gamst and Langballe (2004) call free narrative phase. The goal is to elicit spontaneous accounts of incidents that happened before the child left his or her country of origin. Open-ended questions and invitational prompts are generally recommended to employ for children of all ages (Cederborg, 2002, Gamst & Langballe, 2004, Lamb et al., 2008, Poole & Lamb, 1998). From the interviewer it demands listening actively, being interested, supporting, and awaiting (Gamst & Langballe, 2004). The data material in this study shows that the interviewers use either open-ended questions or invitations. Another important finding is that these questions are perceived as abstract and often not easy for children to understand. Then, the significance of the next phase, probing the validity phase becomes even greater, as also pointed out by the informants.

Raundalen and Shultz (2006) claim that it is through the language a person can calm himself or herself down after critical and life-threatening happenings. It is clear that the asylum interview is not a therapeutic situation. At the same time, it is a situation where children open up and tell about important traumatic experiences. Indeed, the interviewers’ reactions and abilities to meet children’s reactions are extremely significant if the child is able to handle his or her memories of traumatic event both during the interview and after it. In this respect, I wish to emphasize professional empathy as described by Nerdrum (1997) (see chapter 3.1.3). It is when interviewers let the child understand that they accept his or her feelings, show that it is O. K. to cry and feel sorrow. Dyregrov and Raundalen (2002) see the value of children increasing their understanding of why they react as they do. Researchers emphasize that
acceptance and information about various reactions are necessary for children who are traumatized.

Gamst and Langballe (2004) emphasize that children’s narratives contain information on three levels or layers, which are the exterior layer, the middle layer, and the inner layer (see chapter 3.6.2). The researchers point to the necessity to deepen themes touched by the child within each of the three layers with the purpose to get a detailed and complete understanding of the child’s situation (ibid.). In interviews with children it is the interviewer who is responsible of following children’s perspective. Being able to communicate on three layers may increase children’s comprehension of confusing and difficult experiences. From the interviewer it demands thematic knowledge, as well as readiness to meet various reactions when they communicate about topics, which can bring forward traumatic memories (ibid.).

5.4.2 Challenges in Communication

This category includes descriptions of aspects that are experienced as problematic by the informants. The category is divided into two under-categories: (1) challenges related to language and (2) challenges related to culture. They are described in the following paragraphs. As these under-categories are closely interconnected, I find it reasonable to discuss both of them together, instead of separately as it has been done with previous ones.

Challenges related to language

This under-category contains statements coded as challenges in communication related to language. The informants report that almost in every asylum interview they have experienced situations, in which children do not understand questions, utterances, or specific words. Misunderstandings have been explained by the fact that UMAs are often stressed and uncertain about the question they have to answer, or they do not know how to answer, or just because the interpreter doesn’t manage to mediate the question in an appropriate way.

G 5: In my opinion, the whole interview is marked by strictness, the children’s uncertainty because they do nto understand the question or how to answer it in a good
Their replies are often complimentary (utfyllende), but they speak probably about something different. (…) I understand that they have not perceived what the interviewer is after, and questions are often asked without any explanation of why they are asked.

For G5 UMAs’ uncertainty following misunderstanding or not understanding of questions is the problem of prime importance. Her statement indicates the importance of motivation with interviewers to explain their questions and grounds for asking them.

What happens further in such situations? Informants experience that some interviewers are good at re-formulating their questions or as one informant says “translate”, and explain the reason for asking them. Informants also report that it happens often that interviewers just repeat the same question again and again. Most informants report that they always try to assist the child in such situations. Regarding this type of intervention in the dialogue between the child and the interviewer, informants express the importance of their assistance with regard to the child’s asylum claim.

Failures to understand occur both ways, that is both the child and the interviewer happen to misunderstand or not understand each other. Then, having a guardian who is attentive and can follow up such situations is significant for the child.

**Challenges related to culture**

All informants experience cultural differences, even though there are differences in how their influence on the communicative situation is perceived. According to one informant, the interviewers are very professional and possess a profound knowledge of UMA’s country-of-origin, and are acquainted with its culture. Another informant acknowledges that we have few qualifications to understand others. One informant says that understanding the children’s reality is often difficult because of cultural diversity.

Several informants mean that cultural differences make children feel uncertain or lead to misunderstandings. Guardians experience that children from other cultures feel a
great respect towards adults. UMAs are perceived as extremely polite, modest, not used to talking a lot about themselves, and used to behaving quietly and withdrawn.

G 6: (...) I think that the most important thing is to have specific knowledge about the child’s country-of-origin. It is about many issues, for example, school system, it is about being able to ask good questions, knowing how people talk to each other, being able to come through this level of politeness and have a real conversation. It is about various life situations, society structure and institutions there. It is about being aware of the type of politeness, being able to meet it, but also pass past/beyond it.

As the informants experience, situations where minors do not understand or misunderstand questions do occur in asylum interviews. From the dialogical perspective, communication is successful if the participants understand each other (Nynäs, 2006). For Bakhtin (Holquist, 1990) real understanding is active, intersubjective, and dialogical. In this light, understanding is more than just an exchange of ideas or information – it is also rapport between the participants and motivation to understand. In the asymmetrical situation of the asylum interview, it is about the interviewer’s motivation to see the child and attune to the child with the purpose to make communication meaningful.

Data material in this study doesn’t give me possibilities to reflect over the reasons for misunderstandings. However, several researchers emphasize that “difficult language” is often used in interviews with children (Bhabha & Crock, 2006, Halvorsen, 2004, Korkman, 2006). In addition, both cultural differences and mediation of the content by the interpreter impact communication.

Most unaccompanied minors come from cultures markedly different from European cultures. The interviewer and the child are communicating here, but neither of them can escape their cultural background. In a multicultural perspective this requires that the interviewer demonstrates understanding and appreciation of the child’s worldview and acknowledges cultural differences between them, which means awareness of both uniqueness and “otherness” of the UMA.

In the field of the asylum interviews, being culturally sensitive demands knowledge of how cultural values and assumptions influence children’s personal experiences, verbal and non-verbal behaviour. It implies being updated about cultural issues and
the peculiarities of children’s life in their countries of origin, and at least being prepared to the interview with this particular child. Related to asylum interviews, the necessity for the interviewer to maintain his or her role as a learner and to receive training in cross-cultural issues seems to be important.
6. **Summary of the Main Findings**

The study explored the phenomenon of asylum interview with unaccompanied minors coming to Norway and how child-specific aspects are being taken care of through the interview form and guardian’s support. I have analyzed and discussed the research material in the light of the dialogical perspective on communication. My point of departure was article 12 of the CRC (1989) in which all children are ensured the right to express their opinion in all procedures concerning them. The understanding of the asylum interview with children as a combination of both legal (formal) and child-sensitive (informal) aspects is central in the study. Four themes represent the main findings and are summarized in this paragraph.

According to the informants, the guardian’s role can be described as a significant one with respect to three aspects, which are the preparation of the child for the asylum interview, the guardian’s presence at the interview, and the follow up of the child after the interview. When guardians perform their role as they describe in the data material, they to a great degree make the situation comprehensible and manageable for children.

Before the interview, the guardian has real possibilities to prepare the child for it both formally and emotionally. As the informants notice, there is a dependence between the quality of the preparation and the quality of the interview, explained by the degree of the child’s understanding and motivation. The importance of meeting the UMA before the interview is strongly emphasized. By standing by the child’s side during the interview, guardians can contribute significantly in a variety of ways. The informants experience that they can contribute to a profound background for the minors’ applications by encouraging them to tell more. By being kind of “triangulating persons” (Øvreeide, 2000), they can make the situation more symmetric, safe, and reassuring for UMAs. The last, but not least, guardians feel that they follow up that the child is not being unnecessarily stressed or exhausted, and probably re-traumatized as a result of this. After the interview, guardians experience
that their role is important with respect to communicating with the child and following up of reactions deserving special attention.

All of the informants experience the physical framework for the asylum interview with unaccompanied minors as satisfactory. The neutrality and comfort of the interview rooms is perceived as positive. Indeed, the guardians consider the atmosphere during the interview, rapport and communication between the interviewer and the child to be of more profound importance than the interior of the room.

According to the informants, the rapport between the interviewer and the child can be described as varying. The guardians experience some difference in the quality of the rapport from one interview situation to another. They describe some interviewers as caring, showing interest, and less formal. This gives better opportunities for the children to express their opinion in relation to article 12 of the CRC. In situations where the rapport is described as businesslike and impersonal, children feel nervous, uncertain, and let themselves be led. This is characterized by the interviewer playing a dominant role, or by the asymmetry in roles. According to Gamst and Langballe (2004) and Langballe (2007), the quality of the rapport influences the reliability of the information yielded by children. It should be emphasized that recognition and time available for building and maintaining rapport are experienced as important.

The informants experience that the quality of the rapport is influenced by the amount of eye contact between the interviewer and the child and by the fact that it is always an interpreter-mediated interview. They express that eye contact is vital for good communication and good atmosphere in the room. However, they describe it as varying from interviewer to interviewer. It is mostly report writing and the interpreter-mediated character of the interview which make eye contact challenging.

My findings indicate that the interpreters participate in the co-construction of the dialogue and atmosphere of the interview. An extra link and stops in communication are experienced as challenging, while the interpreter’s possibilities to contribute with cultural information seem to be perceived as positive.
The informants present the asylum interview as a highly structured process. In their descriptions of thematic progression, there could be defined different phases, which are considered to be a significant aspect in institutionalized conversations with children (Gamst & Langballe, 2004, Langballe et al., in press). The guardians experience the communicative process as schematic and therefore, limiting the child’s possibilities to recall freely and limiting the interviewer’s possibilities to follow the minor’s initiative. The informants point out an experience of insufficient attention of the interview to the child’s “psychological and mental needs”. They wonder if the minors understand the questions asked and the intention behind them. The informants also emphasize that the way questions are asked (with respect to the intonation) influences whether they are perceived as inquiries or scepticism.

The informants experience it as positive that interviewers encourage UMAs to tell more and express that they are interested in details. The guardians mention the open character of questions concerning the child’s asylum story, and this is in line with research in the field of forensic interviews. Good follow-up questions are pointed out as important. The interviewer’s attention to misunderstandings and ability to reformulate his or her questions is also seen as varying, although extremely vital. The guardians underline that UMAs are very different in how they manage the situation of the interview.

According to the results of this study, children seem to tell their asylum stories on the exterior and middle layers, in other words the layer of action and that of context, while the inner layer (emotional) stays untouched. As informants emphasize, the quality of the rapport may play an important role if the interviewer is interested in getting a complete understanding of the child’s situation. This finding seems to indicate the weakness of the asylum interview if we take into account that free recall with possibilities to deepen information at three layers is necessary for building a reliable background for children’s claim (Gamst & Langballe, 2004).
6.1 Reflections

As a part of globalization, migration has become an important challenge. More refugees and particularly unaccompanied minors cross Norway’s boarders with the purpose to seek protection. The asylum interview ensures the fundamental right of the child to express his or her opinion and be protected as stated in the UN’s Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989). It is also one of the possibilities to fulfil recognition in the legal sphere (Eide, 2007).

The field of immigration is constantly changing and developing. One of my findings indicate that the preparation of the child for the asylum interview performed by the guardian is important for the quality of the interview and consequently for the whole asylum process. This first meeting has already been ensured by the UDI’s pre-interview arrangement (vergevaktordning), which seems to be a positive and child-sensitive change. Other findings related to the guardian’s role in the interviews may be relevant for the Norwegian People’s Aid responsible for courses arranged for guardians for unaccompanied minor asylum seekers. In general, the role of the guardians deserves all respect and recognition in the Norwegian society.

This study points to the varying character of the rapport and communication between the interviewer and the unaccompanied minor. We speak about children, who are fragile, alone, and probably traumatized, on the one hand, and power, immigration politics, and necessity of control, on the other hand. With the dialogical perspective on communication, it is possible and realistic to take care of both child-related and legal aspects of the asylum interviews. Gamst and Lanballe’s dialogical communicative method is developed on the background of the Norwegian reality and is evaluated as giving positive results in the fields of forensic interviews and in the field of Child Welfare. More research is still necessary if one wishes a better adjustment of the method to the reality of the asylum interviews with respect to age- and culture-sensitiveness.

Bhabha and Crock (2006) emphasize that in the field of the asylum interviews it is important to recognize that children usually will not be able to present life story with
the same degree of precision as adults. According to the results of their study, a child’s narrative may be limited not only by his or her ability to comprehend what happened, but also his or her skill in describing the event in a way that is intelligible to adults (ibid.). The decision makers interviewing children should possess child-specific knowledge and communication skills, which are likely to include personal elements such as skills to establish a rapport and communicate (Liden et al., 2008). The researchers emphasize communicative skills as an important area for improvement in terms of various cases, including addressing children directly, ability to inform in a way understandable for children, ask relevant questions, follow difficult themes, appreciating children as informants, etc (ibid). The results of this study point in the same direction. I have several times used the word “dilemma” to describe the asylum interview. It may be a dilemma for the interviewer to keep to humanistic ideals and, at the same time, be loyal in the controversial and complex field of immigration. In order to be able to escape a “businesslike and impersonal” rapport, and also be able to express a recognizing and empathic attitude, there should be time for the interviewers to maintain and develop children’s perspective. There should be time for regular counselling and the development of skills and knowledge.
7. References


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Appendix 1: Presentation of Results

The phenomenon of the asylum interview with unaccompanied minors

Role of the guardian

Preparatory phase

During the interview

After the interview

Interview day

Physical frame

Rapport between the interviewer and the child

Rapport

Eye contact

Interpreter-mediated interview

Framework

Communication issues

Communication between the interviewer and the child

Children’s opportunities to express their views

Challenges in communication

Challenges related to language

Challenges related to culture
Appendix 2: Interview Guide (English)

Research question
What experiences do guardians of unaccompanied minor asylum seekers possess of the asylum interview and its attendance with regard to the right of the child to express his/her opinion in the context of the United Nation’s Convention on the Rights of the Child?

- What characterizes the asylum interview with unaccompanied minors?
- What are the common communication patterns identified in the asylum interview with unaccompanied minors?

Interview guide

Introduction
- Introduction of the interviewer and the interviewee.
- Explanation of the topic (theme, focus).
- Confidentiality of the informants.
- Possibility to withdraw from the interview at any time.
- Obtaining permission from the participants to sound record the interview.

Background information of the participants
- What is your educational background?
- How many UMAs have you been a guardian of?
- Do you have any experience of working with children who have experienced war and flight?
- Do you have any experience of institutionalized (structured) conversations with children?

The role of the guardians
- What are your grounds for being voluntarily engaged as a guardian of unaccompanied minor asylum seekers?
- What do you experience as meaningful in this work?
- Describe the role of the guardians in the asylum interview. Can you explain some of the most significant aspects of your role?

**Key questions**

*Preparatory phase (before the asylum interview)*
- Describe the preparation of the child for the interview.
- In your opinion, how does the child understand the purpose of the asylum interview?

*The framework*
- Describe the physical framework of the asylum interview.
  - What is positive, in your opinion?
  - What are the weaknesses?

*During the asylum interview*
- What is your experience of the first minutes of the encounter between the interviewer and the child?
  - Give examples.
- Describe the physical frame of the interview:
  - room,
  - participants,
  - technical equipment,
  - facilities.
- How would you describe the asylum interview day?
  - How much time does it take to conduct the interview?
  - Breaks (pauses)? Can you describe the pause time?
- According to the research in the field of communication with children, the rapport between the child and adult is important both for the child’s
confidence in the situation and for the communication. Describe the rapport (contact/relation) between the interviewer and the child.

- Eye contact.
- Give examples.

- How would you describe communication between the interviewer and the child?
  - What topics are being discussed during the asylum interview?
  - What is your opinion of the questions the child has to answer?
  - Have you experienced situations when the child does not understand the content of the questions? If yes – What happens in such situations?
  - What is your experience of the situations where children tell about emotionally laden events?
  - Have you experienced situations where the child shows initiative to tell? What happens in such situations?
  - Do unaccompanied minor asylum seekers get a real opportunity to express an opinion about their situation at the asylum interviews?
  - What responses does the child get during the asylum interview?
  - Can you give examples?

- What alternatives ways to support communication are used in the interviews?
  - Drawing, dolls, map, etc?
  - In what situations does it happen?
  - Can you explain and give examples?

- An interpreter is an important participant in the asylum interview. What is your experience of the interpreter’s role in the interview with regard to the communication between the interviewer and the child?
  - What do you experience as positive?
  - What are the weaknesses of the interpreter-mediated interviews?
Report writing

- How does the report writing influence the rapport and communication between the interviewer and the child?
- Give examples.

Describe the closing phase of the interview.

- Summary.
- What kind of information about the asylum process is given to the child?
- Give examples.

After the interview

- How would you describe the role of the guardian after the interview?
- Describe your contact with the child after the interview?
- Have you experienced situations where the child needs to talk about the interview?

Conclusion

- Do you have anything to add to our interview?
- Do you want to listen to the tape recording?
Appendix 3: Interview Guide (Norwegian)

**Problemstilling**

*Hvordan opplever verger for enslige mindreårige asylsøkere at asylintervjuet ivaretar barnets rett til å uttale seg i forhold til art. 12, FN's barnekonvensjon?*

- *Hvordan blir asylintervjuet gjennomført?*
- *Hva kjenner tegner kommunikasjonen mellom intervjueren og barnet i asylintervjuet?*

**Intervjuguide**

**Introduksjon**

- Presentasjon av meg selv
- Kort beskrivelse av undersøkelsen. Presentasjon av tema: Asylintervjuet med enslige mindreårige asylsøkere. Fokuset i undersøkelsen er på hvordan verger opplever intervju situasjonen er for barn som er enslige mindreårige asylsøkere, samt verger opplevelse av kommunikasjonen mellom intervjueren og barnet med et overordnet hensyn til barnets grunnleggende rettigheter.
- Informasjon om bruk av lydbånd.
- Anonimitetsbeskyttelse
  - Ingen informant vil bli gjenkjent.
  - Ingen andre enn prosjektleder vil få lytte til båndet.
  - Rett til å trekke seg når som helst, uten at det får følger for vedkommende.
- Har du noen spørsmål til meg før vi starter?

**Bakgrunnsinformasjon**

- Hva slags utdanning har du?
- Hvor mange enslige mindreårige asylsøkere har du vært verge for?
- Har du noe annen erfaring fra arbeid med barn som har opplevd krig og flukt?
- Har du erfaringer i bruk av strukturerte samtaler med barn i andre situasjoner?
Opplevelse av vergerollen

- Det å være en verge for en enslig mindreårig asylsøker er et frivillig arbeid. Fortell om hvorfor du engasjerer deg i et slik frivillig arbeid.
- Hva opplever du som betydningsfullt ved det å være en verge?
- En av vergens viktigste oppgaver er å være tilstede ved asylintervjuet. Hvilken betydning mener du vergens tilstedeværelse ved asylintervjuet har generelt? Kan du nevne noen av de viktigste sidene ved din rolle?

Nøkkelspørsmål: Styrker og svakheter ved asylintervjuet

Forskere som jobber med strukturerede samtaler med barn er enige at det er tre stadier i samtaleprosessen, d. v. s. samtaleforberedende arbeid, selve gjennomføringen og etterarbeid. Spørsmålene som følger vil handle om disse tre stadiene (det som skjer før asylintervjuet, under asylintervjuet, og etter asylintervjuet).

Før asylintervjuet (forberedelser til asylintervjuet)

Forberedelse av barnet

- På hvilken måte foregår forberedelsen av barnet til asylintervjuet?
- Hvordan opplever du at barnet forstår hensikten og forhåndsinformasjonen før asylintervjuet starter?

Fysiske forberedelser

- Hvordan er de fysiske omgivelsene tilrettelagt for å gjennomføre asylintervjuet?
  - Hva er positivt, etter din mening?
  - Hva er svakhetene, etter din oppfatning, og hva kan eventuelt gjøres bedre?

Under asylintervjuet

- Hvordan opplever du at barnet blir tatt imot av UDI?
  - gi eksempel?

- Fortell hvordan asylintervjuet er tilrettelagt fysisk? (du kan gjerne tegne)
- Hvordan vil du beskrive asylintervju-dagen?
  - Hvor lang tid tar det?
  - Pauser? Beskriv pausetid?

- Undersøkelser viser at den kontakten/relasjonen som skapes mellom de voksne og barnet har stor betydning for barnets trygghet og for kommunikasjonen. Kan du beskrive kontakten mellom intervjueren og barnet?
  - Blikkontakt?
  - Gi eksempler - episoder?

- Hvordan kan du beskrive kommunikasjonen mellom intervjueren og barnet?
  - Hvilke temaer blir tatt opp i intervjuet?
  - Hva er din opplevelse av spørsmål som barnet får?

- Har du opplevd situasjoner når barnet ikke forstår innholdet i spørsmål? Hvis ja – hva skjer i slike situasjoner?
  - Hva er din opplevelse av situasjonen når barnet forteller om vanskelige temaer?
  - Har du opplevd situasjoner når barnet viser initiativ til å fortelle selv? Hva skjer i slike tilfeller?
  - Hva er din opplevelse av enslige mindreåriges sjanse til å uttale seg i asylintervjuet?
  - På hvilken måte blir tilbakemeldinger på barnets fortelling gitt til barnet? (Hvilke tilbakemeldinger får barn på sine fortellinger?)
Hvilke hjelpemidler blir brukt ved asylintervjuet?
- tegning, dukker, kart, annet?
- I hvilke sammenhenger forekommer dette?
- Kan du forklare og gi eksempler?

Bruk av tolk ved asylintervjuet er nødvendig i de fleste tilfeller. Hva er din erfaring av tolkens rolle i intervjusituasjonen relatert til kommunikasjonen med barnet?
- Hva opplever du som positivt?
- Hvilke svakheter er det ved ordningen?
- gi eksempler?

Rapport skriving
- Hvordan opplever du at dette påvirker kontakten og kommunikasjonen mellom intervjueren og barnet? Hvis ja, på hvilken måte?
- gi eksempler?

Beskriv hvordan asylintervjuet blir avsluttet?
- Hvordan foregår oppsummering av asylintervjuet?
- Hvordan får barnet orientering om hva som kommer til å skje i fremtiden?
- gi eksempel?

Etter asylintervjuet
- Hvordan vil du beskrive vergens rolle (din rolle) etter intervjuet?
- Beskriv din kontakt med barnet etter asylintervjuet?
- Har du opplevd situasjoner der barnet har fått behov for å snakke om intervjuet? Gi eksempler – beskriv?
Avslutningsspørsmål

- Er det noe vi ikke har snakket om, men som du synes er viktig når det gjelder intervjusituasjonen og kommunikasjonen i asylintervjuet?
- Lyst til å lytte til båndet?
Appendix 4: Inquiry about Participation in an Interview Study (English)

I am a Master’s Degree student at the Department of Special Needs Education, University of Oslo, preparing to write my thesis. The theme of my thesis is the asylum interview with unaccompanied minor asylum seekers. I wish to look into how guardians for unaccompanied minor asylum seekers experience that the asylum interview takes care of the child’s right to speak in relation to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The study focuses on the guardian’s experience of the communication between the interviewer and the child.

In connection with the thesis I am going to carry out an interview study. To get information about how the child is taken care of during the asylum interview I wish to interview guardians for unaccompanied minor asylum seekers. It would be most helpful if you are willing to participate in this study. You will then have the possibility to increase our knowledge in this field. As a participant in the study you will be offered a copy of the final thesis.

The interview will take about an hour, and I will be using a tape recorder and take notes during the interview. What you tell me in the interview will be treated confidentially. The information you give will be anonymised and the tape recording will be deleted when the thesis has been finalised, before the end of the year 2009 at the latest. The data material will thus be treated in compliance with ethical standards and formal requirements. In the final thesis no information will be attached to named persons and places. The study has been reported to the Privacy Ombudsman for Research., Norwegian social Science Data Services Inc.

The questions will be about the way the asylum interview is conducted, what characterizes the interviewer’s contact with the child and the communication between them, the guardian’s role in the interview situation etc.
You may withdraw from the interview study at any time. In that case, all the information you have given will be deleted from the tape, and will not be used in the study.

Senior researcher Åse Langballe is my advisor for my Master’s thesis. She is a senior researcher at the Norwegian Center of Violence and Traumatic Stress Studies (NKVTS). Should you have any questions to her, she may be contacted on the phone at xxxxxxxx or via e-mail: ase.langballe@nkvts.unirand.no.

I aim to carry out the interviews as soon as possible, in March or the beginning of April. If you wish to participate in the study you may contact me via e-mail natally@student.uio.no or via telephone at xxxxxxxx.

Hope to hear from you!

Sincerely yours,

Natalia Parfionava Vollan

Declaration of consent

I have received information about the interview study “asylum interview with unaccompanied minor asylum seekers”, and wish to participate in an interview.

Name:

Telephone no:

Signature:
Appendix 5: Inquiry about Participation in an Interview Study (Norwegian)

Forespørsel om deltakelse i intervjuundersøkelsen

Jeg er en mastergradsstudent ved Institutt for spesialpedagogik, Universitetet i Oslo, som nå holder på med min masteroppgave. Temaet for oppgaven er asylintervjuet med enslige mindreårige asylsøkere. Jeg ønsker å undersøke hvordan verger for enslige mindreårige asylsøkere opplever at asylintervjuet ivaretar barnets rett til å uttale seg i forhold til artikkel 12 i FNs barnekonvensjon. Fokuset i studien ligger på vergers opplevelse av kommunikasjonen mellom intervjueren og barnet.

I forbindelse med oppgaven skal jeg gjennomføre en intervjuundersøkelse. For å få kunnskap om hvordan barnet blir ivaretatt i asylintervjuet ønsker jeg å intervjue verger for enslige mindreårige asylsøkere. Dersom du kunne tenke deg å delta i denne undersøkelsen, vil det være til stor hjelp for meg. Du vil også ha mulighet til å være med på å øke kunnskapen på dette feltet. Som deltaker i undersøkelsen vil du få tilbud om et eksemplar av den endelige oppgaven.


Spørsmålene vil dreie seg om måten asylintervjuet blir gjennomført, hva som kjennetegner kontakten og kommunikasjonen mellom intervjueren og barnet, vergers rolle i intervjuensituasjonen med mer.

Du kan når som helst trekke deg fra undersøkelsen, og da vil alt du har sagt i intervjuet bli slettet, og dermed ikke brukt i oppgaven.
Veileder for min masteroppgave er dr. polit Åse Langballe, som er senior forsker ved Nasjonalt kunnskapssenter om vold og traumatisk stress (NKVTS). Dersom du har spørsmål til henne, kan hun kontaktes på telefon xxxxxxx, eller per e-post: ase.langballe@nkvts.unirand.no.

Jeg ønsker å gjennomføre intervjuene så snart som mulig, i løpet av mars eller begynnelsen av april.

Dersom du ønsker å delta i undersøkelsen kan du kontakte meg på e-post natallv@student.uio.no, eller på telefon xxxxxxx.

Håper å høre fra deg!

Vennlig hilsen

Natallia Parfionava Vollan

\[\textit{Samtykkeerklæring}\]

Jeg har mottat informasjon om intervjuundersøkelsen "asylintervju med enslige mindreårige asylsøkere", og ønsker å stille på intervju.

Navn:

Telefonnr:

Signatur:
Appendix 6: Norwegian Social Science Data Services (1)

Norsk samfunnsvitenskapelig datatjeneste AS
NORWEGIAN SOCIAL SCIENCE DATA SERVICES

Steinar Thie
Institutt for spesialpedagogikk
Universitetet i Oslo
Postboks 1140 Blindern
0318 OSLO

Vnr data: 20.03.2000
Vnr ref.: 21393 / 2 / FB

KVITTERING PÅ MELDING OM BEHANDLING AV PERSONOPPLYSNINGER

Vi viser til melding om behandling av personopplysninger, motatt 17.02.2009. All nødvendig informasjon om prosjektet forå i sin helhet 27.03.2009. Meldingen gir prosjektet:

21393

Hvis enkelte av de opplystes ønsker å avstå fra avtalen, kan de til enhver tid berøre den ansvarlige administratør.

Beskyttelsesområdet
Universitetet i Oslo

Daglig ansvarig
Steinar Thie

Student
Natalia Parfionova Volland

Personvernombudet har vurdert prosjektet og finner at behandlingen av personopplysninger er i overensstemmelse med personvernloven § 31. Behandlingen tilfredsstiller kravene i personvernloven.


Vennlig hilsen

Tjonn Henrichsen

Pernilla Bollman

Kontaktperson: Pernilla Bollman tlf: 55 58 24 10

Vedlegg: Prosjektvurdering

Kopi: Natalia Parfionova Volland, Sognsvannsvei 11, 1930 AURSKOG
Appendix 7: Norwegian Social Science Data Services (2)

Personvernombudet for forskning

Prosjektvurdering - Kommentar

Datamaterialet vil bestå av intervjuer med verger og intervjuerene vil omhandle verges opplevelse av asylintervju med barn.

Personvernombudet finner at behandlingen av personopplysninger kan foretas med hjemmel i personopplysningsloven § 8 første alternativ (sannykke).

Ombudet mottok 27.03.2009 revidert informasjonskriv og finner skrivet tilfredsstillende.


Ombudet minner om at vergene er underlagt taushetsplikt og at det ikke skal innhentes noen form for opplysninger om de som informantene er verger for.

Åse Langballe ved NKVTS fungerer som veileder for prosjektet mens Steinar Theie er oppført som daglig ansvarlig ved behandlingsansvarlig institusjon (UiO).