



Berit Bae is associate professor at Oslo University College, and has worked in the field of early childhood education for over 30 years. Her work has involved teaching students at all levels of professional education, doing advisory work for the Norwegian government concerning theoretical issues, practical policies and professionalism, and being involved in several research projects. She currently teaches, supervises and mentors Masters and Doctoral students in Norway, along with doing research in the field. Her main research interests are various aspects of interpersonal relationships and dialogues between adults and children in early childhood settings. Over the years she has worked closely with kindergartens and practitioners doing research and practice-based developmental work. Currently she is project leader of a nationwide network project financed by the Norwegian Council for Research. The network project consists of 6 sub-projects, all focussing various aspects of children's participation in kindergartens.

### **ABSTRACT for key-note address at EECERA in Stavanger Sept. 3-6, 2008.**

#### **Children's right to participate – Pitfalls and possibilities**

Children's right to participate comes to the fore both internationally and nationally. Taking Norway as a point of departure, both the Kindergarten Act and the National Curriculum document emphasize children's right to participation. Moreover, children's participation is a prioritized area in a national research program, as well as in a nationwide strategy intended to strengthen early childhood practitioners' competence. The fact that this right is articulated in several national documents is, however, no guarantee that the right will be realised in the everyday lives of children in early childhood institutions.

In the presentation I will explore some critical issues or problems which influence how this right might be understood by practitioners and researchers in the field. Such understandings create premises for what kind of space there is for children to participate as subjects. Issues which will be discussed are views of children and views on democracy along with questions regarding diversity and difference. Other crucial issues are implementation pressures such as, top-down directives regarding methods and/or programs, and thinking emphasizing prescriptive didactics. I will point to how playfulness and humour can be seen as prerequisites for children's participation in early childhood settings. The argument is that the ways these issues are understood and dealt with might lead to pitfalls as well as possibilities regarding the realisation of children's participation in early childhood institutions. In order to be aware of the pitfalls some central tenets regarding early childhood theory and practice have to be reconsidered.