INSIGHTS AND OUTLOUDS:
CHILDHOOD RESEARCH
IN THE NORTH

Edited by
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Abstract
Childhood research aims to investigate and understand children in their everyday life; their actions, intentions and emotions in order to provide supportive environments where children are listened to and valued as such. As long as children are encouraged to take part in activities and express their insights, delights, suspicions and worries, their learning and development is enhanced.

Fourteen researchers and university teachers from different fields have joined hands in the field of childhood multidisciplinary research and published this book for the use of students, researchers, teachers, parents and educators. Childhood as such is universal phenomena, but there are cultural aspects which should be considered. In this book the aspects is Northern dimension, which brings to the childhood own special meaning. The book recounts childrens’ everyday life in the various contexts in the North. The focus is on children’s learning and playing, their cultural competences, school context and language skill, children’s and their parent’s rights to participate and children’s role in the center of research. Also ethical insights of child research are discussed in a practical manner.

Keywords: children’s participation, collaboration, cultural competency and ethics, early learning, Northern childhood, parents’ participation
Tiivistelmä

Lapsuudentutkimuksen eräänä tehtävänä on tutkia lapsia heidän arkielämässään; heidän toimintojaan ja tunteitaan. Kuuntelemalla lapsia ja herkistymällä heidän kokemuksilleen voidaan suunnitella ja rakentaa lasten hyvinvointia tukevia ympäristöjä. Rohkaisemalla ja auttamalla lapsia osallistumaan ja ilmaisemaan omia näkemyksiään, oivalluksiaan, huoliaan ja ilojaan voidaan samalla tukea lasten kehitystä ja oppimista.


Asiasanat: eettisyys lapsuudentutkimuksessa, kulttuurinen kompetenssi, lasten osallisuus, pohjoinen lapsuus, vanhempien osallisuus, varhainen oppiminen ja yhteistoiminta
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Oulu, December 2009

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Contents

Abstract

Tiivistelmä

Acknowledgments

Contents

Introduction 11

CHILDREN IN CULTURAL CONTEXT 17

Boys’ motivation at school and future orientation in Lapland 19
Anneli Lauriala and Marjo Laukkanen

Norwegian children negotiating cross-gender play 31
Berit Overå Johannesen

Cultural competence and children in the North 43
Merete Saus

CHILDREN AND PARENTS IN INTERACTION 61

Social interaction and verbal communication in children 63
Marko Kielinen and Anneli Yliherva

Discussing children’s participation 75
Anu Alanko

Parent participation in early childhood education – is it a chance or a must? 95
Seija Järvi

CHILDREN IN COLLABORATION 111

Early learning and children’s collaboration – joy for learning 113
Eeva-Liisa Kronqvist

Joint story-book telling for the learning of number names 129
Sinikka Kaartinne

Children as experts in designing a play environment 143
Pirkko Hyvönen and Marjaana Kangas

CHILDREN IN RESEARCH 171

Block story: Listening to child’s narrating at home 173
Elina Viljamaa

Ethical insights and child research 185
Eila Estola, Marikaisa Kontio, Taina Kyrönniemi-Kylmänen, and Elina Viljamaa
Introduction

Childhood is important. Certainly it is important for children, and it is important and interesting for adults as well. We, as teachers, researchers and parents, therefore need to understand children in their everyday life; their actions, intentions and emotions in order to provide supportive environments where children are listened to and valued as such. As long as children are encouraged to take part in activities and express their insights, delights, suspicions and worries, their learning and development is enhanced.

The main reason for publishing this book is to disclose contemporary research on children who are living in the North. The book seeks to explore childhood studies in the North from a wide perspective, including early childhood education, sociology, psychology, logo pediatrics, the learning sciences and special pedagogy. The book gives space for the authors to reflect on their methodologies and theoretical positions, and present culturally sensitive ways to reach childhood and to listen to children’s voices.

This book is a concrete result from the activity of the Finnish Network for Childhood Studies and its Northern dimension-network. The book is published by the multidisciplinary childhood research group at the University of Oulu, Finland, and it has origins at a meeting held in Lapland, at Levi Mountains, in November 2008. The meeting brought together childhood researchers from Northern parts of Finland and Norway. The meeting showed that there are various common interests to share, teach and learn from each other.

The name of the book – Insights and outlouds: Childhood research in the North – refers to the two main ideas of the book. Insights and outlouds remind us to hear children’s voices and take seriously their expressions and inventions. The latter part of the title, childhood research in the North, brings forth our research group with the inspiration and aspiration to carry on and publish multidisciplinary and multicultural childhood research in the Northern areas.

Four orientations and fifteen chapters

The topics of the book build a wide range of childhood studies, which has been organized under four orientations. The first is called Children in cultural contexts including three chapters, which stress cultural experiences, cultural change and cultural competence. Cultural contexts refer to children living in sparsely populated areas in Finland and Norway.
International research has shown that boys in the rural areas do not succeed at school as well as girls, or as well as boys elsewhere. Anneli Lauriala and Marjo Laukkanen dissect boys’ school experiences. They aim to enhance gender and regional equality, reduce social exclusion and support boys’ school motivation and achievement, as well as to strengthen their personal, academic and cultural identities. Berit Overå Johannesen continues discussion of children in cultural contexts and reminds us that social and cultural change takes place not only at the macro level, but at a subtle level of everyday life and practices. In everyday life children are continuously active in the construction of their own social lives and the lives around them. Johannesen addresses children’s participation in cultural change processes with a focus on the micro level, meaning production taking place within a group of children playing with Lego bricks. The focus is on the children’s shared social worlds as well as fantasy play, when Norwegian children negotiate cross-gender play. Merete Saus scrutinizes the concept of cultural competence in the context of child welfare in a Sami environment. Cultural competence is necessary in order to be able to meet the criteria in all of the paragraphs regarding children’s rights. Holding a practical dimension and the possibilities to evaluate this concept provide a way to raise the quality of assessment and grant children their rights. The author introduces a model of cultural competence that includes three levels: sensitivity, knowledge and behaviour. The concept of cultural competence needs to be integrated to the child welfare system, and work with children; it should not be considered only on the individual level, but also on the institutional level as well as in the evaluation processes.

The second orientation, Children and parents in interaction, concentrates on children’s, youths’ and families’ interaction and participation, including three chapters from linguistic, special educational and sociological disciplines. The unifying factor for these articles is the importance of mutual interaction, and the privileges and competences to express oneself, to be listened to and take part.

Marko Kielinen and Anneli Yliherva define social interaction and verbal communication as basic elements in interaction. Social interactions are events in which people attach meaning to a situation, interpret what others are meaning, and respond accordingly. Sometimes personal aspects make the social interaction situation somewhat challenging. We adults should pay attention to how to support children’s language skills extensively including pragmatic skills, for the reason that language skills are strongly related to later learning skills at school-age. Language skills are crucial also in participation, which is discussed by Anu Alanko. Children have the right to participate in the community, and this chapter focuses
on ways participation can promote children and youths’ well-being. Alanko describes the youth participation model developed in the city of Oulu. She considers how to translate the theoretical concept of participation into practice, and to be near to children and youth’s lives, and how adults could enhance children’s participation. The results of the project model are encouraging: children are keen to participate. They are surprised at the notion that the adult really is interested in their opinions. This should open adult’s eyes – we have to listen to children more carefully. Seija Järvi continues the discussion dealing with parents’ participation in early childhood education. What do parents think about the day care services, and what kind of ideas do they have to improve these services? She concludes that the demands and definitions of parent participation in early childhood education no longer arise from the educational and cooperation perspective. Rather they are connected to the changing welfare systems and the ideas of the rights of the citizens, but also to the structural changes towards mixed model in service production.

The third topic in our book deals with Children in collaboration. Collaboration is defined as covering both joint activities and shared knowledge construction and making meaning. The focus is on how children play together in peer groups and how they adopt an expert role of playground designer.

In the first chapter, Eeva-Liisa Kronqvist recounts about her study, which is based on observations of children’s play in spontaneous and structured learning situations. Children are capable of guiding other children and they intuitively use various forms of learning and teaching during everyday life in groups in preschools and schools. Children’s voices have been missing in psychological and pedagogical research, although they are proficient in reflecting their learning. At best, learning can be a joyful and empowering event and process in the child’s everyday context. Kronqvist concludes that photographs, video episodes, computers, books and child-centered story-telling are useful ways of supporting children’s reflection in discussions. These opportunities should be used more widely, and classroom culture should be changed in a more open and innovative direction.

Sinikka Kaartinan investigates participation in joint story-book reading in a kindergarten classroom community where pedagogy in the learning of mathematics draws on the sociocultural perspective. The study reveals diverse strategies such as story telling, mathematical story telling, counting and naming numbers. Further, it demonstrates that mathematical book reading offers a suitable
environment for small children to refine their social and cognitive skills. This chapter investigates the cognitive aspects of learning, such as the learning of number names, as well as pre-reading strategies and social practices the children use in pre-reading situations. Pirkko Hyvönen and Marjaana Kangas have published several articles on children’s play and play environments. In this chapter, they dissect children’s expertise in playful design situations; children adopted the role of playground designer. Expertise is usually related to adults only, however development of expertise begins already in childhood and we adults can support it. Expertise is constructed through negotiations, explanations, and problem-solving situations, which take place in everyday practice and especially in play. The children talk, read, play and learn about their passions in collaboration with parents, peers, or other people. The authors concluded that the development of expertise is a journey or path, where children are not dichotomously either novices or experts nor are they routine or adaptive experts; instead, they are on the way.

The last part of the book includes two chapters which raise important questions that should be considered when doing research with children. It underscores perspectives for Children in research, which covers pragmatic and ethical considerations. Elina Viljamaa’s chapter describes children’s stories and storytelling in home context. The author illustrates how she as a researcher and mother is not trying merely to understand children’s voices, but more to listen to what kind of echo or resonance the child’s storytelling creates in the researcher’s mind. She presents the idea that a story and storytelling could also be nonverbal action, such as dance, art or photograph. In her article, the child is hammering, using building blocks and telling at the same time a story to her sister and brothers. This is children’s comprehensive way to tell stories. Eila Estola, Mari-Kaisa Kontio, Taina Kyrölä-Kylmänen and Elina Viljamaa concentrate on their own experiences about ethical issues when doing research with children in the field of educational research. They demonstrate that the traditional research ethics guidelines and codes, such as informed consents, are not enough to ensure good and ethical research. The authors argue that in addition to traditional research ethics, we should also consider research as a special relationship between researchers and children, and we should talk about ‘process consent’. Their examples from various research methods and research stages open some windows to the multiple ethical questions a researcher faces when working with children. When taking seriously every child’s uniqueness, this means that we have to
consider research in a new way at all stages: material collecting, methodology, analysis and interpretations, and reporting.

Ellaveera Hyvönen has designed and drawn the cover of the book as well as the four orientations, which illustrate a positive approach of this book. Instead of bringing out the sorrow and distress of children, which we certainly do not deny, we rather highlight the potentiality, efficacy and joy of children. We believe that these are good tools to work against dismay. For that reason children in different contexts are in the leading role in these pictures and texts.

This book is suitable for a national and international audience, for students, teachers and researchers, who are interested in children in various contexts, and who are concerned about the ethical insights of studying children. In all likelihood, also parents and educators will find useful information from this book. Our multidimensional research will continue with aims to deepen the orientations and new challenges to comprehend children in the contemporary world.
Children in Cultural Context
Boys’ motivation at school and future orientation in Lapland

Anneli Lauriala and Marjo Laukkanen

Recent studies show that boys in the sparsely populated areas of Lapland do not succeed as well at school as do girls, or as boys do elsewhere (Kuusela 2006, Jakku-Sihvonen & Komulainen 2004). These findings have generated a development and research project Boys of the North at School that aims to enhance gender and regional equality, to reduce social exclusion, and to enhance boys’ motivation at school and achievements, as well as to strengthen their personal, academic, and cultural identities. Overall, the aim is to address boys’ experiences at school, to increase awareness of boys’ needs and problems, and to aid schools and teachers in dealing with these issues.

Boys are underachieving in different countries around the world, and it is argued that boys find school meaningless more often than do girls (see West 2002). Boys’ lower achievements have worried educators increasingly over the last two decades, and many development projects and studies have been carried out in this domain, especially in Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States. There are certain similarities between different studies and findings. The problems are often connected to boys’ lower school motivation and weaker engagement in learning. Boys low achievements and lack of motivation especially in linguistic area is well documented in international research literature. It is often emphasized that there are no quick answers or solutions to boys’ problems at school. (E.g. Munns et al. 2006, Warrington, Younger & Bearne 2006.) However, the globalization and generalization of boys’ problems have been criticized because these tendencies prevent us from recognizing differences among boys and because social and cultural backgrounds are given little or no attention (Jackson 2006, Lahelma 2009, Warrington et al. 2006). There has also been less focus on the issue of ‘under-achieving’ boys on the primary sector than on the secondary sector. It is also argued that we should move away from a narrow focus on academic performance and value success also in other areas, like sports, arts, and social contribution (Warrington et al. 2006, 185).

While addressing the boys’ situation in Lapland, we have become aware of the specific contexts that are shaping the cultural and social development in the North. For example, there is a tendency for young people to move from remote rural areas to the southern and urban locations (Soininen 2002, Tuhkunen 2007). According
to earlier studies, women are more eager to move away from their home villages than are men, which on its part is apt to increase social exclusion of males in rural Northern areas (Helve 1998, Rasmussen 2007, Soininen 2002). Males and females also differ in their aspirations regarding further education. A comparative study of rural young people argues that girls regard mobility as a strategy for gaining access to further education and occupations, while many boys are more engaged in the traditional ways of living in their home regions (Helve 1998). This phenomenon – known as the effect of Jokkmokk – has been noticed in Sweden, Norway, and Finland (Kuusela 2006).

In this article, we focus on boys’ motivation at school and their orientation toward the future in Finnish Lapland. The article is based on an explorative study that aims at understanding the reasons for boys’ weak motivation and low school performance. The study highlights boys’ learning and life orientations from their own and from their teachers’ points of view.

Background of the study – the ‘Boy Code’

Developmental differences between boys and girls have been explicated and made widely known in Finland by Jari Sinkkonen, a child psychiatrist and author. He has described the following features to be typical for boys, and to partly explain their difficulties at school: These include boys’ slower developmental pace, weaker linguistic and fine-motor abilities, and smaller vocabulary, which are related to their difficulties, and lack of interest, in reading and writing. Learning difficulties and asocial problems are also far more common among boys than girls (Sinkkonen 2005). The fact that boys often do not take school seriously may be seen both as a cause and a consequence of their weaker school achievements. These ‘weaknesses’ concern not only Finnish boys but have been noticed in other countries too, as stated above.

When considering boys’ weaker school performance, it seems difficult or even impossible to distinguish the biological, social, and cultural aspects from each other. Many researchers – feminist researchers among others –attribute boys’ underachievement to the dominant constructions of desirable masculinity among boys, as well as in the society at large (see Skelton & Francis 2003). According to Peter West (2002), the statistics from the PISA study provide evidence of a similar boy culture in very different countries such as Brazil, Finland and Canada. This culture is based on a traditional, hegemonic masculinity, and it includes things like being active and loud, showing off in front of girls, and undervaluing femininity
and book learning. Furthermore, this boy culture is in opposition to school, and it does not encourage boys to invest in education. This kind of masculine culture has been described as ‘laddishness’ in British research and has been designated as the ‘Boy Code’ by William S Pollack (2001).

The Boy Code consists of certain features that define what boys are expected to be like and how they are expected to behave. For example, when boys are expected to be harsh and strong, this can lead to covering up of uncertainty by self-confident and boasting behavior. These kinds of role expectations can define boys’ peer relations and their status among other boys. Jari Sinkkonen (2005) proposes that boys form friendships by playing, while girls do so by talking. This means that group activities are crucial for boys. For example, a boy who is not interested in or good in group activities – like sports or computer games – may easily be excluded from the group. Boys are supposed to like competing, but they can also fear that school success will lead to a loss of status in the boy group. (e.g. Jackson 2006, Sinkkonen 2005, Warrington et al. 2006.)

For schooling to succeed better in motivating and engaging boys in learning, it should pay more attention to boys’ interests and temperament styles. On the basis of the earlier studies, it would seem that the traditional classroom, teacher and book-centered teaching, and solitary learning do not suit boys very well. When thinking about behavior models, action rules, and assumptions about how boys are expected to behave, we can speak about the Boy Code, referring to typical behavior and norms that guide boys’ life at school. It seems that to become accepted among the boys, one need to obey certain rules, at least to some extent.

When speaking about the Boy Code, we should, however, be cautious and avoid generalizing it to all boys. Elina Lahelma (2009) proposes that we should focus on schools’ informal cultures, in which there is an ongoing battle between different kinds of masculinities. Earlier studies suggest that boys’ success is appreciated in some schools, while in others it is not. For example, it is noticed that in Finland boys do well in those schools that are situated in metropolitan areas and in which good results are commonly achieved. (Lahelma 2009.) Likewise, the boys of the North have very good results in towns, but their results are far below the average in sparsely populated areas. It seems that the Boy Code is stronger in some places than in others, and the meaning of local culture for boys’ school motivation needs to be studied more closely. On the basis of earlier research, there is good reason to believe that when aiming to improve boys’ school motivation and achievements, we need to pay attention to the social and cultural situation, along with pedagogical development work.
Boys’ school experiences and motivation

This explorative study was carried out through a questionnaire to female and male pupils (N=207) as well as through individual interviews with male pupils (N=19) aged from 11 to 13 years. The pupils represented 5th and 6th graders in seven different schools. The study also included a short questionnaire to teachers (N=15) in five schools. Both questionnaires were carried out in 2007–2008, and they were analysed by using content analysis which included different forms of categorizing, quantifying and comparing. The broad themes were based on research questions, in the forming of which earlier research and theories were utilised. There emerged also interesting subthemes from the data. These have oriented our further studies as well as deeper analysis of the already gathered data.

Pupils’ questionnaires consisted of 28 open questions. Pupils were asked questions concerning their life in school and their life in general, for instance, what they think about the school, what are their favourite subjects, how they see themselves as learners, what they are interested in, what they think about their home communities, and how they see their futures. In this article we will focus on those questions which had the most striking differences between boys’ and girls’ answers, and which therefore can implicate why boys have problems in schools.

Teachers’ questionnaires consisted of twelve questions. Five of the questions dealt with boys’ situation in schools and teachers’ experiences about teaching boys. These first questions were all open questions. Rest of the questions focused on pedagogical development and teachers wishes concerning the project. In this article we will focus on those first five questions that are mapping the boys’ current situation in school from the teachers’ point of view. Teachers were asked if and how boys’ and girls’ attitudes towards school are different, how they are experiencing the teaching of the boys, what they see as the greatest problems in boys’ learning and school-going, which factors could explain boys’ possibly low school motivation and how boys’ problems could be solved.

According to the teachers, the most challenging feature in teaching boys is their lack of motivation. Altogether, 11 out of 15 teachers mentioned motivation when asked what they find to be the most difficult problem concerning boys’ learning: for instance, “Arousing and maintaining pupils’ motivation” or “advocating the necessity and importance of the school.” Half of the respondents also found girls to be more conscientious than boys, and some said that girls take school more seriously. A couple of the teachers thought that school is only an obligation for boys, something ‘one just has to go through’. Similar views were
discovered in earlier studies about teachers’ attitudes on boys and girls (e.g. Gordon 1992, Tarmo 1991). In our study, some teachers also described boys as being more straightforward than girls. One of them wrote that Boys are more open – both in good and in bad ways.

When asked to what factors teachers attributed boys’ lower school motivation, the most common answer given by the teachers was that families do not provide a model that would encourage boys to do well at school. Six teachers expressed this view, and one of them wrote that Boys are expected to have traditional rural skills rather than success in school. Five teachers said that the present school system does not favor or suit boys and five said that boys need more action at school. In some answers, these features were seen to interconnect with each other: Boys need more action and concrete activities. We teachers should be trained more in this direction.

Teachers were also asked about their solutions to boys’ school and learning problems. This question aroused varying answers. Some teachers wrote about a need for trust, caring, and encouragement, while others spoke about a need to use more learning-by-doing approach. Some teachers also suggested that pupils could be divided into different groups according to their capacities. A couple of teachers mentioned a need to develop learning material and contents, while others spoke about their aim to try to influence both the boys’ and their parents’ attitudes: Development of attitudes through education, and insisting from the very beginning that boys need to perform as well as girls in all subjects.

Overall, all the respondents seem to believe that there are differences in boys’ and girls’ attitudes towards school. Most of them thought that boys do not take school seriously enough, and that boys have difficulties in motivating themselves to study. Many of the teachers wrote that teaching boys is more challenging than is teaching girls, but that it can also be rewarding. Only one teacher wrote that boys were easier to teach than were girls.

The questionnaire to boys and girls in primary schools was carried out in six village schools (N=111) and in one town school situated in the capital of Lapland (N=96). This made it possible to compare the answers of the children who lived in the sparsely populated areas with those living in the town. About half of the participants were boys and half were girls in both contexts. When pupils were asked what they thought about the school, the girls in the town school had clearly the most positive attitudes towards the school. In the positive answers, school was seen as meaningful, okay, or fun. For example, one boy from a village school wrote that It is really educational and fun. However, in both contexts, there were more
negative answers among the boys than among the girls. Almost 20 per cent of all boys described school negatively, most often as **boring**. Although girls more typically gave positive answers, a couple of the girls had exceptionally strong negative expressions, such as one girl in a village school who described school as **torture**. When asked about favorite things in school, the village boys stressed the meaning of school breaks and sports. They were liked because of the freedom and choice, and *because it is more fun to move than to sit still*. The village girls stressed the meaning of friends but also school breaks. In the town, boys emphasized friends and sports, while the girls emphasized friends and learning. Overall, the girls mentioned learning more often than boys did, while none of the village boys mentioned learning among their favorite things in school.

![Attitudes towards school](image)

Pupils were also asked about their life outside the school. When asked about the favorite things outside the school, the most popular answer of the boys was sports, while girls mostly mentioned friends. Sports were mentioned by a half of the boys in the village schools and by a little over a third of the boys in the town school. Other traditionally masculine activities were mentioned far less often. For example, driving motor vehicles, like snowmobiles, was mentioned only by six boys, who all represented village schools. However, it was mentioned by the village boys a bit more often than friends were, as a favorite thing in life.
The questionnaire also dealt with pupils’ plans for the future and their professional role models. There were great differences between boys and girls regarding their dream or ideal professions. A clearly greater number of boys than girls did not know what they wanted to be as adults. The boys in the village schools were the most uncertain about their future goals: over 40 per cent did not mention any profession as their choice. At the same time, girls in the village schools most often mentioned their dream future professions; only less than 10 per cent did not mention any profession. The most popular profession among both village and town boys was athlete, while it was doctor among town girls and working with animals among village girls. Also more generally sports seem to be an important resource to boys when considering future professions (cf. Lahelma 2009). Overall, girls mentioned more professions that require further education than did boys. Girls also had more professional role models than did boys. Somewhat over half of the girls mentioned role models, while less than one third of the boys in the village schools were able to do this. The difference between boys and girls was greater in village schools than in the town school.

Because of the migration tendency, the pupils were asked about their home communities and the place there they hoped to live as adults. Pupils in the town more often described their home community positively than did pupils in the sparsely populated areas. There was no difference in the number of positive answers between the town boys and girls: over 80 per cent of both described their hometown positively. In the villages, the situation was different: 70 per cent of boys described their home region positively, while only less than half of the girls did so. In the answers, the same features were described as positive and negative issues: It’s a nice periphery or backwater as well as This is a good place to live because it’s peaceful or too small. The capital of Lapland was also described as being safe, good size or too small.
When asked about where pupils would like to live as adults, the girls expressed more often than the boys that they wanted or were eager to leave their home region. The situation was similar in the town and village surroundings, and a similar tendency has been found in a study among Karelian youth (Sinkkonen-Tolppi 2006). However, in our study, the boys in sparsely populated areas were somewhat more eager to mention their future living place elsewhere than in their present home region, as compared to the pupils in the town. The most eager to leave were the girls in sparsely populated areas: almost two thirds of them wrote that they would like to live as an adult in some other place than where they were presently living, and less than ten per cent of village girls preferred to stay in their home villages. Even though the number of respondents is relatively small, there seems to be a striking difference between boys and girls, which is apt to add to boys’ problems and marginalization in the future. Teacher answers reflected similar tendencies although they are not directly comparable to pupil’s answers, due to the differences in respective questions.

**Pedagogical implications**

Schools have an important role in anchoring children and young people to their home regions. It has been noticed that young people’s positive relationship with
their home community is based on a good image and vision of the community and on the knowledge of local history that is evoked in local schools (Lähteenmaa 2002). These notions give a further impetus for critically reflecting the linkages between the school and local communities, and for finding ways to incorporate school life and learning into the local history, culture and sources of living. This means rethinking our curricula, learning material, and pedagogical approaches, as well as teacher and pupil roles, and widening our view of the learning environment, experts, and sources of information, if we are to make school learning more meaningful for the boys in the sparsely populated areas of Lapland. Some promising approaches have already been developed by teachers in Northern schools, for instance the use of spoken and written narratives in strengthening pupils’ local and cultural identities. Pupils have written their own narratives, which have been printed as a book, and read among the pupils. Own stories, with local emphasis, have greatly interested pupils and motivated both reading and writing. (Kalske 2009.)

When thinking of boys’ learning at school on a more general level, we may base our arguments on Sinkkonen (2006), who suggests that we should move towards gender-sensitive teaching and education that is not based on stereotypes but on empathy to children’s position and world. In order to do this, we need a holistic approach, as noticed by Molly Warrington et al. (2006). This involves, for instance, using a variety of teaching methods and developing action-oriented learning and teaching models. Learning, in general, is enhanced if it involves a possibility of natural movement and activity of a learner. Furthermore, supporting both individuality and group activities in learning are key issues in making learning more meaningful – for each pupil. Activity and learning in a group seem to be especially important for the boys.

However, due to the different gender and regional cultures, it is important to develop pedagogical models that pay attention to different features and interests and to develop methods, materials, and environments that are meaningful for the boys of the North. For instance, specific approaches might include project-based learning, collaborative ventures and problem solving, as well as learning that is connected to workplaces and enterprises. When developing schools, we should also listen to pupils’ own voices and ideas (cf. Francis 2000, Warrington et al. 2006).

After finishing our explorative study, we returned to the schools and discussed the results with teachers and pupils. During these discussions, the teachers suggested different ways to develop pedagogical approaches and learning
environments; e.g. strengthen collaboration between teachers, extend learning outside classrooms, utilize pupils’ own hobbies and interests in learning, develop pupils’ self-evaluation and negotiate more with pupils. During a group discussion with pupils in one of the village schools, both boys and girls stressed the meaning of their own choices in learning, as well as practicality and application of different subjects in everyday life.

Taking into account what has been said above, inclusion of the families and community in the school activities is of paramount importance for boys’ motivation and engagement in school learning. We have carried out a questionnaire for the parents in all of our research schools. On the basis of preliminary results, the real challenge appears to be how to engage the men of the North to participate in school affairs. This could involve finding encouraging local role models – older male pupils, for instance – to read regularly to the boys in lower grades (see Munns et al. 2006, Warrington et al. 2006). To diminish boys’ educational and social exclusion, collaboration with the further education institutions is also needed.

Our research on boys’ school motivation and learning has so far given us some cues to the boys’ difficulties in finding school learning meaningful for their present and future lives. To get a better understanding of the complex situation, which involves interaction of social, cultural and educational factors, we need to penetrate deeper into boys’ lives in the northern villages. In order to do this, we have planned and are presently being carried out an ethnographic study in some of our research schools. The schools were selected to represent cultural diversity, so that the ethnographic research will be carried out in the northern Sámi regions as well as in southern Lapland.
References


Norwegian children negotiating cross-gender play

Berit Overå Johannesen

In a global context, the Nordic countries are characterized by being well functioning democracies. In principle at least, men and women, majority and minority, live on equal terms and take part in civic society and decision-making on equal terms. In our democratic countries, we also encourage children to speak out and claim their rights, and as adults, we like to think of ourselves as those who take children’s interests and opinions into consideration when political and other decisions are made. We see an example of this in the chapter written by Anu Alanko in this volume. In this sense, our societies see children as citizens involved in cultural reproduction and change. However, societies and cultures are constructed also at a more subtle level of everyday life and practices. In everyday life, children are continuously active in the construction of their own social lives and the lives around them (James, Jenks & Prout 1998). To fully recognize children’s contribution in meaning-producing practices, we need to also include everyday practices in our studies, and to give a special focus to children’s collectively produced peer-cultural universes of meaning (Corsaro 2005, Johannesen 2006, Prout & James 1997).

Today among adults it is regarded as common knowledge that “values and practices regarding sex and gender are among the most fundamental constituents of a society’s symbolic system” (Prieur 2002). This also does not go unnoticed by children, and cross culturally children from preschool age on tend to congregate in same sex groups (Aydt & Corsaro 2003, Maccoby 1988, 1990, 2002, Thorne 1993). Studies of such groups of children indicate that gendered behaviour may emerge among them at the group level, and not mainly as a result of sex typing processes on the individual level as claimed by traditional approaches to gender development (Maccoby 1990, 2002, Grusec 2006). Studies indicate that once the children start to interact with same sex peers, the styles of play seem to become more divergent. Maccoby reports that boys more often than among girls, involve in rough-and-tumble play, competition and conflict while girls on their part typically are more engaged in collaborative discourse (2002). The result is that children progressively build same sex subcultures involving shared cognitions and common interests in themes and scripts (ibid). In addition to these emerging differences in social behavior and play interests, peer pressure in the form of
teasing works to keep girls from playing with boys and boys from playing with girls. Sometimes teasing takes place between groups of boys and girls in cross-sex play. This kind of play, which tends to emphasize differences between groups and promote solidarity between same-sex children, is called “border work” by Barrie Thorne (1993). Invasion, as when boys disrupt girls play, is also a form of border work.

In a comparison between Italian and American children’s construction of gender, Aydt and Corsaro (2003) note that the quality of interaction and the salience of gender in children’s play vary between cultures. They found that borderwork is more frequent among the American children, while the Italian children more easily enter into cross-sex play. They also point to the fact that much of the research referred to by Maccoby is conducted among middle class American children. In their study American children in private day care tended to code cross-sex relationships as typically romantic in nature and they seemed to have limited access to alternative scripts for possible relationships between the sexes. In Italy on the other hand girls and boys enjoyed taking part in debates together and also shared role play. The authors refer to observations of Italian boys and girls taking turn portraying a female gypsy fortune-teller popular from television. The fact that boys portray a woman indicates that roles are not limited by sex (Aydt & Corsaro 2003).

In this chapter, I will address children’s collective agency and negotiations of gender, with focus on the micro level meaning production that takes place within a group of Norwegian children playing with Lego bricks. The focus will be on the children’s shared social worlds, as well as the fantasy play. In his work, Keith Sawyer (1997) shows how the meaning content produced in children’s fantasy play is irreducibly collective. However, even though the fantasy narratives are collectively produced, as seen from Sawyer’s work, these narratives seem to depend upon the contribution of individual children. In other words, individual agency is taken to be a precondition for the collective production of meaning. Other researchers, such as Evaldsson (2003, 2004) and Goodwin (1990), open up to an understanding of agency at a collective level by looking at how children, through their talk, constitute their shared social worlds. Different positions from where to act are shown to be inherent at this social level. In my study of joint Lego play, I want to explore this collective aspect of agency. From this perspective it will also be possible to explore gender as a group phenomenon.

I take the children’s shared focus and concern as a starting point for looking at the positioning of the children’s utterances in the co-regulated discursive pattern.
when they play together with Lego. This will lead to a detailed description of how they collectively create a shared interactional space. I will take as a starting point that agentive positions, such as the position of “boy” or “girl”, are discursively/dialogically created and constituted through the very participation in cultural practices (Bakhtin 1994, Olsen 1999, Walkerdine 1984). Furthermore, within such a framework, I will show how children can step out of the gendered positions in order to develop a focus of shared interest. I will show how new positions from where to act can emerge from within the shared play, and suggest that the relationship between emergent agentive positions and children’s fantasy narratives are relevant to the understanding of children’s contribution to their own societal context. This idea that children, in order to address their own peer concerns, collectively negotiate and develop structural positions of the larger culture of which they are part, is captured in the concept of “interpretive reproduction” developed by William Corsaro (2005).

With regard to situational constraints, my study takes place within the institutional frames of an after school program. In the Nordic countries, children’s everyday lives are characterized by a high level of institutionalization. In Norway 80 per cent of children aged one to six go to preschool (Dzamarija & Kalve 2004). After-school programs are established in every elementary school and are open to children from 1st to 4th grade. Preschools and schools, including recess time and after school programs, constitute arenas where many children meet and spend time together on a regular basis. Institutions like this thus constitute frames within which children develop social worlds, including peer cultural interests/foci, personal relations, and relational identities.

**Method**

The data that I want to present in this chapter are part of the data that I collected by participant observation over a period of 8 months in 2001/2002 in two after school programs. In this study, I particularly wanted to trace the emerging meaning potential of artifacts being used within a community of children. I chose Lego bricks to be suitable artifacts for my study, and followed two groups of children playing with a particular set of these toys every week during recess time throughout their first year in school. In one case, the group consisted of eight children, in the other case, four children. The data presented here are from the group of eight children. I brought the box of Lego every week and my presence
with the Lego quickly became part of the children’s weekly schedule. This way of actually imposing structure on children’s everyday life is a bit unusual for ethnographic studies, but it worked out well, as the presence of the Lego and of myself was construed by the children as “the Lego day” and thus became a significant event throughout their week. During the fieldwork, I made video recordings with a small hand-held camera and took field notes. From the very start, the children knew that I was a researcher interested in “Lego in play” and they had agreed to help me out by actually playing with the Lego. Most of the time, I did not directly take part in the play myself. In the present chapter, I will use data from one day of Lego play to show in some detail the intertwining of children’s play realities, their social world, and gendered structures. Studies of play and games indicate that both fantasy play and games with rules have universal features (Carvalho 2004, Corsaro 2003). In fantasy play, children typically talk in particular manners and manipulate figures and building materials to create fantasy events. At the same time, play is always local and situated. Children who take part do not separate themselves from the social context in which the play takes place. Rather, the level of reality is in a constantly negotiated flux between the narrated fantasy of “good guys” and “bad guys”, “heroes” and “princesses”, on the one hand, and the playing of children’s social and situated reality on the other (Corsaro 2003, Johannesen 2006, Strandell 1997). The play material is the focus of playful negotiations and transformations and is ripe with sometimes ambiguous meaning potential. This negotiated flux is the focus of my analysis.

**Boys and girls and Lego bricks**

On this particular day, all of the children in the group are present and playing with the Lego. Many different fantasy Lego-events are taking place around the room. Two girls, Karin and Ida, are located under the table and are providing the voice to one Lego character who wants to go skiing, and to several others who are absorbed in building houses. One other girl, Trine, is sitting in the middle of the room. She is building a house, while the Lego characters in front of her are talking peacefully with each other. Two boys, Simen and Odin, are located in a corner. Their Lego characters are discussing weaponry. A bit to the side of them are Per and Morten (also boys) and some Lego characters who just escaped the severe threat of a dragon. The fifth boy, Dan, is now crawling on his hands and knees over to Trine. He stretches out his hand, tries to grab one of the Lego characters in front of her and says, *everybody should share ... we are supposed to share all the Lego, Trine*
... Trine bends over and protects the Lego with her arms as she asks Dan to stop it. From his corner, Odin raises his head and looks at them and then gives Dan his support: we are supposed to share, Trine. Trine, on her part, is supported by Karin, who is now crawling out from under the table. She approaches Dan and tries to take back something from him. Hey ...you ... Dan took his [the Lego characters] helmet ... Dan ... give me back the helmet, she says. By now, it is fairly obvious that this confrontation not only has to do with the distribution of Lego between the children, but also contains an aspect of gendered positioning; Odin and Karin were not involved in Dan and Trine’s activities prior to this event. However, now Dan is supported by Odin and Trine is supported by Karin. Dan starts to circulate in the room, and eventually ends up by the table where Ida and Karin and their Lego are located. As he gets closer and tries to get under the table, the girls protest. Only after elaborate negotiations is he finally allowed to enter. As soon as he is under the table, Dan states, do you know why I came here? I came to be your police.

There is no evident plan between Dan and Odin to invade the domain of Karin and Ida, but now Odin also approaches, popping his head under the table: I want to be here and take a look ... just see what you are doing .. The self-proclaimed police officer Dan makes no protest. He himself is approaching a green crocodile that is hiding out between the other Lego. As he grabs it: can I have the crocodile? It was lying right here. NO, replies Karin, and continues: hey ... he took the crocodile!

Karin’s complaints about Dan taking the crocodile are partly directed at me, as she implicitly raises a question of what is fair in the situation. What rights do she and Ida have in the situation, as girls and as opposed to the boys? The girls only unwillingly accepted Dan’s entry under the table, and we can suspect that Dan may have joined them, not to play, but rather to get access to the Lego that they control. Karin and Ida’s complaints support this interpretation.

The impression of the situation so far is that the boys and the girls have played side by side, but without having a shared play focus. Now, some of the boys have started to show interest in the Lego controlled by the girls. Gender is made relevant in the play context, as a taken for granted solidarity between boys on the one hand and girls on the other. The gendered positioning is not being generated from within the logic of the play events, but must be seen as part of the children’s broader cultural context. A while later, Dan and the Lego police officer in his hand are heading back to the location under the table, after having visited their mates in Odin and Simen’s corner. Simen is just about to pick up something from the floor when Dan all of a sudden bursts out in protest, no, that one belongs to us! The item Simen picked up is a prison door with bars. Simen protests: but I found it over
there. Dan points his hand against the Lego under the table: the prison is over there. This is accepted as a good argument and Simen lets go of the barred door by shoving it towards the prison. In the process of these events; when Simen grabs the prison door; when Dan says no, that one belongs to us! and when Simen accepts his claim, the levels of participant structure and fantasy narrative gets blurred. When Dan claims that the door belongs to us, and supports his claim by referring to the prison under the table; the focus is shifted from the social reality of the boy- and girl dichotomy, to the fantasy play narrative. However, the us that the door belongs to is not only the Lego community under the table and Dan as their spokesperson; it also includes the girls who are, after all, in charge of the Lego. Dan is “taken”, so to speak, by the Lego fantasy and now he suddenly finds himself teamed up with the girls. When this blurring of participant and fantasy narrative happens, it transforms the existing tension between boys and girls into a tension between two groupings of Lego characters – one group under the table and one group in Odin and Simen’s corner.

Based on the participant structure of gendered solidarity and tension between boys and girls, and by Dan having caught girl “cooties”, a new possible field of interaction opens up to the Lego characters. At this ambiguous moment Simen turns to Odin and confirms the new emerging structure: we have stolen their prison door. Dan follows up: I have a prison. If someone goes to war, they will end up in prison. Odin looks at Dan and says, yes, that is exactly what we will do, we are going to war, against you guys. A Lego character close to Simen says in a deep voice, we are going to war. Another character, voiced by Odin, elaborates: we are going to war against you [plural]. The police officer in Dan’s hand is excited: against us! All of a sudden, an enemy has materialized and a war long dreamed of by the Lego characters in Odin and Simen’s corner can be carried out. Odin and Simen immediately proceed to build a road connecting their warriors in the corner and the enemy to be attacked under the table. The surrounding floor turns into water and boats are approaching.

By blurring the levels of fantasy and reality, Dan opened a new possible field of interaction to the Lego characters. However, he also, accidentally, teamed up with the girls. At the level of participant structure, this means that Dan is “othered” in relation to the rest of the boys. In the long run, this is not a position he wants and now he tries to get back together with his mates. He turns to Simen and says, I am not on their team, I tricked them, I tricked you, but I am on your team. So now we know for sure that Dan actually did act strategically when he first approached the girls. Dan is accepted back by the other boys.
Now we are seemingly back where we started, with the boys and the girls in separate positions, but not quite, as the Lego characters in the corner still keep up their preparations to confront the under-table enemy. From the perspective of the boys and the Lego in the corner, the under-table Lego are now included in a relational structure of opposing Lego teams. The under-table Lego characters, on the other hand, are happily unaware of the war to come and are carrying out their lives with no worries, and so are the girls.

By the time the boys are ready to attack, both Trine and Karin have been picked up by their parents and Ida is alone under the table. When the first troops eventually reach the table and shout, *let the war begin!*, Ida protests: *I am not part of your game.* If Simen and Odin were to accept this and let Ida withdraw, their troops would have armed themselves for nothing; the mission would be meaningless. It would also mean that the girl-boy dichotomy from earlier – from before the episode when Dan changed sides – would be confirmed at the level of participants; boys and girls do not interfere with each other’s Lego events. The boys could, of course, try to capture Ida’s Lego characters (just take them from her), but in that case, the relational structure of the Lego fantasy would collapse. The Lego at war would no longer have an enemy who were willing to fight back. Consequently, at this point, the boys simply need Ida to want to play along. Let us see what happens.

Ida’s protest leaves the attacking Lego warriors confused for a few moments. They move aimlessly around the table until one Lego character, given voice by Odin, says to one of his mates, *there is no war: You were mistaken.* The characters then start to withdraw from the area. A character in Simen’s hand says, *it was the wrong war,* and a character held by Dan confirms, *it was the wrong war,* and even adds, *sorry.* They keep withdrawing and repeating how they were mistaken and ended up in the wrong war. Finally, only the Lego character in Odin’s hand stays behind. Instead of going to war, he now tries to initiate contact on more friendly terms with the Lego characters under the table.

What we see in this little incident is that Ida’s statement, *I am not part of your game,* is responded to; not as a statement about her not wanting to interact with the boys, but rather as a statement from the “under-table” Lego characters about not wanting to take part in the war. By accepting the assumed wish of the Lego inhabitants under the table about not wanting to fight, Odin’s Lego character confirms their position in the relational structure. In fact, the position of the under-table Lego community it is not only confirmed, but also strengthened, since they now have actually taken part in defining the shared situation. It was a mistake
to consider them the enemy, but they are still there, and interaction can take part between the two groups of Lego.

After a moment of hesitation, Ida accepts the implicit invitation for her to play along. She moves a group of Lego characters out of sight from the character in Odin’s hand and says, *everybody was away at work right now ... but you did not know that*. Odin’s character replies, *yes, but then we came to visit*. Ida responds, *no, right now all the men ... all the boys are working, but you could come to visit later.*

When Ida’s Lego characters start to act upon the relational structure made available to them, they do it in an autonomous manner, negotiating their own identity and role in the emerging events. This means that Ida also constructs her position in the participant structure, as a position on equal terms with the boys. The fact that Ida was invited in now leads to a merging of ideas at the level of the fantasy narrative. The trail between the two communities that was originally built for war-purposes now serves as a road for flourishing travel, visits, and commercial affairs. Busy Lego characters steadily go back and forth, from under the table and to the corner, as well as from the corner to the table, and it goes on for the rest of that day.

Throughout these events, Ida’s Lego characters are mainly defined as “boys”. It is tempting to interpret this use of the term “boys” as an expression of Ida’s awareness of playing with the boys. In Odin and Simen and Dan’s groupings of Lego, we find sailors and warriors and other kinds of characters. They may well be inherently male, but so far with no explicit gendered identities. However, this now changes, as Odin also starts to use the term “boys” to talk about the characters in Ida’s charge. When his own character is paying a visit and finds only one of Ida’s characters at home, Odin asks *where are all the others... all the other boys?* Ida responds *oh, they are at work*. Odin’s character is surprised to find the character before him at home when all the others are working *and why are not you at work as well?* he asks. Ida’s character replies, *oh, eh I have the day off.*

Throughout these events that I have described for you, some important changes took place. The children moved from a situation clearly defined by gendered positions, to a situation defined by the emerging focus of the play narrative. In this process, an exchange of meaning potential took place between what I call two levels of reality: the participant, social level and the narrated fantasy level. Initially, we saw the structuring tension between the boys and the girls at the lived, social level. This tension, however, also added a certain excitement to the play context. Both the gendered structure and the excitement
entered into the fantasy narrative, with Dan’s blurring of the two levels of reality. When the boy versus girl oppositional structure merged with the fantasy level, it offered a new space of interaction for oppositional Lego groups. A road was built to physically connect the groups, and a failed war eventually lead to friendly visits. Interestingly, together with this collectively narrated fantasy, a participant/social structure of differentiated, but gender-neutral, positions also emerged.

In short, the children’s own motivation to develop the fantasy level meaning potential created a situation where they no longer allowed sex to define the relationship between them. They dismissed the gendered tension in favor of a relational participant structure characterized by equally empowered, gender-neutral positions. They did so in order to develop the focus of their own shared interests (Corsaro 2005).

Sex and gender are core categories of our symbolic systems and used by both adults and children to define themselves and others. Observations of children segregating themselves in groups based on sex are done cross-culturally. The tendency of choosing same-sex playmates begins around three years of age and increases up to puberty (Maccoby 2002). Recent approaches suggest that we should study gender development as a group phenomenon rather than something taking place within the individual child (Maccoby 2002). This is in line with the focus on the importance of the collective, communal aspects of children’s activity worded within childhood studies (Corsaro 2005, James & Prout 1998) and underpinning the perspective of interpretive reproduction (Corsaro 2005, Corsaro & Johannesen 2007).

Aydt and Corsaro (2003) show that children in a private daycare in the US code cross-sex relations as romantic in nature and argue that the children see cross-sex relations as something entirely different from same-sex relations. These children entered into a lot of joking and teasing and “marriage talk” with the opposite sex, but at the same time had the least sustained play between boys and girls in a comparison of four preschools in the US and Italy (Aydt & Corsaro 2003). In the Norwegian episode that I have described, children step out of the gendered positions when sex becomes an obstacle and threatens sustained play. At that point gender is no longer made relevant in the participant structure. Instead, we see gender reflected in the play narrative. We see it explicitly in Ida’s talk of boys, and implicitly in the everyday activities being narrated; in the activities of going to work and paying each other visits. Sex and gender is thus part of the narrated focus, and as such it is still available for reflection and negotiation. Aydt and Corsaro (2003) note that overall among the Italian children a collective spirit
seems to undermine division by gender (ibid.). This is the impression also in the Norwegian episode. This Norwegian episode also illustrates how gender neutral positions from where to act emerge as part of the collectively created shared interactional space. Thus the children themselves create a social structure defined by shared interests rather than by sex-segregation.

The episode of the Lego playing children illustrates how gender can be transcended and transformed when the children themselves find this useful, in order to develop their focus of interest. In the Norwegian context of equality of status between women and men it makes sense that children in their play feel free to choose whether to make sex a relevant category or not. In light of interpretive reproduction and the idea of gender development as a group phenomenon this is not a trivial point. Rather it is clear that the children, by playing together and negotiating gender in the process of pursuing their shared interests, contribute to the further development of the egalitarian Norwegian society.
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Cultural competence and children in the North

Merete Saus

Cultural competence has not yet matured as an operational concept in practical work with children in the North. Working with children is not helped by a stable and usable working plan that addresses cultural competence nor is it facilitated by a theoretical base for making one. A practical or theoretical guide on how to carry out cultural competence has not yet been established. This makes it difficult at the educational level and it makes the evaluation of quality of assessment impossible. What should a tutorial contain when teaching students cultural competence? How does one facilitate the student’s skills in cultural competence? How can we judge what has been done concerning cultural orientation when working with children, and if it has been good enough?

Today’s advice is to be sensitive and to be aware of cultural impact on situations, events, and people. Being respectful and thoughtful is seen as sufficient. In teaching, there are no accurate models accessible, but only some well meaning attitudes that are thought. Accordingly, the evaluation of cultural competence is difficult (Mederos & Woldeguiorguis 2003, McPhatter, Vidal de Haymes & Francisco 2003). It is hard to evaluate without knowing exactly what you are suppose to evaluate. Without no objective and practical guides to reach the desired cultural competence, you hardly can judge the professional quality. Because of this limitation, both in the educational potential and evolutorial possibilities of the way cultural competence are conducted, children’s rights are at stake (Mindell et al. 2003). How can child welfare secure children’s rights if it is not certain that they provide the best quality of assessment?

My contribution is to present a model for capturing the concept of cultural competence that is theoretically suitable and sufficient from a practical standpoint for child welfare work among indigenous and minority children. The model will strengthen the professional routine that is aimed at working with children in the North, regarding both children’s rights and quality of efforts. Cultural competence is a deed of necessity to grant children’s rights. The quality of effort in working with children is increased if a theoretically solid and useful practical concept of cultural competence is being implemented. This is based on earlier work where contextual child welfare work is outlined from a functional cultural perspective (Saus 2004, 2006a,b, Saus 2008) and the body of work presented in the Journal of
Child Welfare in 2003. The editors of thos spesiall issue arues in favour of a minimum standard for cultural competence:

At a minimum, our goal should be to ensure that services to all children and families reflect an understanding of and respect for their cultures and service needs. (Valázques, McPhatter & Yang 2003, 101).

Stressing the necessity of cultural competences by making it an imperative, they make way for infusing cultural perspective it in every aspects of child welfare. This means that cultural competence is not only effectual in client work, but also involves strategic planning of services provided for minority children and their families.

**Children’s rights and child welfare**

According to the international laws that are ratified in the Nordic countries, children have some grounded rights to enjoy and participate in their culture, language, and religion. As such, the children have privileges to maintain contact with their cultural background. The Convention on the Rights of the Child is a part of the UN human rights, and in article 30 it says:

In those States in which ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities or people of indigenous origin exist, a child belonging to such a minority or who is indigenous shall not be denied the right, in community with other members of his or her group, to enjoy his or her own culture, to profess and practice his or her own religion, or to use his or her own language.

Even though the child welfare services sometimes must intervene in families, this cultural privilege applies.

The children’s rights cover multiple elements, all of which are important in granting children’s human rights. Among others, it gives the children protection from being put in danger and the privilege to live in healthy, learning conditions. Different paragraphs grant a variety of rights, phrasing it in different wordings. As a summary, you can say that children’s rights give the child, as a human being, the legal right to have the possibility to grow and develop under secure circumstances, and in ways that are adapted to them. To enjoy culture is to be seen as a necessity for carrying out many of the other privileges given by the children’s rights. Child welfare authorities cannot repeal the validation of these. On the contrary, human
rights might be considered as the framework for social work for indigenous people and national minorities (Cemlyn 2008, Suleiman 2003).

To allow children to enjoy and maintain contact with their own cultural background is a tangible responsibility for the child welfare service, subsequent to the children’s rights. Whether the child welfare is effectuating protection from abuse and neglect or is supporting the parent in their parenting, the cultural background is a basic human right that must be taken into account. Child welfare as protective, normally functioning in holding a child away from their biological parent, needs to be done in such a way that children maintain contact with their cultural group. Helping, which is the main role of child welfare as the supporting parent, has to follow cultural traits familiar to the children and their families. Working with children from minorities demands a cultural perception. If not, the effort that is done to help, support or protect the child might make it harder for children to enjoy their cultural background. The contribution from child welfare might be meant to suit the children, but may actually drive them away from their known context and toward an unfamiliar milieu.

This is not a biological statement, where children only can be helped in the surroundings of origin of their cultural group. It is a social perspective, where the child’s world is understood as the world with which it is acquainted. As such, it is a contextual perspective, where familiarity is important (Saus 2004). The child must be able to recognize some important frames in ways of organized living, to gain the most from efforts outlined to help or protect. Cultural background is subsequently understood as the child’s context, not the cultural group’s roots. The child’s language, the child’s religious environment, and the child’s well-known norms, beliefs and patterns of social interaction must be the base for what is understood as cultural background. However, in most cases, the child’s context would be recognized as the world of their cultural group. Notice the stress placed on children’s individual situations. For the child welfare services, children’s rights have the practical consequence that the children and the families’ frames of reference must be stressed (Saus 2008). However, in addition, human rights have acknowledged the rights of groups, not only individual rights, and in doing so, have also invoked an anthropological approach (Messer 1993). The Vienna declaration from 1993 emphasized cultural and historical differences, making group rights possible as a consequence of human rights (Harris-Short 2003). The significance of national and regional variation in this declaration made it difficult for States to use the human rights as a tool to assimilate minorities.
This does not mean that the ethnic group does not have any interests. Two aspects make ethnic groups worthy of the attention of the child welfare system. First is the fact that most indigenous and minority children are a part of ethnic groups that share some important cultural references. If they share an environment and settlement, they often also share context. Cultural perspective then normally will imply cultural knowledge. Secondly, children’s rights are part of the paradigm that welcomes diversity. The phrasing “to maintain contact and enjoy” gives direction toward the privileges of learning from and developing within the cultural group. This must be understood as the privilege to mature and heal in circumstances that allow children to indulge in the identity driven from their cultural backgrounds (Saus 2004). Subsequently, the group becomes more important. For humanity, this has to do with the maintenance of a multi-cultural society, and the value of variation. For child welfare and child protection, it means that the group of origin is of importance. An intervention cannot solely stress the child’s psychological and somatic needs; in addition, it has to be adjusted to the cultural context. The culture of the child and the child’s family is of importance.

**Cultural context in Sami society**

Boine (2005, 2009) interviewed six Sami parents about their parenthood. She was interested in the meeting between the Sami versus the Norwegian and the traditional versus the modern, in the northern part of Norway. Focusing on gender and transition of values, she described how parents had ambitions for their children’s upbringing that were linked to positive values in the Sami tradition. It was considered important that the sons **BIRGET** (cope, manage their economy and function socially), **BIRGEHALLAT** (manage in cooperation with others), and **GULAHALLAT** (gain the ability to understand and listen to others).

Fathers communicated **BALDDALAGAID** to their sons, as a side-by-side communication rather than an eye-to-eye talk. Using ordinary activities, such as standard tasks, breaks, watching television, or driving cars, they start a dialog with their sons without forcing them to have eye-contact. The guiding is indirect, and the aim is the child’s autonomy. When acting, the son is expected to have considered alternatives, and by that to maintain autonomy and discover his limits. **Birget, birgehallat, gulahallat, and bálddalagais** is Sámi world, not understood by Norwegians speakers, and has no clear translation neither into Norwegian or English.
The contribution given by such a description of the ambition these parents have in raising the boys, is that we can see the values behind the social relationship that the parents build with their children. These values are not only essential in the traditional Sami society, but are highly efficient in the diversity of choices and manifold of contexts characterising the society of today, she stresses (Boine 2009).

Boine (2007, 2008) has highlighted how these findings have pedagogic implications that challenge the strong impact that direct guiding and eye-contact has on teaching. The description has the quality of exemplifying how cultural context in Sami society is a philosophy that influences the social engagement between generations, the values, and ways of communicating. Hart has done somehow the same in Canada, where he describe how child welfare can learn from Aboriginal helping approaches (Hart 1996, Hart 1999, Hart 2001). Both of them are stressing the need of understanding the variety within the minority society. But acknowledging the understanding and respect of Aboriginal practice, they give a distinctive social pedagogic point. Drawing knowledge from these kinds of practice when outlining pedagogic frames will make the school more familiar to the minority children. Moreover, social work and child welfare will interrelate with the family more frequently if knowledge from the family’s context is integrated. The quality of assessment increases when implementing the contextual knowledge.

**Quality of effort in working with children**

Cultural competence might be a deed of necessity. It is necessary to be able to meet the criteria in all of the paragraphs regarding children’s rights. Consideration of what is good practice within the professional field requires cultural competence (Welbourne 2002). The Convention, as a whole, has to do with human rights also being for children. They have made it in such a way that the general human rights applies to children and especially their position as dependents of grownups. Familiar environments and taking culture and tradition into account are parts of the preamble of the agreement. To implement a practice in the child welfare service that is responsible towards children’s rights is only possible if a cultural perspective is a part of that attempt (Saus 2004).

The act of implementing cultural perspective in child welfare will benefit children as a user group. The quality of effort is a question that strongly involves the legitimacy of the child welfare action. If intervention does not make the situation better, then the child welfare service can argue to transfer it.
Consequently, quality of efforts is an overly important aspect for child welfare. Cultural orientation will raise the quality of intervention given to the minority or indigenous children, because it will suit their context better (McPhatter 1997, McPhatter et al. 2003, Nash 1999).

Quality of effort, however, depends on both the opportunity to learn what to do to meet the standard, and the possibility to evaluate what has been done. There are no ways to address the aspect of quality if the values that are asked for are not accessible for others. Some kind of instruction is essential in order to be able to transfer the recommended practice. For this reason, evaluation is a basic element, because the recommendations must lean on knowledge of what works and what does not. Additional evaluation is a key element in the quality of effort, as it allows validation that the standard outlined is in agreement with the aim that caused the intervention.

Cultural competence as a concept needs to be articulated so that the needs of learning guidance and evaluation are achievable. This is the main reason that the well intentioned and more common request of sensitivity is not acceptable. Sensitivity is not enough, because it lacks the practical element that learning and evaluation demand (Saas 2008). As an attitude, sensitivity is important and fundamental to cultural competence, but it is not sufficient. Behavior arising from a sensitive and respectful attitude is just as important in ensuring the quality of effort. To guarantee a culturally adopted service, the child welfare has to do something (Saas 2006). This activity must be led by some general advice, or some kind of guidance as to how to achieve a cultural perspective.

**Trapped in the squeeze between standardization and sensitivity**

The child welfare service cannot fulfill these actions without standardizing competence in how to make cultural adjustments when intervening. This might lead to the thought to invoke stricter rules and standardization by following pre-described guidelines and step-by-step manuals. Actually, standardization in cultural competence is instead a request for consistency in the theoretical and practical model on how to precede in cases that concern minority and indigenous families and their children (Saas 2008). Rather than following unbendable principles, it requires skills on how to adjust and amend the intervention according to the context.

The culturally oriented practice seems to be trapped in a squeeze between standardization and sensitivity. On the one hand, cultural competence is only
possible with sensitivity towards contexts. At the same time, it needs some standards to guide the teaching on how to carry it out, and for the evaluation to qualify the work. This might appear as a trap, a squeeze that does not give the cultural perspective any chance to meet the criteria of consistency.

By viewing this as a practical dimension, the inconsistency evaporates. Child welfare is, as a social service, obliged to act. Taking action is the only way a society might justify having a department that protects and helps children in need. Of course, the opposite scenario, that child welfare should not act, not take action or not operate, is bizarre. If child welfare workers were to only need to understand, not act according to their understanding, it would be impossible to preserve child welfare as a department. It would be of no use to only know of children’s situation of neglect and abuse, if that knowledge was not followed by interventions. Child welfare is a truly practical department, a service that has to handle the situations that are presented. This also holds for the cultural perception. Cultural orientation of child welfare is deeply connected to the child welfare agency’s ability to do something. The “operationalization” of cultural competence is a done by making a connection between the sensitivity as a fundamental attitude and the need for standardization. This is what comprises the quality of assessment.

**Cultural perspective without a practical dimension**

Being a new challenge for child welfare, cultural perspective has been met with confusion. Is cultural competence in practice analogous to knowledge of culturally distinct groups? Cultural perspective cannot be viewed as simply knowing all of the different cultures the client represents. However, this has been the main criterion of competence. Cultural competence is, however, actually a call for activity. This lack of a practical dimension in cultural perspective is caused by an apprehension of being accused of relativism.

Fear of advising a practice that is culturally relativistic has been widespread. Sensitivity and respect have been the dominating phrases when discussing cultural perspective, to avoid the suspicion of relativism. Cultural relativism occurs when cultures are viewed as islands, independent and rooted in the common origin of a group of people. Cultures are only to be valued by their own standards, and a valuation has to be relative to the groups’ own standard. It also has a tendency to a non-intervention because the child welfare finds it hard to distinguises “abuse and neglect” from “cultural practice” (Barn 2007). Researchers therefore hesitate to articulate anything that reminiscent of cultural relativism.
Not knowing what cultural perspective actually involves, and what the knowledge behind it is, the wavering towards relativism takes the unfortunate turn to lock out the behavioral aspects of the cultural perspective. In Scandinavia, this challenge has been met with a redrawn attitude. Due to the academic demolition of the view of culture as an origin, acknowledging of differences is solely sensitivity and respectfulness. Chan and Elliott (2002) have emphasized the need for professionals to grasp the transcendental cultural variation, because studies show that the professional’s attitude is a reflection of their own culture instead of children’s rights. Barn (2007) suggests understanding cultural sensitivity with in the context of power dimension. Both of them are moving towards a flexible and dynamically perspective when incorporating cultural perspective in the child welfare.

There are several reasons for lack of inclusion of practical aspects in the cultural perspective. In Scandinavia, the realization of being a multicultural society is rather new. The social democracy was based on an equality ideology, where equality was seen as likeness, as in being the same. Later, this was criticized for being a undermining the respect for differences (Gullestad 2002). This affected the way that indigenous people and the regional minorities were treated in Scandinavia in the social services (Jernsletten 1996, Olsson & Lewis 1995, Saus 2004). In addition, the number of immigrants has been somewhat low and the restrictive politics towards immigration has held the problem, or at least the visibility of the problems, on a low scale.

**Cultural safety**

One essential aspect when outlining the concept of cultural competence as a practical model is concerned with the environment that it is used. We cannot make a cultural competence that works, if the atmosphere does not welcome it. Such an environment is refered to as Cultural Safety, a label conceptualizing how free the workers and clients feel to express their own cultural identity (Zon et al. 2004). Cultural safety, as a concept, draws attention towards the experiences of minorities and to how the power relationship creates contexts. Cultural orientation will fall flat if these surroundings are not prepared or adjusted towards a decolonizing discourse. This, however, does not mean that having a good attitude, paying the minority respect, is enough. Neither cultural sensitivity nor cultural safety has the capacity to fulfill cultural perspective. Those ambitions cannot be the base for a practice that is indisputably taking into account cultural differences and acting
accordingly. In addition, outlining practical consequences is necessary (McPatter 1997). Cultural safety is a crucial part of the environment (Zon et al. 2004).

Today, Scandinavia is in much the same situation. The cultural aspect is acknowledged as a required perspective, but how this might be implemented in child welfare is vague (Saus 2004). The advocacy is still asking for cultural sensitivity and a respectful attitude, without actually outlining how this might be done in practical work. Leaning only on attitude and respectful approaches, the minority experience is neglected. Discussing cultural tension, Miu (2008) draws attention to minority social workers’ feelings. The cultural tension for frontline social workers is a major challenge, and calls for reflexivity in the theoretical development in the field (Miu 2008). The contextual perspective, outlined in four textbooks by Saus in 2006, demonstrates a theoretical reflexivity. Connecting a link between theoretical and empirical knowledge of Sami society, child welfare workers are advised to use contextual understanding as a base in their work. A model where every part of child welfare work is integrated, and contextual understanding is included in these parts, is a model that prepares for an atmosphere for cultural safety to exist.

The concept of cultural competence

The concept of cultural knowledge was developed in the field of physical health. The concept has to do with the ability to provide culturally congruent service (Weaver 2004). In the physical health services, the need for some clear advice on how to implement cultural perspective into practical work has been acknowledged. A definition of cultural perspective was needed (Sherraden & Segal 1996), as cultural perception was illegible and the activity following this perception was blurred. In addition, there was a tendency to mean well, but to act disrespectfully (Garcia and Van Soest 2000, Williams 2005). Establishing a frame for practice was desirable and the concept of cultural competence required some outlining. The aim was to draw attention to what had to be done, rather than to recommend vague ways of being sensitive, aware, and conscious of cultural differences (McPhatter 1997). This attitude was considered necessary, but incomplete.

The concept of cultural competence includes more than cultural sensitivity and safety. Three components are essential for cultural competence: values/attitude, knowledge, and skills (Weaver 2004). The problem with only stressing the first part, values and attitudes, is that it does not activate any behavioral imperatives (Saus 2008). There is no required knowledge, and no actions that can be
delineated. This makes it nonviable to actually teach students or new employers what they should do when using cultural perspective. It also makes it impossible to evaluate what has been done. How can you evaluate someone’s attitude or values? The children’s rights are therefore in the hands of the workers’ best intentions. This might be satisfactory, but it could also be not satisfactory. The child welfare workers only can rely on themselves, their own values, when carrying out the cultural perspective. Later in the process, there is no way that the outsiders, that being the clients themselves, their families, or advocates, can evaluate what has been done regarding the cultural aspects of the case. Not even the co-workers of the child welfare workers, or the leadership of the child welfare service, can evaluate another worker’s form of implementing cultural perspective. This is actually a lack of quality of assessment of justice granted by the children’s rights.

**The triangular model of cultural competence**

A model of cultural competence (Figure 1) can be drawn in the form of a triangle that is divided into three, each representing a level of importance (McPhatter 2007, Saus 2006, Saus 2008).

![Fig. 1. A model of cultural competence.](image)

Level 3: Behavior

Level 2: Knowledge

Level 1: Sensitivity
All three levels contain a significant part of culture competence, which is only fulfilled when all levels are activated. The ground level is the beginning, and the essential fundamental necessary to begin to implement this competence. In contradiction to what many Scandinavian child welfare workers think, this is not enough. The competence is also dependent on knowledge and behavior to be classified as competence. Therefore, the understanding that is highlighted in level two, and the know-how at level three, are just as important.

Level 1: Sensitivity. This level is about conscience. It is the level of attitude and respectfulness, and mostly referred to as sensitivity. The child welfare workers are occupying themselves with the question on how to meet people in a respectful way. Consideration of the culture is a key at this level. They direct the attention towards cultural phenomena and awareness of these. The ambition is to meet people with dignity. Important as it is, the attitude on this level has been the dominant interest. Nevertheless, it is not enough simply to outline a stable and usable working plan to address cultural matters in child welfare. Uniting both understanding and skills is also important.

Level 2: Knowledge. The second level addresses knowledge. Attention is directed towards both formal and informal knowledge and facts. It is a theoretical level. What the child welfare worker needs to know is addressed. The question is what they need to know to be able to put the respectful and sensitive attitude into practice in a way that maintains the dignity of the child and the child’s family. Even more, the knowledge has to be suitable to synthesize the aim to give respect to the cultural background and to perceive how it might be an important part of the intervention. The theories have to be helpful for the child welfare workers to recognize how part of the situation can be understood in the light of the cultural context.

Asking for knowledge does not mean knowledge of every single culture, but theories that make the child welfare workers able to consider the child’s culture. Knowledge through theory and empirical knowledge is what is needed. The aim is to be accomplished with tools that give insight into cultural processes in society. Facts and specific details about cultural groups are knowledge that qualifies the child welfare workers, but is not the only significant component in this level. For example, in Boine’s (2005) research, we learn about some Sami parents’ ambitions raising their children. However, we also learn about how important values are in influencing the social interaction between generations and genders, challenging both pedagogical platforms and child welfare. In addition, her work provides information on ways to communicate that might contribute to new methods in
social work. The same position can be learned from Harts (1996, 1999, 2002) work stressing the necessity to describe the indigenous peoples practice in relation to child welfare.

Level 3: Behavior. The behavioral level addresses the question of what actions the child welfare workers are to take. What is the child welfare actually going to do when carrying out cultural perspectives? This level has to do with roles. It is labeling the skills that child welfare workers need to produce child welfare that is sensitive towards cultural differences and according to insight and knowledge of important processes in a multi-cultural society. Cultural competence cannot be solely sensitivity and respect, or just contain some well-chosen theories. It has to have a strong impact on the practice. Cultural competence has to be followed by activities that translate the theories and sensitivity into behavior.

What the behavioral part of cultural perspective might be is not obvious, and gives the child welfare practitioners much to ponder. Child welfare workers often say that they feel they have to consider the culture, but nobody tells them how to do it (Saus 2004). How to make contact and collaborate with families of different cultures is a challenge, according to their considerations. Dealing with unfamiliar ways of bringing up children, communicating with children and guiding children are other challenges for child welfare workers, but mostly, child welfare is struggling with the lack of adequate methods and means when interacting with families and children having another cultural background than the majority. They require direction on the activity they are supposed to perform.

It is on this level that the knowledge of a definite culture is necessary. Whatever a worker does, it is towards someone, living somewhere. From Boine’s (2005, 2009) research, it becomes clear that the child welfare worker needs to know about the family with which they are working. Knowledge of the family and the child then has to give direction to what should be by the child welfare (Hart 1999). At a practical level, the child welfare needs to know the Indigenous families context. The knowledge gives the professionals the tools to ask the right kind of questions when considering the Child’s situation. From this insight, the child welfare might provide concerning proper and acceptable protection and care. Stressing the behavioural aspects of cultural competence demonstrate how important the focus on variety and diversity is when working with minorities. Contextual knowledge is required when doing this, because knowledge from one place may not be valid for somewhere else. Knowledge of one context does not grant knowledge of another context.
Cultural competence and education

An education program aimed at training people in cultural competence generates professionals who experience cultural safety, and by that, generates an atmosphere of cultural safety (Williams 2005). This atmosphere is established and strengthened when the education is done in a situation of familiarity, for example, within the professional’s own institution and together with others from the same profession. Cultural safety is a condition of security and acceptance toward one’s own culture (Zon et al. 2004). Swelled by this, a situation is created that fosters the ability to lead a process that enhances a higher degree of cultural competence (Williams 2005).

A process that features a higher degree of cultural competence enhances all three parts of the triangle: more reflection, more knowledge, and better skills. The educational program must premeditate all of these aspects. How can values be changed towards a more respectful attitude? Reflection and consideration that turn the attention towards culture are essential for this part. Furthermore, how to take culture into consideration is also a part of the program that enhances the ability to have values and attitudes that are sensitive towards cultural differences.

Erstad (2005) has designed a model for enhancing skills for professionals. Through reflection on their own cases, dwelling on dilemmas and paradoxes, the aim is to learn how to use reflection as a central foundation for changing practices. It challenges the concept of standardization as a rule-learning strategy, leaning towards an idea of learning through reflectional processes. As such, it has been proven promising, and the evaluation of this as an educational program gives it good credit (Hansen 2008, Nordstoga 2008). This program might be the baseline in the attempt to change attitudes in a way that allows the professionals to include cultural aspects in their reasoning, when working with their cases.

The next step is the theoretical level. What is the knowledge that is required to increase the level of cultural competence? The education has to be designed in such a way that it does not have the traditional shortcomings, such as being ethnocentric or relativistic. These diametrical positions are both capable of leading to a praxis that is well intended but racist. Even multi-cultural courses that are not based on solid knowledge might cause cultural misunderstandings, stereotyping, and negative long-term effects including anger and disrespect (Garcia & Von Soest 2000). Theories included in education will generate a base for thinking about and understanding different cultural and ethnic groups. Stressing the context, rather than cultural hegemonic strategies, has the potential to create such a base.
Education at this second level means introduction to contextual perspectives. It is not learning about every single culture that must be represented in the population, but theories that gives support to reflection on social processes concerning being a minority or in multi-cultural settings. Key elements in a contextual perspective are cultural variation, ethnic meeting, and orientation towards power. Additional contextual orientation lets the individual perception of culture be central. For child welfare, this is ideal because it is the children and their families that are the clients.

The third level stresses the behavioral aspect. Education preparing child welfare workers for this has to be oriented towards working plans and methods. Interventions that are design to match certain problems are some examples of what can be taught. Training and qualification on methods and interventions are part of educational efforts at this level. This calls for standardizations, but to avoid the trap between standardization and sensitivity, the knowledge of empirical description of different ways to organize your world is essential. The Indigenouse parents, The Native Americans, The Canadian Aborigionals, The Alaska Natives, the Maori of New Zealand, the Aborigionals of Australia and the Scandanavian/ Russian Sámis amongs others, and have some, perhaps unique, socialization strategies compared with the majority of their home region. Documentation of those practices is important, and achivements from the different regional research worth paying attention to. It is a growing body of literature on how child welfare knowledge of Indigenous practices and values (Bennett et al. 2004, Hart 1999, Red Horse et al. 2000).

Boine’s (2009) work is an example of this development. Insight into this gives a useful means when outlining pedagogical platforms in Sami regions, but it also gives a new set of reflections when working with clients. The description illustrates variation in communication with children, variation that gives child welfare a broader influence. This openness towards both standardized methods and capacity to make new ones, are important parts of cultural orientation. In this double aspiration, child welfare links itself to the children’s rights. According to children’s rights, the minority children have the privilege of the same quality of assessment as the rest of the population, and are free to enjoy their own cultural background. Education in well-designed methods and interventions, and orientation toward the individual context, is full filling these children’s rights.
Cultural competence and evaluation

The concept of cultural competence does not solely involve individual skills, but also addresses the competence of an institution or a system. Cultural perspective is not generally taken as a duty of an institution. That perspective is left to the workers as a personal responsibility. Several difficulties follow from this individualization of responsibility. For example, it makes it difficult to demand something from the service. If the service provided is not good enough, it is the person who is to blame, not the service. It is hard to get the resources needed to provide a service that holds the best quality of assessment. When it is a personal responsibility, the leadership does not get the price for excellent service. Furthermore, the one who puts in the effort needed is the one that feels the needs the most. This in all probability will be a child welfare worker from a minority. It becomes his or her own problem to solve, and often without the leaders’ active support. To create a standard to evaluate the implementation of cultural competence can enhance the process of achieving this competence (Bennett et al. 2004, Simmons et al. 2008, Weaver 2004, Williams 2005).

To make sure that culture perspective is integrated into child welfare systems, it is important to raise the responsibility to the institutional level. Cultural competence as a three part concept elevates the responsibility from the personal level to an institutional level. The first and the second levels mostly activate personal abilities, as both sensitivity and knowledge are individual qualities. In contrast, behavior challenges both the personal initiatives and the institutional potential. No child welfare workers can integrate a culturally adequate method if the institutions do not back them up. The resources needed, either personal or material, have to be granted. Training and qualification in methods have to be carried out at the level of the organization.

The quality of assessment is, in short, dependent on the raising of responsibility from a personal to an institutional level. Driven by this, one important dimension of quality of assessments is possible, which is the possibility to conduct an evaluation. To evaluate a practice that is not qualified by grants given at the institutional level is impossible. The intervention is made dependent on individual quality, and on personal interests. If a client complains, there is no response to be given, other than pointing fingers at a few child welfare workers and their personal qualities. The activity level needs to be addressed to grant the rights given by the children’s rights, because only by actually doing something, can you measure if the quality is good enough.
Conclusion

The concept of cultural competence needs to be integrated into the child welfare systems in the northern region of Europe. This is an important consequence of children’s rights. The triangular model of cultural concepts, including sensitivity, knowledge, and behavior, has several advantages. It is convenient for education and possibility for evaluation, which is the main merit. Education and evaluation are necessary to grant quality of assessment. This means implementation of cultural perspectives in child welfare challenges the education of child welfare workers. The tutorial has to be held a contextual orientation, conveying cultural safety, balancing the standardization and sensitivity in practical work. Cultural competence also requires a higher quality in the child welfare as a service, not merely a skill held by every single child welfare worker. Qualification and assessment need to be elevated both in the educational field and in the leadership of child welfare. The challenges are directed towards the institutional level, rather than towards the individual level. Practical child welfare work in the North is a cultural problem outlined as a contextual perspective that activates the three levels of competence: respectful attitude, theoretical understanding, and personal and institutional skills.
References


Children and Parents in Interaction
Social interaction and verbal communication in children

Marko Kielinen and Anneli Yliherva

In this chapter we consider social interaction and verbal communication and how they influence childhood. We have approached so-called “normality” by studying children in Northern Birth Cohorts who have difficulties in social interaction and verbal communication. Children with ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder) and ASD (Autism Spectrum Disorder), for example, have this type of difficulties.

Social interaction

Social interaction is a dynamic, changing sequence of social and communicational actions between individuals. Social interactions are events in which people attach meaning to a situation, interpret what others are meaning, and respond accordingly. Sometimes there may be personal aspects that make the social interaction situation challenging. Our senses are the most important channel with which to view social interaction. Babies are born fully equipped with all the necessary senses of sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch. Children naturally use their senses to gain information and explore the world. Every child has a unique system with which she/he perceives through her/his senses, with resulting feelings, thoughts and responses to stimuli. Kindergarten and school provide an important arena for exploring with the senses. Dance, song, drawing and painting, and time spent outdoors will activate these senses in positive ways. Explicit teaching can help children to see how the senses operate and how they are connected to interaction and learning (Kranowitz 2005).

In Northern Finland, there is a long tradition of carrying out birth cohorts. These cohorts are geographically defined population samples collected from the region covering Lapland and the Province of Oulu. The present study material consists of unselected and genetically homogenous eight-year-old children living in the area of Northern Ostrobothnia Hospital District (Mattila et al., 2007). In the epidemiological study by Mattila et al. 5,484 eight-year-old children were screened, 4,396 (80.2%) of whom were rated on the high-functioning Autism Spectrum Screening Questionnaire (ASSQ) as assessed by teachers (Ehlers et al., 1999). The ASSQ comprises 27 items rated on a 3-point scale, 0 indicating
normal, 1 some abnormality and 2 definite abnormality (Mattila et al. 2007). Social impairments and quality of friendship are included in this questionnaire (questions 11, 12, 15 and 17). These questions were analyzed for this article to evaluate social interaction and lack of friends. At primary school there is, for each class group, a main teacher who teaches the same pupils for several hours per day from one to several years. It is very common for a teacher to teach the same group for the first two years. In order to establish the reliability of teachers’ ratings, eight-year-old children were chosen, most of whom were attending the second grade and having the same teacher as in the first grade. The screening of children was carried out in 2000 by the clinician paediatrician Marja-Leena Mattila (Mattila et al. 2007). According to the analyses, the teachers reported definitive abnormality in 1.9 % of the population (n=82), and some abnormality was discovered in 10.7 % (n=471). In addition, 0.8 % (n=33) of the children had definite problems in their relationships with their classmates, and 4.2 % (n=183) of the children had some problems.

If a child is shy, it usually takes her/him more time to make contact with others. Language and body language influence the way that individuals act in different social situations. Boys and girls differ from each other. Boys usually act out and their social behavior is more physical. Girls may be more verbally active and use language more in social interactions. Traumatic experiences could also make social situations difficult or anxious. A child with Asperger’s Syndrome may have a concept of friendship that is immature and some years behind that of his or her age peers. (Attwood 2003, Baron-Cohen 2003, Frith & Happé 1999). In assessing social interaction and social reasoning skills, the teacher or educator socializes with the child. With young children, this can be achieved by playing with the child and using some toys or play equipment. In evaluation, it is important to define the degree of reciprocity – the child’s recognition and reading of social cues. These skills should be assessed in both structured and unstructured play situations with other children. The evaluation of social interaction skills and supported social interaction training will rehabilitate and help prevent the isolation from other children (Attwood 2007).

**Verbal communication**

In the modern world, well-developed verbal communication skills are important. Children start to take their communication partners into account quite early. For example, in the study by O’Neill (1996), even two-year-old children could
communicate with adults when they needed help in retrieving a toy. According to Bishop (1997), normally developing children start to utilize context as soon as they start to understand language. As age increases, children’s irrelevant answers decrease (Marinac & Ozanne 1999), and they learn to utilize and connect various specific contextual factors (Ryder & Leinonen 2003).

Overall, more research is needed on how a child uses language in different contexts, so that professionals can support parents in establishing how to communicate with their children. There are few studies concerning communication skills in Finnish children, and that is why communication skills of typically developing Finnish speaking children between three and six years of age were studied by Yliherva et al. (2009). The Children’s Communication Checklist (CCC) (Bishop & Baird 2001) was used to measure communication skills in different contexts in children between 3–16 years of age. Parents filled in the CCC during a visit at a health care center. According to our study, three-year-old children differed most in the subscales of speech, syntax and coherence from their older mates, while four-year-old children differed from six-year-olds in syntax and coherence. Coherence means how a child is able to tell logically about past and future events. In the subscale use of context, there was a clear difference between three- and six-year-old children. Use of context means the ability to comprehend and express utterances in different contexts in a relevant way. In practice, the results indicate that Finnish-speaking children start to use context in their communication when their language has developed enough to enable them to express themselves clearly.

Language skills are strongly related to later learning skills at school-age. This is why we, the adults, should pay attention to how we support our children’s language skills, including pragmatic skills (narrative skills, conversation etc.). Children with special needs (e.g. preterm children, autistic children) in particular need support in their communication. On the other hand, according to clinical experience typically developing children also need support to be able to perceive speech in their environment with an immense number of distractions. Many children are referred for further detailed evaluations because of difficulty in verbal communication that lacks any special neurological or developmental deviance. The main reason might be that the child’s environment offers too few opportunities to interact and communicate with other people.

Children with speech and language problems at the beginning of secondary school often have more behavioral problems than do children who have no problems in speech and language skills (Beitchman et al. 1996, Poikajärvi et al.)
2005). In the Northern Finland Birth Cohort Study 1986 (n=9357) the teachers reported children with difficulties in speech production and reception (n=1175) to have more behavioural (7.1 %, n=85) and emotional (3.1 %, n=37) problems (Taanila et al., 2009). The difference compared to the group with no problems in speech production and reception (n=4293) was statistically significant (p< 0.001). Especially boys belonging to the group with both speech and language problems (n=73) had behavioral problems (13.7 %, n=10). In practice, these results indicate that school-age children with problems in speech and language have also a higher risk for social exclusion.

Media, television, games, and the internet in childhood

Media are increasingly part of younger children’s environments. Television programs are being made especially for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers. Thoughtfully designed television shows used at the appropriate developmental stage can be educational. At the same time, other research shows that entertainment media can contribute to aggressive behavior, anxiety, and obesity in young children. Violent television programming has been associated with an increased risk for antisocial behavior in boys (Christakis & Zimmerman 2007). Research on violent television programs, films, videogames, and music reveals unequivocal evidence that media violence increases the likelihood of aggressive and violent behavior in both immediate and long-term contexts. Developmental science suggests that children may be most vulnerable between birth and school age to certain negative effects of media use, such as obesity, aggression, fear, and sleep disturbances. Paralleling this vulnerability is a unique responsiveness to educational programming that has been linked to both immediate and long-range educational benefits (Anderson et al. 2003).

Traditional books and stories leave room for a child’s own imagination and make it possible to deal with frightening things and thoughts in a safe way (Groebel 2001, Paik 2001). Fairy tales deal with psychological conflicts, especially those experienced during childhood. Bettelheim discussed the emotional and symbolic importance of fairy tales¹ for children, including traditional tales at one time considered too dark, such as those collected and published by the Brothers Grimm² (Bettelheim 1989).

¹. Fairy tale, see Wikipedia: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fairy_tale
It might be difficult for a child to make a distinction between a virtual and the real world without an adult’s interpretations and explanations. Thus, it is very important to be with a child and discuss how he or she has experienced the virtual world of games, films, and the internet. However, many children state that the immersion experience feels stronger when reading books than when playing games (Ermi et al. 2004). Some children’s organizations have expressed concerns about the impact of media on young children; others have underlined the educational benefits of certain media products (Attwood 2007). Media are thoroughly integrated into the fabric of life, with television, movies, videos, music, video games, and computers essential to both work and play. Recent studies indicate that even the youngest of children are using a wide variety of screen media, much more than recommended by child development professionals. (Christakis & Zimmerman 2007, Heft & Swaminathan 2002, Li & Atkins 2004, Mumme & Fernald 2003) Media influences on young children are not only strong and pervasive, but are also potentially controllable. Parents and educators can and should control their children’s media exposure in the early years.

**How to support social interaction and verbal communication?**

Language and communication develop in interaction between a child and her/his environment, mainly with parents, but also with other children. Social interaction skills have an important role in speech and language development, and they are essential for a child to be able to understand and learn her/his mother tongue. Important points in language development are also joint attention, which means a child’s ability to share her/his interests with another person, parent, or friend. (Lord et al. 2000). For example if a small child wants to show something in her/his environment, it is important that a grown-up shares that interest and responds somehow to the child to confirm that he/she has noticed. In addition, we adults should also listen to small children acquiring language and discuss with them from an early age, even though a child’s capacity to speak or understand is limited. We should remember that interaction is reciprocal in nature (Yliherva 2002). Interaction also includes nonverbal features such as smiling, eye contact, facial expressions, gestures, and movements.

Recently, the role of the environment and its crucial effect on language development has been emphasized, and in speech and language therapy, for example, it has become essential. If a child learns language in connection with the environment, why should we perform interventions separately and individually in
clinical settings instead of acting in the child’s everyday environment? (see e.g. Yliherva, in press). Of course, a child may need individual treatment many times, but the environment should also be taken into account (e.g. home incl. parents, siblings, day care centre, school etc.). It is very important for us as adults to listen to children’s initiatives carefully, in order to build a real contact with them, and listening is specifically important in interpreting other’s messages in communication. For example, Manolson (1992) presents three further basic elements in communication between an adult and a child: Observe, Wait, and Listen. All are simple things to say, but many times difficult to follow in reality.

The following could be considered as a top ten-list on how to start to observe one’s own communication with a child (based on Duchan 1995, rewritten by Yliherva 2002):

- Look into the child’s eyes when speaking to her/him
- Take the child with you to activities, even though she/he is not yet able to participate
- Offer choices to the child
- Involve the child in decision-making
- Enjoy spending time with the child
- Speak to the child with age appropriate language
- Interpret problem behavior in a positive way
- Speak with the child from the same level (e.g. sitting on the floor)
- Do not speak about the child to other persons when she/he is present
- Do not think that all problem behavior is caused by the child

Friends and social respect are important for everybody. Children are having fun, socializing, and they want to be included in social activities to experience the enjoyment of their peers. Legitimate peripheral participation (LPP) gives the individual a good atmosphere for learning and social connections (Wenger & Leve 1991). The desire to make social contacts is essential for a child to construct her or his own self (Kozulin 2003, Vygotsky 1999). Usually the child has to try different strategies in order to estimate proper and accepted social manners. If there are some problems in strategies, or if there is only one way in use, we might see very dramatic happenings. Sometimes, we see only the result of the social behavior and we also judge the child from that point of view. However, we might miss the facts
behind the child’s behavior. The child can become aware of being perceived as different by his or her peers, giving rise to adjustment and compensation strategies like depression, escaping into imagination, ignoring, avoiding, aggression, or making jokes.

If you treat an individual as he is, he will stay as he is. But if you treat him as if he were what he ought to be, he will become what he ought to be and could be. – Goethe

To support friendships, children and adolescents sometimes need an adult consultant. Friendship can be achieved by identifying a child’s friends, the quality, stability and maturity of the friendships, and his or her thoughts regarding the attributes of friendships. The process could be reinforced by using some simple questions and conversations with a child. Mapping friendship with a child or adolescent can be done with this simple model:

**Circle, underline or write what is true.**

- I do have friends
- I do not have friends
- I want to have a friend
- I do not want a friend
- I have one friend. My friend’s name is ____________________
- I have many friends. Their names are: ______________________________________________________

These are the things that I like to do with a friend:

1. ______________________________________________________________
2. ______________________________________________________________
3. ______________________________________________________________
4. ______________________________________________________________
5. ______________________________________________________________
6. ______________________________________________________________
There are lots of advantages in having friends and social contacts. Children without friends might be at risk for later difficulties and delays in social and emotional development, low self-esteem, and development of anxiety or depression (Hay et al. 2004). Of course, the advantages also depend on the quality of the friends. Antisocial or criminal friends might also be very harmful to weak individuals.

Cooperative learning is individual accountability, which exists when the performance of individual pupils is assessed. In a group situation the results are given back to the individual and the group, and a pupil is held responsible by group mates for contributing her or his fair share to the group’s success. It is important that the group knows who needs more assistance, support, and encouragement in completing the assignment. It is also important that group members know that they cannot “hitchhike” on the work of others. When it is difficult to identify members' contributions, when members' contributions are redundant, and when members are not responsible for the final group outcome, they may be seeking a free ride (Harkins & Petty 1982, Ingham et al. 1974, Kerr & Bruun 1981, Latane et al. 1979, Moede 1927, Petty et al. 1977, Williams 1981, Williams et al. 1981). The purpose of cooperative learning groups is to make each member a stronger individual in her or his own right.

Each word is therefore already a generalization. Generalization is a verbal act of thought and reflects reality in quite another way than sensation and perception reflect it. – Vygotsky

Friends could also help a child to manage at daycare and later at school in many social and learning situations. Rubin (2002) reported that friends make improvements in problem solving. If several children are engaged together as a group in tasks, they have the benefit of different perspectives and ideas, and greater physical abilities. One child might see a solution and the group could share the idea. Learning and remembering is often more powerful in a group. The positive feedback from the group might raise the motivation and start the positive flow phenomenon, as was the case in a pilot study of three severely handicapped school age children (Aura & Pihlajamäki 2009).

By being alone and lacking friends, a child becomes vulnerable to also being teased and bullied. Having more friends can mean having fewer “enemies”. Social relationships can provide effective emotional monitoring and repair mechanism,
especially for emotions such as anxiety, anger, and depression as seen in school-age children with Asperger Syndrome (Lee & Hobson 1998). Also reciprocal communication and ability to listen to others make it easier for a child to get friends. Friends can offer guidance on what is appropriate social behavior, can help to develop self-image and self-confidence, and can act as personal supervisors and supporters. Development with others throughout childhood is essential in managing adulthood (Hay et al. 2004).

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have discussed about social interaction and verbal communication, and their significance for child's development, and further for child's ability to participate in her/his environment. We have concluded that friends are important resources for child to develop and educators’ active role is essential in supporting children to create friendships. We have also dissected so called normal development through a range of studies. Most of those studies enlarge our comprehension of child’s development. We have concluded that understanding the essence of childhood, and particularly child’s activities as a living, experiencing and human being becomes understandable through dissimilarity.
References


["Piikkikantasista hipaksiin” – child’s language development and how to support it].


Discussing children’s participation

Anu Alanko

The year 2009 marks a significant event in the history of children’s rights; 20 years have passed since the introduction of the United Nation’s Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). This international treaty is the most ratified human rights treaty in history: only Somalia and United States have yet to ratify the convention. The Convention’s 54 articles can be summarized into three categories, known as the three Ps: Provision, Protection and Participation. The latter is the thread of this article. (Unicef 2008.)

Children’s participation lies at the center of my dissertation. I am especially interested about what kind of participation possibilities there are for children and young people in promoting their own ideas and opinions in their everyday lives, but also in wider societal contexts. The central context of my research is the youth participation model that has been developed in Oulu and which was executed starting in 2006. Children – age 9 to 18 – are the key informants of my research and their own experiences within the youth participation model are at the center of my research. I will also review how the CRC, national legislation, and policy programs are promoting children’s possibilities for participation. Another central theme in the research is the pedagogical nature of participation: how can adults enhance children’s participation?

In this chapter, I will address the idea of participation, mostly on a theoretical level. First, I will discuss the concept of participation: how to translate the concept from theory into practice and what kind of features does it bear in relation to children? I will also discuss the changing nature of childhood in the postmodern world. I will argue that these changes also reflect the more general structural and social changes in our society, which in turn also emphasize the participation of the citizens. I will also examine the grounds for children’s and young people’s participation and I will look into this on the basis of the national legislation and policy programs that are promoting citizen’s possibilities for participating and influencing our society. At the end of my chapter, I will introduce the model of children’s participation in the city of Oulu.

The term “children” is used in this chapter to refer to all of those who are under the age of 18, which is also used by the United Nation’s Convention on the Rights of the Child.
Defining participation

For many, participation and democracy seem to be nearly equivalent to each other. Indeed, for the ancient Greeks, who formulated the idea of democracy, participation of the citizens (although meaning male property owners) was the key feature of societal life (Qvortrup 2007). However, Della Porta states (2000) that we have learned to consider a nation a democracy even if the exercise of power – the politics – happens far away from the lives of the ordinary people (Della Porta 2000). Della Porta talks about representative democracy, in which the citizens are secured with basic rights by law. Citizens possess the right to vote for those who make the “real” decisions in society. Citizens’ participation possibilities beyond voting are scarce and, to some extent, even undesired. (Cohen 1971, Laine 1993.) The converse situation is one in which democracy is perceived as participatory and direct. In this view, voting is one means by which the citizens can participate and influence society. Although the political system with its citizen-chosen representatives is regarded as an essential part of the democratic system, this is yet insufficient; citizens need to be able to participate and influence the decisions made in society, but also to be involved in the execution of these decisions. (Laine 1993.)

Theoretical discussion on participation

Human beings are social creatures; we live in interaction with other human beings. Thus, participation can be viewed as a fundamental feature of human behavior. To lead one’s life without some degree of participation is a mere impossibility. Our everyday lives occur both in private and public spheres of life; that is, at home and its immediate surroundings, but also at school, in workplaces, and in wider societal contexts. In the ongoing research, participation is viewed as a human activity that can take place in both spheres of our life, although the public sphere is emphasized. Participation is regarded as a feature of an active citizen who is able to participate in for instance planning, preparation, and decision making in his/her immediate surroundings, but also in wider societal contexts.

Hanhivaara (2006) states that participation is essentially a question of community: it means participating in a group, in a community, or in society. For her, participation always refers both to a person and to the social context; it is a question of a person’s experience, which cannot develop without the existence of
the social. The feeling of being part of something is generated through participating in significant and meaningful action. (Hanhivaara 2006.)

One of the popular definitions of participation was formulated by Arnstein in 1969, when she stated that participation means the redistribution of power that enables the have-not citizens, presently excluded from the political and economic processes, to be deliberately included in the future. Arnstein also created the “ladder of citizen participation”, which has since been adopted by other researchers in defining the levels of participation (see Hart 1992, Horelli 1994). According to Arnstein (1969), the ladder is to help in analyzing participation and its eight rungs correspond to the extent of citizen’s power. The two lower rungs describe non-participation; the main purpose is to educate and cure people, not to empower them to participate. From the third rung until the fifth rung, Arnstein talks about tokenism, in which people might be heard but there is no assurance that the prevailing order of things would change or that people’s opinions would have any effect in decision-making. From the sixth rung onwards, there is citizen power, which, according to Arnstein, means increasing degrees of decision-making clout. (Arnstein 1969.) Horelli and Kukkonen (2002) note that these ladders move from one-way (and even non-) participation towards the means of direct democracy and eventually to participation that also has an effect in decision-making.

For Hart (1992: 5), participation refers to

- the process of sharing decisions which affect one’s life and the life of the community in which one lives. It is the means by which a democracy is built and it is a standard against which democracies should be measured. Participation is the fundamental right of citizenship.

Hart (1992) continues with the idea that children’s participation is a contradictory matter. For some, children are seen as incompetent to formulate their own opinions and to take part in decision-making. For others, children are viewed as social agents who have all the potential to take part in societal life beyond their traditional roles.

Laakso (2006) reminds that participation can happen through more formal channels of political life (political parties, councils and committees, associations and organizations and youth councils and student bodies), in which the work is normally very persistent by nature. Besides these, there is also growing interest in ways of participating beyond formal politics. This kind of participation seems to be especially favored by the younger generation: individual lifestyle choices, boycotts, demonstrations, and direct contact with the decision-makers are some
examples of these new ways to participate in late modern society. (see Lundbom 2007, Stranius 2009.)

Should the concept of participation be defined differently in relation to children? Thomas (2002) defines six elements that construct participation: 1) the possibility to choose to participate; 2) the possibility to get information about the situation and the rights that one has; 3) the possibility to influence the decision-making process; 4) the possibility to express one’s views and opinions; 5) the possibility to get support and help in participation; and 6) the possibility to make independent decisions (Thomas 2002: 175–176). Satka (2005) follows along the same lines and states that participation in relation to children means that equal possibilities for participation are validated and that, like adults, children are also guaranteed the possibility of active citizenship. Children’s natural environments (e.g. schools, youth houses, contexts of peer cultures) are crucial in promoting participation possibilities (see Suutarinen 2006). When talking about participation in relation to the younger generation, we need to acknowledge the fact that it is fundamentally also a pedagogical process. We cannot expect that children are born with the abilities for active citizenship, but instead they need to learn them by practice. As Hart (1992: 5) puts it:

Children need to be involved in meaningful projects with adults. It is unrealistic to expect them suddenly to become responsible, participating adult citizens at the age of 16, 18, or 21 without prior exposure to the skills and responsibilities involved. An understanding of democratic participation and the confidence and competence to participate can only be acquired gradually through practice; it cannot be taught as an abstraction.

**Children’s own views on participation**

In my own research, I have asked children what “participation” means to them. As the question was addressed to ninth graders during their school day, the answers mainly related to the participation in the school context. There were several definitions that were rather abstract, without any practical example of how participation might appear in life.

Participation means that you are together with others and influencing means change.

You can suggest improvements, you can complain and student’s opinions are taken into account.
That you express your opinion in relation to some issue and then you also take part in trying to make it successful.

It means that you are either with the system or simply a user.

In most of the answers, young people gave also practical examples of the way that participation should happen in the school or elsewhere. Essentially, this meant taking part in the events organized by the school. According to many young people, participation also simply meant that you take part in the lessons and show up at school.

Participation means that you participate voluntarily in the events that are organized at school. To participate means that you take part in the event. To influence means that you make decisions and that you want to tell your own opinion, to be part of something.

You can take part in various things at school but also in your living environment.

I attend the lessons and take part in voting and I also tell things to our class representative of the student body.

Mainly it means being a member in the student body. Of course it can also mean that in the beginning of the new course you take part in the discussion about the course content (optional subjects).

For the majority, participation meant that you can share your opinion with others and that your own opinion is respected and heeded. It also meant that students’ opinions have an effect on decision-making. Although student bodies are now getting more common in Finnish schools, in some of the answers it was regarded as the best place to participate and to share opinions. Only in few answers was participation seen as something unrealistic and absent in their school.

**Discussing childhood**

Children’s participation has been under public discussion and of political interest for some time now. Suggesting that children have a role of an active citizen is somewhat new in postmodern society and for this reason it is important to reflect on the preconceptions we have on childhood nowadays. Granting children status of active social agents can be seen as one reason for promoting their participation
possibilities beyond their traditional arenas of action (e.g. family, school, and peer cultures).

Probably the most famous historical account on childhood is that of French social historian Philippe Ariès’s (1962: 128), who presented his contested claim:

In medieval society, the idea of childhood did not exist; this is not to suggest that children were neglected, forsaken or despised. The idea of childhood is not to be confused with affection for children: it corresponds to an awareness of the particular nature of childhood, that particular nature which distinguishes the child from the adult, even the young adult. In medieval society, this awareness was lacking.

In medieval society, children were viewed as miniature adults who, as soon as they were capable, attended the societal life alongside the adult population. Only slowly during the 16th century did childhood – closer to our present day comprehension – come to be acknowledged. Children were seen as sweet and innocent and they became objects of adult interest, care, and even amusement. From 16th century onwards to the 18th century, ideas about children’s evilness and lack of competence began to gain more ground. This meant that children were in need of guidance and discipline in order to reach their full potential as human beings. Seeing children as naturally good and innocent arose in the private sphere of family, while the evil and incompetent view of children was mainly a product of moralists and pedagogues of the time, from which they later on were adopted into family lives. (Ariès 1962)

Alanen et al. (1990) makes an interesting note in relation to Ariès’s account; the history of childhood appears as a history of recession. Ariés (1962) addresses the same point in his work: the church, the family, the moralists, and the administrators abrogated the freedom from children they had so far enjoyed among the adult population. In relation to participation, is the circle simply closing and we are returning to something that is actually nothing new? Children were once regarded as competent and capable, but over the course of time, their place in society has been marginalized.

Scientific interest towards children arose during the 19th and 20th centuries. General views on childhood are mainly constructed through traditional child sciences, such as developmental psychology, pediatrics and pedagogy. Within medicine, children diseases were defined as their own specialty and as the 20th century arose, standards for children’s normal development were introduced. The
focus from the children’s diseases moved towards defining who is a normal child and how the normal child develops. (Prout 2005.)

The most influential science to define and construct childhood has been developmental psychology, which still today forms the basis for our knowledge about childhood. The first significant texts in developmental psychology were introduced at the end of the 19th century and ever since, it has affected the research on childhood. (Archard 1991.) Even though developmental psychology entails a variety of competing theories about child development, these share some basic ideas (Prout 2005). Archard has listed these similarities and states that, firstly, they are teleological in the sense that they all view development as something that has an endpoint. In relation to children, this means that the culmination of development is adulthood. Secondly, these theories view development as something that proceeds gradually. In order to move to a next stage, a child needs to overcome the previous one. Another related feature is that these stages are regarded as universal; every child goes through these stages even though there might be some individual differences. Fourth, Archard notes that these theories entail the idea of development being something intrinsic for human beings. (Archard 1991.)

Childhood has been mainly viewed as something incomplete that needs adult intervention in order for children to reach their full potential. Although this incompetence is seen as biological immaturity, which in time will give place to full potential of adulthood, the idea of socialization and education exist; children will not develop only by themselves but in connection with other people. This is the task of the adult population, which has the competence and the knowledge to survive in life. Within sociology, the concept of socialization became contested in the 1980s; scholars felt that children’s lives are also something other than mere socialization, becoming, and growing up. Children’s lives are worth researching in their own right and not simply through developmental terms. Children are beings and active agents of their own lives right now and not interesting only as potential future adults. This new perspective on childhood and on children lives has aroused wide interest in research; children are no longer researched marginally or in relation to traditional categories such as the school or the family. For example, peer cultures or children’s own experiences and thoughts about their lives are at the core of the present day research (see Alanen 1988, 1992, Corsaro 2005, Jenks 1996, Lee 2001, Prout 2005, Wyness 2006).

In the 21st century, many traditional structures in society have collapsed and this has also affected childhood and the lives of the children in ways that may not
even be yet totally recognized. Prout (2005) mentions that there are several features that are influencing the childhood in western societies at the moment. First, he refers to demographic features: there is a general decline in the birth rate, an increase in life expectancy, and an ageing population. This leads to a question of resource allocation; when the number of the elderly exceeds that of the children, the social resources may get scarcer for the latter. Secondly, life circumstances are differentiated; alongside the nuclear family, new types of families have emerged, the numbers of marriages is declining while the number of divorces is growing. According to OECD data, child poverty and increasing income inequality between children seems to be a reality. (Prout 2005.)

The third feature relates to globalization and to the idea of the nation state. A majority of societies are no longer closed entities but face a growing flow of people, information, and products across national borders. Children in society are often the first ones in their families to face ethnic minorities through schools and free time activities. We are said to live in an information society, which means, among other things, that our lives are occupied by a variety of technological apparatuses and that knowledge can be found in a fraction of a second. Children are as much affected by this as are adults, maybe even more so. The asymmetry that has said to prevail between children and adults seem to lose some ground when we discuss, for example, children’s abilities to use new technological devices (Prout 2005).

The fourth feature concerns the special nature that childhood has been given during the last century. Children were removed from the public sphere to the private sphere of life; that is, nurseries, schools and the family life. Childhood became highly institutionalized and supervised and nowhere else in history had children’s lives become so highly monitored and controlled as during the 20th century. This has a lot to do with the nation’s future thinking; children were seen as potential adults who would be the ones to keep the nation running and prosperous. For this reason, it was felt that children’s lives and the material they learned at school should be closely monitored and planned. Finally, Prout refers to the demand for children’s rights and possibilities to participate in decision making which have arisen only since the end of the 20th century. This feature is somewhat in conflict with the other four, yet for Prout, this issue cannot be viewed only through rose-colored glasses. Children’s participation can become a norm in society, which in turn can create inequality among the child population. (Prout 2005.)
Demand for participation

Yet another question is why participation has become such a central issue in public discussion and in policy-making. There are many suggestions, which cannot be dealt with in detail in this chapter, yet the central one is that the status of representative democracy is deteriorating overall in western societies; people do not seem to be so keen on voting anymore and this applies especially to the younger generation. (see e.g. Maitles & Gilchrist 2005, Pohjantammi 2004, Suutarinen 2006.) This is probably the most obvious reason behind children’s participation; as Hart (1992) noted, children need to learn the skills of active citizenship in order to act as ones in future. On the basis of this lack of enthusiasm in active citizenship, there are a variety of laws and policy programs that are trying to strengthen citizen’s possibilities in participation beyond voting.

National legislation

Citizen’s participation possibilities are well represented in the Finnish legislation. In the Constitution, it is stated that everyone is equal before the law and that, without an acceptable reason, no one shall be treated differently from other persons on the ground of age, for example. Furthermore, children shall be treated equally as individuals and they shall be allowed to influence matters pertaining to them to a degree corresponding to their level of development. (Constitution 731/1999.) Besides this, in the Finnish Local Government Act, it is stated that the council shall ensure that local residents and service users have opportunities to participate in and influence their local authority’s operations (Finnish Local Government Act 365/1995). In this act, age is not explicitly pointed out, but it seems obvious that children also are a significant group of those using the services on a local level (e.g. day care, schools, youth work).

It is noteworthy that in the Land Use and Building Act children are also mentioned. In this act, it is stated that the objective in land use planning is to promote for instance a safe, healthy, pleasant, socially functional living and working environment, which provides for the need of various population groups, such as children, the elderly, and the handicapped. This happens through interactive planning and sufficient assessment of impact (Land Use and Building Act 132/1999). Environmental planning is a central area when children’s participation possibilities are historically discussed. In 1960s and 1970s, for example, architects pointed out that children should be able to participate in
planning their urban environments and playgrounds (see Lehti 1969, Periäinen 1972, Setälä 1973). At the moment, the most referenced law in relation to children’s and young people’s participation is the Youth Act.

The purpose of this Act is to support young people's growth and independence, to promote young people's active citizenship and empowerment and to improve young people's growth and living conditions. The implementation of the purpose is based on communality, solidarity, equity and equality, multiculturalism and internationalism, healthy life styles, and respect of life and the environment. (Youth Act 72/2006, 1 §.)

The eighth section in particular has significance from the point of view of participation:

Young people must be given opportunities to take part in the handling of matters concerning local and regional youth work and youth policy. Further, young people shall be heard in matters concerning them. (Youth Act 72/2006, 8 §.)

In previous sections of various laws, no specific instructions are given as to how the hearing of citizen and especially children should be executed, although in the Constitution it is noted that each citizen – 18 years old – has a right to vote in the elections (Constitution 731/1991). Yet, in many instances, the means by which the hearing will be carried out is the responsibility of the local authorities.

**National policy programs and international treaties promoting participation**

Besides national legislation, there are several policy programs in Finland that have enhanced the idea of participation among children. One of these is the Citizen Participation Policy Program 2003–2007, which aimed to reinforce the functioning of representative democracy and encourage civil participation. One of the main objectives of the program was to promote children’s development into active and discerning citizenship. In this program, schools were seen as central arenas in educating children into active and democratic citizenship. In the final report, it was stated that although the setting (e.g. legislation and curriculum) is seen as appropriate for enhancing participation, there are still many obstacles in the way: attitudes towards civic action are problematic and personal resources in participation are weak among Finnish children and young people (Finnish
The present government has started a new policy program called “Children, youth and families” in which the participation theme is a strong feature. It is stated in the program that knowledge about the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child needs to be increased among those working with children. One of the goals of the program is that the voices of children will be heard and their possibilities of exerting influence will be increased (Finnish Government 2009).

Lastly, but most importantly, the UN’s *Convention on the Rights of the Child* is a key factor in promoting the rights of those under 18 years of age. This international treaty was ratified in 1991 in Finland. The twelfth article has the most importance in relation to participation, as it states:

1. States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.

2. For this purpose, the child shall in particular be provided the opportunity to be heard in any judicial 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. (Unicef 1989.)

In the European context, there is no EU-wide legislation in the field of youth policies, but in 2002, member states decided to co-operate in enhancing the four priority areas identified in the *White Paper*. Participation and information are identified as two of the four main priorities in the youth field. This means that the member states increase young people’s participation in the civic life of their community, increase young people’s participation in the system of representative democracy, and provide greater support for various forms of learning how to participate. Co-operation means for instance that the member states share the best practices of each of these areas (European Commission 2008).

The Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities introduced the *Child Policy Strategy 2015* in 2000. The purpose of this national program was to generate in each country’s municipalities a local child policy program based on the three Ps’ of the CRC. In this program, it is stated that children should be able to participate and influence matters that affect them and their community, and that adults should be interested in their experiences. Children’s opinions should be also taken into account in decision-making. According to the Association of Finnish...
Local and Regional Authorities, in 2005, there were 162 municipalities that had either prepared, or were in the process of planning, a local child policy program. In 85 municipalities, the policy program was carried out in co-operation with a neighboring municipality, while in 34 municipalities, it was part of the wider well-being policy program (Eläköön lapset…2000) (see Alanen et al. 2004).

In light of the previous, it seems that the framework for children’s participation is mostly adequate and in order. Another question is how well children themselves are aware of the rights they possess. Furthermore, how well are these rights adopted and recognized by the adults who work with children? Probably the biggest obstacle in the younger generation’s participation is the awareness, but also the attitudes, of both the adults and the children. Preliminary findings in my own research show that children do not always realize that they are entitled by law to have a say in decision making. While starting participation groups in Oulu, children were amazed that this kind of action is possible and that they can really make a difference. Yet, there are those who think that the school and the leisure activities are enough for children and that the real decision-making should be left to adults.

**Youth participation in Oulu**

Oulu is known for its technological know-how and the large variety of educational settings. However, Oulu is also known for its resident democracy and participation. For example, there are several resident associations in the city, which have promoted the possibilities of the residents to participate and influence in local development and planning. Furthermore, in 2001, the city council approved the program for resident’s participation and influence, which had the basic message of promoting participation possibilities for all of the city’s residents in environmental and service planning and decision-making. Children’s participation was a central theme in this program (City of Oulu 2005).

In 2005, the city council requested that the Youth department construct a model of youth participation that would meet the demands required by the pending Youth Act. In Oulu, it was decided that youth participation would not be centralized; this was the idea of the youth councils that were already operating in various parts of the country. Instead, youth participation was to happen locally, which meant that 11 local participation groups were to be established in various parts of the city. The basic idea of the model is presented in the following figure.
The large circle on the right represents a residential area in Oulu. In this area, there are at least schools with grades 1–6 and probably also those with grades 7–9. In some areas, there are also upper secondary schools as well as youth houses. From each of these schools and youth houses, representatives will be selected to form a so called local participation group. Representatives will be chosen by the schools and there seems to be various ways in which this has been executed. In some schools, students have had elections and all those who are willing are able to stand as a candidate. In other instances, representatives are chosen from the student bodies. Then, there is simply a procedure of teacher’s decision; those who are voluntary and willing will join the group. Quantitatively, 3–5 representatives are chosen from each school, the youngest representatives being third graders.

The execution of the youth participation model started in the autumn of 2006, when the first two groups were established. Since then, two groups have been established every six months, finally resulting in 11 operating local participation groups in 2009 (Picture 1). At the beginning, each group participated in a two day “coaching camp”, during which all of the representatives of the specific area gathered together to get to know each other and the basics of the participation model. During the two-day camp, a lot of functional activities took place, which were to help the group formation as well as the ways in which children can participate in the city of Oulu.
After the coaching camp, the groups started to operate in their own local areas. Each group meets on average once a month to discuss issues of concern relating to their own local area or in general in Oulu. Some groups have chosen a chair, a vice-chair, and a secretary for a year’s period of time, but others have chosen them for every meeting, separately. Every group has a local youth worker attending their meetings, who also helps with the organization of the meetings; s/he informs the group’s members about the meetings and the timetable and other relevant matters. The youth worker’s role is highly important in the functioning of the group. For many children and young people, participation is something they are not used to and they will need support and guidance in order to develop their participatory skills. At best, the youth worker will strengthen their abilities to participate and speak out their opinions. Besides the youth worker, there is a so-called participation coach, who is working in the Youth department of Oulu. His main job description at the beginning of the execution of the model was to inform the schools about the model and to coach representatives in the coaching camps and later on, for instance, to act as a mediator between the groups and the officials/administrators of the city.
What can these local participation groups do in practice? So far, local participation group OiVa gave ideas as to what things their schoolyard should have (e.g. swings, climbing frames and ropeways). After planning, they made an initiative for the city council, which was accepted later on. Another group, MaNu made an initiative for the city council in order to get an ice rink for their local area, which would operate as a football field during the summer. This initiative was also accepted. Furthermore, in PoVa's initiative, the concern was to get more litter baskets in their local area, as well as bicycle stands for the schoolyard. This initiative was recognized and a promise was made to evaluate the local situation during the present year 2009. In 2007, OiVa organized a festival in their local area, during which there were various activities for families. In the evening, there were local bands performing at the school. Besides these, groups have organized summer camps in which the groups’ representatives have been able to attend. These camps have been very informal by nature; children have planned the program for the camp and the official program has been minimal. In 2008, representatives from eight different groups made a visit to the Finnish Parliament to meet with the members from the Oulu constituency and to get a glimpse of national participation and democracy procedures.

The biggest enterprise so far was the first city meeting, which was held in February 2009. Each local participation group discussed the ideas and concerns they had in their area in relation to children’s lives. After consideration and voting, one proposal was chosen for presentation at the city meeting. City council had allocated 5 000 € for the meeting, in which the delegation consisting of 35 representatives from various local participation groups voted for the proposal for which the money should be used. This year, the proposal that spoke for schools’ contentment was granted the sum of 5 000 €. In the preliminary plan, for instance, sofas and recess activities are to be purchased for the schools. Three other proposals were decided to take further to the city council; these included opinions about school food, school health care, and free snacks for longer schooldays. Furthermore, a declaration for the city council was made concerning the public transport in Oulu. Local participation groups felt that the cost of bus fare was too expensive for those under 17 years.

At the moment, the youth participation model is moving into a next phase. The oldest representatives in local participation groups have shown an interest in forming a centralized participation group for those studying in upper secondary schools, as well as in vocational schools. On the basis of conversations, young
people see that the age difference is too wide and the interests of 9–15 year olds differ from those of the older ones.

Lastly, preliminary observations, questionnaires, and informal conversations with the group members show that the model of participation functions relatively well. Children seem to be eager to participate and to voice their opinions. In the following, some quotes of these 9–18 year old members of local participation groups are presented:

I think it is good that we are listened at. It is good that we can influence the matters in our own area that are mostly directed at children and young people.

We haven’t influenced that much in practice yet. But I believe that in future we will. It would be nice to influence matters that concern young people now that we have a possibility for that. It is good that this possibility exists, that is if we really can influence something.

Young people are irresponsible. No more responsibility is needed. Adults have the experience; children should be able to grow up in peace. Young people have other things to worry about. Young people are children too. Young people ought to concentrate on the school.

I think it is nice to be in the local participation group. There are nice people in our group. Good thing is that one learns to work with people of varying ages. Sometimes in the camps the older ones don’t notice the younger ones.

The above quotes were collected in 2007, when there were only four groups operating. Thus, the model was still relatively new, for both the children and the adults. However, from these quotes one can already read that children have eagerly welcomed the possibility to participate. At the moment, questionnaires are being collected from each of the 11 groups and these should shed more light on how children are viewing the action. Later this year, interviews among group members are also planned.

Discussion

The purpose of this chapter was to shed light on a rather complex issue of children’s participation. Participation was dealt from the theoretical perspective, followed by some preliminary observations from the local participation groups. Furthermore, childhood as a social phenomenon was discussed in order to give some basis for why children’s participation is seen as such an important issue in
late modern society. I argue that seeing children as active social agents has strengthened the requirement for their active citizenship. Our society is facing new dilemmas, an ageing population being one of these. In my opinion, this trend results in the situation where citizens need to be “educated” to be more independent and capable in leading their lives efficiently. Developing children’s participation possibilities and introducing them to the ways in which society functions is an investment for the future.

National legislation, as well as national and international policy programs, were introduced to show how citizen’s and especially children’s possibilities for participation are secured. At the end of this chapter, one practical example of children’s participation was introduced. In the city of Oulu, local participation groups are being established in order to guarantee that children can take part in planning and decision-making in their hometown. Preliminary observations suggest that children are keen to participate; yet, in the answers so far, none of them speaks about their “right” to participate. A sense of humility and wonder is reflected in the answers: children seem to be amazed that someone is interested in their opinions. Therefore, one obstacle in the way of participation relies on the attitudes of children. Giving children a chance to take part in societal life does not mean that they are viewed as miniature adults; they are granted the possibility to influence their everyday lives. It is not only about socializing them to become future adults and citizens, but also that they can influence their lives right here and now, to act as citizens in the present situation. Yet another obstacle is the adult’s attitudes; children’s participation does not mean to undermine the adult know-how in society. We, as adults, need to understand that we possess valuable information, which we can share with the younger generation. School knowledge is transferred to children through books and tests, but the art of active citizenship is only acquired through practical training among people of varying ages.
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93


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Parent participation in early childhood education – is it a chance or a must?

Seija Järvi

What do the parents think about the day care services and what kinds of ideas do they have to improve these services? OECD’s report (2006) encourages the involvement of parents and communities in early childhood education services. According to its recommendations, the participation of parents should be provided because parental involvement contributes significantly to children’s learning and the quality of early childhood services. However, there are also other aspects in parental involvement, such as the increasing demand for active and participatory citizens who are able to choose and buy the welfare services they need. This article is based on on-going research in which the focus is parent participation in early childhood education and care (ECEC) services within the changing welfare state framework in Finland.

As parents, the intensity and diversity of communication forms during the process of day care depends, of course, on many reasons, but specifically on the level of participation and collaboration with the staff and other parents. Our preferences and needs, as well as our underlying personal characteristics and experiences, certainly affect our willingness and ability to participate. However, there is also another side, the structure and practices through which we are or are not participating in some activities. This article concerns that side in particular.

In The Finnish National Board of Education’s (FNBE 2007) vision of the learner’s perspective, participatory citizenship and sustainable development are the starting points for all operations in education systems. At the same time, the demand for evaluation at the national, regional, municipal and local levels of welfare services has increased. With the increasing need to evaluate social impacts and good practices, the demands to develop greater civil society involvement and improve the quality of public services also arise. Could and should the parents be the resource, not only for improve services and increase society’s social capital, but also to implement children’s rights as representatives of their children?

This article has three parts. The first part concerns the concept of participation and why it is now an actual issue in welfare services. The second part briefly presents the Peer interview - a method developed by Anna-Leena Vähimäki (1994) - because it is a tool to increase participation and because peer interviews are used in data collection in my study. Although it is more of a tool (to collect qualitative
data and to implement 5th generation’s evaluation) than a method, we can easily notice how well it fits into the customer-oriented and participatory citizenship approach in public strategies and welfare services. The third part of the article describes my research setting and presents some of its first results.

The necessity for parent participation

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (2005) was formulated 20 years ago. We adults have to face the question of how to realize these rights and improve the welfare of children in every day practices. We need to make sure that our children and young people have the rights to participate, exert an influence, and to be heard. The participation of small children is especially challenging because the very small children do not speak for themselves. The Finnish legislation supports the participation of children, but we need adults’ – as parents, staff and decision makers – supportive attitudes and the operational environment in welfare services to make these rights true and alive.

The Finnish National Committee on the Rights of the Child underlines that child upbringing and provision for children’s wellbeing are the foremost responsibilities of the parents. Public decisions and actions must support families in this task. Parents need the support of basic services in their parenting. They also need the communality provided by parents’ peer groups. According the committee the child, the family and the state have a tripartite relationship in which the child has rights, the parents/guardians have responsibility and the state or local authority has obligation. Parents have the primary responsibility for the upbringing and development of their children. The best interests of the child will be their basic concern (Articles 18.1, 3.1). The government must take care of the appropriate assistance to parents in the performance of their child-rearing responsibilities. The government also has to ensure the development of institutions, facilities, and services for the care of children (Article 18.2). Parents have the right to provide appropriate direction and guidance in the exercise by the child of the rights recognized in the Convention (Articles 3.2, 5, 12 and 14) According to the committee, parenthood is not sufficiently appreciated in social decision-making. The committee also outlined that in society lacks effective structures and there are insufficient resources for parenting cooperation between early childhood education and care system and parents (A Finland Fit for Children 2005).
The Finnish Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) system covers both the day care arrangements for families and the early childhood education for children (The Finnish Government’s Child and Youth Policy Program 2007–2011: 13–16). The National Curriculum Guidelines on Early Childhood Education and Care in Finland (2003) is a national tool for guiding early childhood education and care. It stresses close cooperation between parents and education professionals to ensure that the upbringing of the child constitutes a logical entity from the child’s point of view. According to the guidelines, the parents and children should be encouraged and provided to influence the unit-specific guideline drafting and to participate in its evaluation. Each child should also draw up an individual ECEC plan with the cooperation of parents and staff.

Good ECEC has been shown in international review to improve life chances of all children. It has been referred to as ‘universality’ of opportunity. (Gammage 2008.) A universal approach implies making access available to all children whose parents wish them to participate in early childhood education programs (Bennett 2008). In the Nordic countries, the emphasis of the preschool years is placed on broad developmental needs of young children, their wellbeing and motivation to learn. Early childhood institutions are also seen for the children as a forum of civil society. Parents found it important for their children to be able to attend day care and spend time interacting and forming relationships with other children and adults. Children and parents held remarkably similar views about the role of early education centers and the importance of specific activities and experiences. Their perspectives also mirrored the Nordic perspectives on early childhood education as the right of all children and society’s responsibility. (Einarsdottir 2008) In Finland, parents have a crucial role in ensuring the responsiveness of day care services to child interests and needs (OECD 2006). We are also used to including ourselves as Nordic welfare states, even though we are not always categorized among them (Greve 2007).

The child’s and parents’ interests can also differ from each other. The children do not decide if they are staying at home or going to day care. The perspectives are different because the adult is a caregiver, while the child gets the care. The quality of child services is often defined by different stakeholders, like parents, teachers, decision makers and professionals, but too rarely by the children themselves (Olk & Wintersberger 2007). The participation of children has absolutely to be considered from their own perspectives, but the participation of children is not the focus of my research. Instead, the focus is on parent participation, because although it is important to remember that young children have the right and that
they also are able to impress their opinions, if we adults just listen and create opportunities for them to participate and influence, there still will be situations and responsibilities when parents represent their children.

According the Ombudsman for Children, there has been a key aim in her job to place the welfare of children and young people high on the political agenda (Aula 2008). In recent years, the different bodies have also produced their own directions and strategies to increase children’s rights. The government of Finland has a separate child, youth, and family policy program, which includes objectives concerning the participation of children, providing information about children’s rights, and improving the information base on child welfare. The strategy requires that the service network must recognize children, young people, and their families as a diverse customer group. (The Finnish Government’s Child and Youth Policy Program.)

These aims are often also linked to larger customer-oriented approaches in public strategies and welfare services – and an aim to increase participation, empowerment and involvement of the citizens. The contemporary welfare states are challenged both ‘from above’ within globalization, Europeanization and denationalization, and ‘from below’ within citizens who have become more knowledgeable, self-confident and conscious of their rights when dealing with services and professionals. At the same time, there are trends towards individualization and the marketization of citizenship. (Johansson & Hvinden 2007.)

Bent Greve (2007) considered the Nordic welfare states, comparing them with other welfare states and under pressure from Europeanization and globalization. It seems to him that EU member states are moving in the same direction and towards a more uniform level of public sector spending and welfare services. Because of this developmental path, an adaptation and changed boundaries between state and market will be witnessed. At the same time, citizens will continue to expect and demand the delivery of services to cope with needs for care and new kinds of consumption. Gustafsson (2008) found that market allocation has come to Swedish welfare services since 1990s. The process of privatization and more market-like allocation has also changed the role of the consumers in terms of being empowered to make decisions and choices.

In Finland, recent survey results still show that people support the current welfare system and are ready to pay taxes for it (Forma et al. 2007). But since the 1990s, the use of welfare services has also started here in Finland to connect to peoples’ willingness and abilities to buy and order as customers the wanted
services from the market (Lehtonen 1998). The welfare services are turned to products and they have been commercialized. The citizen has become a customer or a client and citizenship itself is understood more instrumentally while social justice is understood more and more as the right to make choices rather than to get benefits (Koskiaho 2008). Neo-liberalistic philosophy and New Public Management are often seen in the background of this development, preferring individual rights above common good and conceiving the individual rather than the citizen as actor. Alongside this administrative reconstruction in public services, there was also recognized a familistic turn in Finnish debate (Jallinoja 2006).

In the modernization, discussions about the new professionalism client-centeredness has also been seen both as a mechanism to control professional practices and as the consumerist order to produce individual solutions and new needs (Erikson 2002). Some researchers have examined the question for citizenship as bound up with the formations of a welfare state within cultural analysis, because citizenship is also located in processes and practices of service provision and its reforms (Clarke & Fink 2008). Universalism is not always conceived worthy of its present. Even in childhood research the question Does the good childhood concept, as a fundamental, if not taken-for-granted aspect of Nordic childhood philosophy and romanticized practice, promote universalistic and normalizing social policies and pedagogies to the detriment of diversity and individual difference? has emerged and invited researchers to study this subject. (Wagner & Einarssottir 2008: 268.) On the other hand, the movement towards a market system also moves away from the principle of universality in education, if there is a danger that just “money talks” in the future.

Whatever the perspective the changing welfare state adopts, the participatory citizenship also brings the need of methods that reflect the importance of experience-based knowledge, the methods that can react to the need of policy assessment on the increase and that take into account the necessity of co-operation between different participants. Client-centered and stakeholder approaches in evaluation, as well as consumer-oriented evaluation systems, are examples of participant-oriented models. One tool to help to carry out this kind of evaluation or research is the peer interview –method.

The peer interview as a research tool

Participatory research has been described as an emancipator method, a process of critical and reflective inquiry, which empowers people and gives them “the voice”.
The approach has been used in many different areas, including evaluation research. It is often an effective tool to enable people to become aware of their collective power and to create knowledge about their experience. The degree of involvement in participatory research may vary, being limited to consultation during the research or total involvement. (Bernard 2000.)

The development of evaluation is often described through the evaluation generations (Rajavaara 2007). As a general approach, empowerment evaluation is described as a development potentiality, which has the tools of self-evaluation and communality. A participatory evaluation is also described as a dialogical learning process. Its theoretical background is, on the one hand, seen as consumerism and, on the other hand, as a constructionist approach, in empowerment evaluation and in 4th generation evaluation. Indeed, it is outlined presenting a movement into the 5th generation of evaluation, which provides peoples’ possibilities to influence their own lives and choices. It also supports actors in reflective self-evaluation and learning. (Guba & Lincoln 1989, Leeuw 1999, Paasio 2000, Pohjola 2000, Vuorela 1990 & Vuorenmaa 2001) In participatory and empowerment approaches, the context of the actors cannot be ignored either, but the environments of social issues are required to be taken into account (Haverinen 2000, Kivipelto 2008).

Applying Guba & Lincoln (1989) and the definitions above, the evaluation generations with their typical characters are:

1. 1st generation: behaviorism, measuring, quantitative results
2. 2nd generation: zoom from individuals to organizations and programs
3. 3rd generation: objectives and values, costs
4. 4th generation: stakeholders oriented, participative, pluralistic, (dialogical)
5. 5th generation: empowerment, self-evaluation, dialogical

There are several different ways to analyze the different evaluation approaches. The grouping above is one of the most familiar and is the most used, but still should be viewed as just suggestive because the terms “participatory inquiry” and “empowerment evaluation” mean different things to different people (Patton 2002). To increase the participation of people, social innovations are also demanded to create activity and structures for social connections and participative implications (Metteri et al. 2000).

Välimäki (1994) developed the peer interview method in the 1990s to increase the voice of participants; people who use the welfare services or who work in the area. These people have a lot of tacit knowledge and ideas to improve these
services. The peer interview method is also an available and innovative tool for decision-makers and any other stakeholders, because it enables the systematic learning of the development processes by all participants if it is used as a dialogue peer process, which means a continuous learning cycle using peer interviews as an evaluation tool (Välimäki & Järvi 2005)

The peer interview method is based on interaction between (2–4) participants. The main purpose is the same as that of focus groups and other forms of qualitative interviewing: to tap into the meanings, the needs, experiences or developmental ideas of people. However, a peer interview method is more of a reflective dialogue between participants than a traditional research interview. It offers an opportunity to discuss and reflect on chosen themes, goals, and quality standards and, after the process, to select the correct policies and developing indicators.

Using the peer interview in research also differs from traditional interviews and focus groups in that a researcher is not present. All material is sent and directions are given in letters or/and by telephone before the interview. The participants themselves choose the place and record or write down their discussions. The researcher trusts his or her informants. The interview situation provides the informants a possibility for intensive reflection on the themes that the researcher has given them. As a research tool, peer interview is light, quick and economical. As a developmental method, it is a method within which it is possible to bring out and resolve the tensions between education and social policy and other policies, if it is used as a dialogue peer process.

The peer interview and the dialogical peer process are reflective ways to produce information about the impacts of policies and social services as they are experienced by service-users, staff, and decision-makers. This is the reason why it is an excellent tool to gather information from participants. It makes it also possible to combine top-down and bottom-up approaches through the evaluation processes and to produce the best practices, which are also sustainable and efficient. It is a tool to produce participatory evaluation and good governance, but it also offers the chance of a learning process for all stakeholders.

Välimäki developed the peer interview method in the 1990s when she studied daycare services in Finnish municipalities. At the beginning of this decade, I considered, in pd-studies, how to use peer interviews as an evaluation tool (Järvi 2003). Now, I am using the method in my doctoral thesis, which is focused on the participation of parents in daycare services (see the next part of this article). Aila Tiiilikka (2005) has also used the method in her doctoral thesis Mothers’ conceptions of education and assessments of good day-nursery education. The
method has also been used in a successful way in research into municipal daycare services and it is also applied to evaluating regional co-operative work between public, private, and civil organizations in special education. The dialogical peer process is a reflective model that produces information about how the impacts of social policies and social services are experienced by the service-users, staff, and decision-makers.

**Parent participation in day care services**

Experience from the OECD (2006) reviews suggests that appreciations of parental involvement vary from country to country. According to the OECD report (2006), parental involvement contributes significantly to children's learning. But since the end of the 90's parental involvement seems also to be linked into chancing political agenda to strengthen parents' role as their children's first and most consistent educators. In UK the government launched the early excellence centres program in 1997 and here in Finland parents and staff are also defined more than before as co-educators who can share important child development concept with each other. Projects have often been the practical tools implementing the vision of an equal and active partnership between parents and staff. (see Kaskela & Kekkonen 2007, Whalley 2001.)

In many countries, there seems to be a shift from a weak or temporary contribution to parental involvement to Bronfenbrenner’s (1986) ecological model of early childhood development. The Finnish early childhood education is based on this contextual approach, which refers to the holistic understanding of different parts and dimensions of a child’s growth environment, the child’s own participation, and cooperation between the staff and the parents (Hujala 2000, Hujala ym. 1998, Reunamo 2007). Early childhood education itself is multidiscipline. In my research, the perspective to consider the participation of parents is based on social sciences more than on pedagogies.

Steele et al. (1999) outlines that in sociology, a phenomenon that occurs in micro-level (like the participation of the parents in my research) should also consider taking into account the meso- and macro-perspectives. And from another direction – a macro-level trend (like the change of the welfare state order) should look also at a micro-level. In my research, I am trying to take into account these different levels while studying parents’ participation.

While preparing my doctoral thesis, I have been interested in how to improve the quality of family services and to increase the participation of parents, also in
how the changing social order in the Finnish welfare state and the increasing regional cooperation between municipalities, societies and private sector demands new roles of citizens. Bennett (2008) refers to Esping-Andersen (2002) and outlines that

country policies in the early childhood field are often ‘path dependent’. This means that the organizations of early childhood services are embedded within larger socio-economic structures and policies that influence how these services are understood, organized, and financed. (Bennett 2008, 70–71; OECD 2006)

The final report of the Advisory Board for Early Childhood Education and Care “Early Childhood Education and Care up to 2020” (2008) also outlines that the perspective to consider early childhood education should be the larger field of welfare services. As Cheal (2008: 142) put it:

Public policy makers do not only seek to find ways of supporting families in order to improve family outcomes, but they also use the family as an instrument for policies to solve social problems.

Describing the explicit shift to welfare pluralism, Hartley Dean (2006) says that certain elements of the welfare state, especially bedrock services of health and education, could not easily be devolved to the non-public (informal, voluntary or private) sectors. However, the marketization of early childhood services has been promoted in recent years in OECD countries, in order to limit public expenditure and to allow greater choice and control by parents. It still seems that at least the unregulated market approach is problematic in the early childhood field. According to the OECD report, early childhood services in market situations can be subject to critical shortages and low quality. Unlike material commodities in a market, in early education services parents cannot easily obtain a refund or a new model if they are not satisfied. A purely market system also moves away from the principle of universality in education.

Negative practices tend to appear, such as the growth of unregulated services; the selling of services on appearance and the practice of offering ‘slot’ services to parents, which undermine all notion of continuity of relationship for young children, of programming or of developmental progress.

In spite of this, according OECD recommendations, the benefits of greater choice and market innovation should not be overlooked, but in OECD countries, should find innovative ways to create effective social markets. The experience of Nordic
countries suggests that a public service model can accommodate private providers when they are properly contracted, regulated, and supported by public funding. (Bennett 2008.) Parents are also “clients”, “consumers” or “service users” when they are asked for consultations to improve the quality of ECEC (OECD 2006, 185).

The first part of this article mentioned the ECEC plans. The Act on the Status and Rights of Social Welfare Clients (812/2000) also demands that a care and service plan be drawn up for social welfare clients. According to government’s program, this means that a child-specific plan has to be drawn up in day care as well, although an early education plan is not expressly mentioned in the day care legislation. According to the committee responsible for preparing the program, however, cooperation between daycare and the home to support the growth of the child has not developed sufficiently and the goals set for children’s care and education are not always shared between families and early education. (The Finnish Government’s Child…2008).

After publishing The National Curriculum Guidelines on Early Childhood Education and Care, municipalities and units have done a lot of work to develop the partnership between parents and staff. In my research, one of the parents presented during peer interview a question What do I really know about my child being in day care? to herself and to her peers. Many parents share this question. We are used to trusting the high quality Finnish early childhood education system. In spite of that – or perhaps because of it – what we really know about the question is often quite thin, especially if we do not know the area of early education very well. We do not always know what we are expected to do, how we are expected to participate and how we might influence service system development. We do not even necessarily know our own possibilities as to choices. How could we order without seeing the menu? Or how could we develop without opening the professional concepts?

In my research, I consider early childhood education from the perspective of parent participation. The wellbeing of the children is strongly dependent on the adults around them. Both the children and the parents are the customers and the service users in early childhood education. The parents are also the advocators of their children. Moss and Dahlberg (2008) argue for a multi-lingual evaluation world, where there is a continuing place for early childhood work to adopt different perspectives, based on different stakeholders and paradigmatic positions. One of the perspectives is called ‘meaning making’. As they point it out,
Meaning making is evaluation as a participatory process of interpretation and judgment, made within a recognised context and in relation to certain critical questions: for example, what is our image of the child? what do we want for our children? what is education and care?

Meaning making involves contextualized interpretations of actual practices and environments and it assumes that citizens participate with other citizens. However, we also have to recognize the other aspects like the managerial and neo-liberal discourse producing ‘quality’. (Moss & Dahlberg 2008.)

As a theoretical framework, I have applied Derek Layder’s adaptive theory. The approach encourages dialogue between the macro and micro levels, to take into account the variegated nature of social reality and to get a more complete picture of the studying issue. (Layder 1993, 1998 & 2006.) Day care or any other organizations do not exist in a vacuum. Changing social structure (macro-level) changes both the organizations (meso-level) and the understanding of the people (micro-level). Furthermore, not only are the structures of the organizations influenced by the macro-level of the environment, but the organizations and the people involved them, in turn, influence the environment around them. (Steele et al. 1999.) The approach of contextual growth has the same elements but, because my interest is not in a child’s growth but in the existence of parent participation, I prefer Layder’s approach. It also includes the elements of power. The adaptive approach encourages the use of orienting and background concepts (Layder 1998, Layder 2006). In my research, the changing context of welfare services forms the framework for considering the participation of parents in early childhood education. In that sense, the research also provides insights into the social, organizational, and policy environments of early childhood systems, which is one of the expanding ECEC research agendas in OECD countries (OECD 2006).

The research method combines adaptive theory with fifth generation evaluation study. The data are collected using peer interviews and analyzed using the NVivo8 program. Still, my research is more an academic qualitative research study than an evaluation. As an evaluation, it has characters of participatory and empowerment evaluation. According to Alasuutari et al. (2008), the changing society influences as well as research methods and the increased interest in qualitative research is partly due to recent policy changes, like marketized or privatized public services and citizens turned into customers. Within the social sciences, the reality of research involves a lot of compromise between the pure approach positions (Milliken 2001). Denzin (2009) outlines, that we can supply
methodological rules and interpretive guidelines and that they are needed to be open to change and to differing interpretation.

The first results show clearly that parents are very interested in both reflecting and developing early childhood services and especially the circumstances of their own children in the day care unit. Parents also take seriously their responsibility for their children and are oriented to do their best for the child’s best interest and wellbeing. Parents strongly trust and respect the day care staff and are willing to cooperate with the staff; most of them are ready even to work as an employee when needed. However, parents do not know the day care practices and the professional conceptual language very well. For example, the content of the word “early childhood education” is not as clear as the professional are used to thinking or want to think. Many parents think that what happens in daycare centers presents high quality early childhood education and care, and they do not even need to know in detail how it runs. Furthermore, if they recognize something to improve in the circumstances or the services, they do not necessarily know how to make the decision-makers listen. To answer the challenge of changing welfare models – if it requires parents to be more consumer-oriented – they need to be more informed about these curriculum concepts and their own possibilities for influencing them as active citizens, into the ECEC plans and the development work of services in the municipality. As a result, I have also prepared a model to consider the different dimensions of participation with relation to parents’ different roles.

Conclusion

The demand and definitions of parent participation in ECEC no longer arise from the educational and cooperation perspective. This participation is now connected with the changing welfare systems and the ideas of the rights of the citizens, as well as with the structural changes towards mixed models in service production. The future challenges of the Nordic model of welfare services also challenge the people to face the new demands and opportunities to become active citizens and service customers. Whether we like this or not, this perspective should also be included in the consideration of parent participation. The question in future welfare services, including early education, is how to make sure that people get all the information they need to make the best choices and how to make sure all the people really have the possibilities and resources to make these choices - not just as customers but also as citizens.
References


Children in Collaboration
Early learning and children’s collaboration – joy for learning

Eeva-Liisa Kronqvist

This chapter examines young children’s learning in semi-structured and spontaneous situations. Of particular interest is the theoretical viewpoint on learning - what is learning - and how to examine learning as a collaborative process and what consequences it has for intervention and the planning of learning environment and for pedagogical considerations. The focus will also be on developmental aspects of young children trying to capture the role and interaction of early learning and early development.

Learning and development are not seen as separate, individual entities. Relational orientation to learning and development emphasizes that people learn new skills, expand their emotional lives to include others, and grow in awareness of their abilities and their place in the world. Co-regulation is a dynamic and creative process, where people create meaning together, rather than simply exchanging information. Learning and development are almost same phenomena or at least approach each other. Development can be seen as personal and learning as interpersonal phenomena, but both of these are built and formed through relations. Relationships are developing systems that are self-organizing and self-sustaining. Therefore, relationships should be studied from a developmental and systemic perspective, taking into account transactions between partners, changes over time, and culture (Fogel 1993.)

The focus of early learning here will not be on the individual learning process, but more on the structure and process of learning, with a special focus on collaborative learning processes. It is easy to agree that learning should be understood as a social, and not merely an individual, phenomenon. However, the consequences that this point of view has for learning research must be considered. The theoretical foundations of the study described in this chapter are based on socio-cultural and systemic perspectives, where learning is viewed as collaboratively constructed and mediated by various tools and artifacts (Hmelo-Silver, Chernobilskey & DaCosta 2004). Sociocultural theories emphasize that individuals learn and construct the traditions of their cultural communities and that individuals become proficient in the practices that are common and valued in the institutions and interactions of their daily lives (Rogoff 1998). This idea is represented in Barbara Rogoff’s notions of building bridges, where experts in a
specific culture help the novices to become experts. She also builds bridges between different theoretical traditions and to overcome the dualism between individual psychological functions and their sociogenetic origins. She reviews human beings as living in a “social sea” in which interhuman exchange is necessary for development. Rogoff’s sociocultural view emphasizes that individuals become proficient in the practices that are common and valued in the institutions and interactions of their daily lives (Rogoff 1998.)

Understanding development and learning from a sociocultural-historical perspective requires examination of the cultural nature of everyday life. This includes studying people’s use and transformation of cultural tools and technologies and their involvement in cultural traditions in institutions of family life, pre-schools, schools, and community practices. Children’s relationships with other children and with parents are a crucial part of the cultural nature of development and learning.

Vygotsky (1978) provided a framework for analyzing the dynamic, relational, and cultural nature of development. He proposed four interrelated levels of development involving the individual and the environment in different time frames. **Ontogenetic development** is the traditional developmental orientation, which means the time frame of the individual life span, such as across the years of childhood. **Phylogenetic development** is the slowly changing species history that leaves a legacy for the individual in the form of genes, transforming over centuries or millennia. **Cultural-historical development** changes across decades and centuries, leaving a legacy for individuals in the form of symbolic and material technologies (literacy, number systems, computers, play) as well as value systems, scripts, and norms. **Microgenetic development** is the moment-to-moment learning of individuals in particular contexts, built on the individual’s genetic and cultural-historical backgrounds. All of these levels are inseparable. (Light, Woodhead & Sheldon 1991.)

Development takes place within both the course of cultural history and the course of phylogenetic history. In this chapter we observe children’s development in a micro-environment and micro-level while remaining aware that children’s learning and development is in relation to the contexts, the use of tools and artifacts of the culture in which the child is growing. Children learn skills in the context of their use and with the aid of those around them. Caregivers help them, but many skills are also learnt by observing and listening to other children in informal and formal environments (Rogoff 1998, 65–70.) We need each other to develop. We also need children to develop a picture of themselves as competent,
resilient, and confident learners. However, in formal institutions like schools, solo activity appears to be prioritized. Matusov, Bell & Rogoff (2002) ask the question — *how do children learn interactional patterns in their cultural communities?* They reply that we need developmental research to attend to children’s activities within their everyday settings, and to study how children’s settings like schools or preschools function as cultural institutions and the place and role of children and how they learn through participating with others in sociocultural activities.

It has also been shown that children often transfer the communication patterns of the school outside the classroom context to an informal context. One example is children who have been asked to teach others in a laboratory context who use their schoolteacher’s intonations and “quiz” their partner or withhold information, as if their idea of teaching was based on the notion that schoolteachers regard open provision of information as out-of bounds (Matusov *et al.* 2002, Ellis & Rogoff 1986).

Human development should thus be examined in terms of changing participation in activities within cultural institutions involving systems of values, goals, and patterns of communication. This would be a shift from considering human development simply as age-related individual skills, or conceiving of context preschools and schools as collections of pedagogical techniques. Children develop by participating in diverse and overlapping complex cultural systems with associated practices and philosophies (Matusov *et al.* 2002.)

**Joyful learning – early learning as source for resilience and self-efficacy**

The important aim for early childhood education should be for children to develop a view of themselves as competent and confident learners (Carr 2001). *Resilience* is usually defined as a developmental perspective, which refers to active coping and maintaining positive expectations. It describes a set of qualities that foster a process or successful adaptation and transformation despite of risk and adversity. People are born with an innate capacity for resilience, by which we are able to develop social competence, problem-solving skills, autonomy, and sense of identity and self-efficacy (Bernard 1999.) Everyday life in pre-schools and schools could at best be a meaningful source of significant resilience promoting influences and experiences. Young children are not merely passive recipients of the socializing influences of their parents, families, and environments, but they can act in evocative and proactive ways to shape their environments and make themselves
more resilient. Children use various ways to share, to join, and to design in collaboration. They learn to become active participants within in practice. Barbara Rogoff’s (2003) view of learning is an acculturation via guided participation and it assumes an actively constructing child.

**Self-efficacy** is the belief that one is capable of performing in a certain manner to attain certain goals. It is a belief that one has the capabilities to execute the courses of actions required to manage prospective situations. Unlike efficacy, which is the power to produce an effect, self-efficacy is the belief (whether or not accurate) that one has the power to produce that effect. Self-efficacy refers to a judgment about one's capability to successfully perform a task at given levels (Chase 2001). Research has shown that people tend to avoid situations in which they believe themselves incapable of success.

Could collaborative working produce joy, resilience, and self-efficacy for children? Could group support give children faith for coping in difficult situations in the future? Could learning be at best a source for joy and delight? In the research about children’s concepts of learning, my teacher students and I found that young children – preprimary or primary school children – described learning using three different categories: learning is something we do, learning is something we know, and learning is something we think or understand. The classifications correspond with the results of Pramling (1990) with the exception that in our data we also found a category of “joy of learning”. We asked 5- to 8-year-old children how they understand learning. The results shows that there may be various orientations to learning already present at a very early age and that one orientation could be designated as a “joyful learning”-orientation. The students described that “it makes you feel good” and “it is nice”. Children have a unique perspective on the process of learning, have different priorities and concerns, and often ask very different questions than adults in an educational setting (Alderson 2000). We just forget to ask children themselves and to take them as co-researchers. Morgan (2006) showed that, in general, young children’s perspectives on their own learning process are not being acknowledged, valued, or documented. The new technology like computers, interactive whiteboards, and digital video can allow researchers to listen to young children and increase the interaction and reciprocal talk in pre-schools and schools.

It has been stated that children’s learning strategies are already developing before school age and that features of positive orientation to challenges as well as learned helplessness can be found as reactions to failures and critique (Burhans & Dweck 1995). Dweck (1999) had shown that children develop quite early a
general orientation towards performance goals and learning goals. By performance goals, he signified goals when children strive to gain favorable judgments or to avoid negative comments about their competence. Learning goals are described as striving to increase their competencies or to understand or master something new by trying hard and persisting after failure. Carr (2001), in her research on children’s motivational processes and multiple social identities, described how performance and learning goals in fact are themselves intertwined with situated and sociocultural features of the classrooms. Gender, age, and goodness favor children’s beliefs, but friends and technological social identities are growing. Children try to find balance between learning and performance and between explorations and belonging. However, the system in early childhood education seems to be quite conservative and in group settings, performance goals have a tendency to become default settings (e.g. being good and being right) as Carr (2001) suggested.

Duncan and Carr (2008) follow the sociocultural framework to look at the children’s learning dispositions. They define learning dispositions in early childhood education as “attunement to the constraints and affordances” in settings that include relationships between children and other people, places, and in participation in activities. Children’s identities as learners require belonging and learning dispositions like resilience, reciprocity, and imagination. Children need time for interaction, joint activities, opportunities for participation, various tools, information, and distributed expertise. These are aspects of educational contexts that support mutual relationships and engagement.

Some results from earlier research have shown that there are some key factors that mediate group success and facilitate peer learning in primary school classes. First, the artifacts, like blocks and whiteboards, have played an important role in mediating learning. Second, the role of soft leaders in the group facilitated and helped the knowledge cognition process. They helped other children to think deeply and to manage the agenda as well as ensured that all were active participants (Hmelo-Silver 2007.)

Methodological views - video as a tool to understand young children’s collaboration and early learning experiences

Angelillo, Rogoff and Chavajay (2007) ask how to develop methods to analyze and code between-person- aspects explicitly. They indicate that studies of social interaction have focused in coding the isolated behaviors of individuals. Typically,
this type of coding is used in analyzing verbal statements, words spoken, or errors made in interactive situations. The dynamic intersubjective aspect of emerging shared meaning is not reached using the individual focused coding system. The authors use the description “shared endeavors” as opposite to the individualist approaches. They illustrate the way to develop the method of coding schemes addresses both the contributions of individuals to shared endeavors as well as the overall form of shared endeavors themselves. Individuals are important, but especially necessary for the investigation of shared or group processes, not as though they were acting in isolation. This method is one way to build bridges between the individual and group levels as well as between qualitative and quantitative analyses. The method is based on a cycling process between ethnographic analysis of cases and quantitative analyses of cases.

Rogoff (1993) used diagrams to discover patterns in settings where people work together. In the shared problem solving she differentiated four various engagement models: shared multiparty engagement, division of labor, directing pattern, and non-coordinated engagement. This so called ethnographic analyses of video data was used not only in a preliminary way but also as a way for elaborating the coding scheme. The importance of ethnographic study is not just in focusing on individual cases, but also to understand the broader organization and meaning of community events. This can aid in focusing on emerging intersubjective processes, which are central to learning in sociocultural activities (Angelillo et al 2007.)

There are many ways to capture the nature of the collaboration in children’s peer-groups and pairs: one is to organize and observe structured learning situations, where children have a specific task to do or problem to solve. The other is to examine situations in which children are in charge of their own intentions and situations and to examine what children learn spontaneously from each other in everyday activities. This involves careful interpretations and analysis of routines, which focus on informal or spontaneous learning (Williams 2001.)

Barron (2007) describes the first examples using film in observing children’s behavior. Kurt Lewin, the famous social psychologist, created a documentary film about children in urban settings “The Child and the World”. In this children’s life and landscape descriptive film, he expressed his later published idea about interdependencies between the child and his or her life spaces. His goal was to describe his developing theory of the life space. He argued that the psychological life space resulted from the interdependencies between the environment and the person, and to understand behavior, both of these must be taken into account. All
experiences and aspects of current environment need and tensions are part of “the field of the person” and it includes both the person and his psychological state and the environment (Barron 2007).4

Later video has been used in various disciplines like anthropologists, sociolinguists and psychologists. There are many reports of children’s play episodes, conflicts, and cooperative behavior. Also children’s aggression is widely investigated using film and video as data collection methods. In pedagogical research, it has been shown that there are differences between schools in the quality of peer collaboration and that this could be related to classroom practices and atmosphere (Barron 2007).

The advantage of video study is that it can be used in both informal and formal settings. The formal environment usually includes various laboratory and structured and semi-structured situations. Typically, the setting is a problem-based task that must be solved together. The informal settings are organized with minimal adult presence. Especially suitable for ecologically valid research are investigations of peer interaction, peer collaboration, conflicts and cooperative play sessions.

Recent interest using video capture has been directed towards three areas in particular: First, in the family interaction research, which has moved from the laboratory to people’s homes and neighborhoods. It helps to understand the role of emotional regulation and communication in the family. In general, the trend is to have more ecologically valid research. There is interesting new research about families in everyday and real-life contexts (Barron 2007). Video can also be used in training and counseling. Parent-child Early Relational Assessment (PCERA) is used to capture the child’s experience of the parent, the parent’s experience of the child, the affective and behavioral characteristics that each bring to the interaction, and the quality or tone of the relationship (Clark et al. 2004). A video-based consultation (VIG - Video Interaction Guidance) model has also been used to help teachers and parents in their communicative skills (Kennedy & Sked 2008).

The second is learning and how cultural artifacts and cultural tools mediate thinking and learning (Barron 2007). This orientation is based on cultural-historical theory, which has been rooted to the early childhood education as a sociocultural theory. Children participate in many different activities and child development can be understood by researching children’s participation across the variety of cultural settings in his everyday life. This indicates that a child as a human agent contributes to collaborative processes in environments. The dimensions of everyday life and environments include artifacts, social others, and
self. The term *artifacts* usually refer to the things that sustain certain practices. At the preschool and school, they can be the architecture, outdoor and indoor facilities, decorations, books, schedules and time planned activities, which have both historical and functional value to the pupils (Bang 2009).

The focus is also on the everyday contexts in preschools, schools, and homes and especially how children make sense of their environment within the context of everyday practice. Reading a book, for example, is not a neutral cognitive skill, but a way to appropriate more of this world with the help of this artifact and with the help of the child as an exploring reader and researcher. Early learning activities using artifacts could also be construction games, computer games, video, photographs, visits to museums, play grounds, collaborative problems-solving, and learning in family environments, from other children, parents, and from siblings like Viljamaa (2010) examined storytelling in the home context in the first chapter of this book. Video recording as data gathering is a useful method for studying potentials for development in an activity setting, and the use of interpretative methods tells about the richness of those potentials (Bang 2009).

The third tradition, using video as a data gathering research method, is also based on cultural-historical theory and is referred to as *children as researchers*-orientation. The basic idea is to emphasize that the child is an active participant in a community and that the voice of the child is not just heard, but understood. There are a variety of methods for hearing children’s voices and the one most commonly used is the design with children taking photographs, which represent children’s ideas, thoughts, and understandings (Fleer & Quinones 2009). Smith, Duncan and Marshall (2005) used an ethnographic study to research children’s involvement and engagement within learning environments. As a stimulus, they used digital photographs about children in everyday activities. The researchers used various nice ways to discuss with children about learning and activities, like focus groups of children with the teacher and researcher, direct interviews with children with and without friends, informal discussions and interviews with a child when the mother was present. Results showed that in all situations, excluding focus groups, children were productive and relaxed and could give various notions about their activities. Children’s perspectives are important ways to understand how the people, places, and things within children’s environments are linked to their engagement in learning (Smith et al. 2005). Another technique is called *Mosaic Approach*, which integrates visual and verbal data. *The children as researchers*-orientation has as the unit of analysis not merely the individual child, but rather the dynamic interactions of the children within their environment as they
videotape or photograph their own specific local contexts. The documentation was also used as a stimulus at home in discussions with parents. This gives children skills and confidence to practice “research” at home with their families (Fleer & Quinones 2009.)

**Children’s learning in peer collaboration – the settings, data collection and data analysis**

In this chapter, two ways of making observations of children’s peer-learning are presented: The first setting is based on observations on children’s *spontaneous learning* in a pre-school environment. The data were gathered using videotaping in the children’s natural preschool environment during children’s play situations without any adult intervention. Children’s ages varied between 2.5 and 6.7 years. The episodes were videotaped using a focal child data collecting method. Together, 89 episodes were analyzed using the social routine children produced (Corsaro 1992) as the analyzing instrument. Each episode was named after the content of the activity through the episode.

The second situation was a *structured learning setting*, where children learn a new game together. The data have been collected in children’s semi-structural situations. Children are working in pairs, where one of the children is teaching and one is learning the game. The expert child teaches the novice child a game that he/she does not know yet. The teacher of the group gave all instructions and the placement of the observation was familiar to the children. The discussions were videotaped and transcribed for the analysis. The analysis of working dyads is based on microanalysis of the video episodes. Altogether, 20 episodes from children between 3 and 6 years were analyzed mainly using the content of the tutoring.

**Results of the peer-learning episodes**

The results of these two learning settings are briefly described in following paragraph.

**Spontaneous situation: Social routines**

Five various social routines could be differentiated. Especially interesting were discussions that included multiple elements of peer learning.
1. Sociodramatic play: role-play in pairs or small groups.

2. Non-fictional discussions: tutoring, elaborative and inquiring discussions during the activity.

3. Fictional narratives: non-reproductive, children’s own stories, narratives and creative fictions.

4. Imitations: children’s imitative behavior, typical of the youngest children in the group.

5. Rule creating and maintaining: rule games, typical of the oldest children in the group.

Structured learning setting with a formal task

Five emerging tutoring patterns could be differentiated during the sessions:

1. Helping-encouraging pattern

   Eeva is drawing a flower using a template, which will later be cut out. Milla is sitting beneath and looking at Eeva for a very long time. Then Milla says to the adult: “I would also like to draw a flower”. Milla starts to use the same template as Eeva had used and she starts to draw and then to cut it out. Milla says: “I cannot get it to turn out”. Eeva turns and looks at Milla. Eeva: “Look at how I did it.” Milla cuts. Eeva: “Look at this.” Milla turns and says: “Yes”. Milla continues and cuts the flower out like Eeva did.

   In this tutoring mode, the child is helping, supporting, and assisting another child. In these cases, the tutor is usually an older or more competent partner.

2. Doing-together pattern:

   Sara and Cassandra are working with a game. Tara is teaching the game: “This bone goes right there, that one goes right there.” Cassandra: “But this one is orange.” They start to examine the pieces. Tara: “It is a hard time looking for this one. Here, I will give it to you and you put it in. No, that’s not the one, that is.” Cassandra: “It goes in here”. Tara spells Cassie’s name and says: “It doesn’t fit.” Cassandra: “Yes, it does, it goes in right here. After the game, we can play hide and go seek”. Tara: Now put it right there”.

   Joint activity (Pictures 1 and 2) is characterized by collaboratively working at a task. Partners collaborate and there is no great difference between the tutor and
tutee in completing the task. A degree of competition could also be noticed on occasion. The results of previous research have stated that cooperation and constructive competition can exist simultaneously in preschool children’s pairs (Sheridan & Williams 2007).

![Picture 1. Leena is supporting Asta at a new game.](image)

3. Resisting-maintaining pattern

Alejandra is teaching William the game: “You just gotta do this... Ok you have to do these things. You have to see which ones cut out. William is resisting: “I want to go play with that one (points to another toy). I want to play with all of them (toys). William tries to maintain Alejandra’s interest: “I did it before, I really did this game before.” Alejandra: “He can go play (referring to the other toys). William: I don’t want to do another game.” Alejandra: “Then we can play? Maybe, ok I’ll do it then.” William: “I don’t want to do another game.” Alejandra:” You don’t have to do it.”

The child is resisting the task and the tutor is trying to maintain the activity. Children act in a very sensitive way, but if the situation changes to something more challenging, they asked an adult’s help. However, all pairs finished the task.
4. Tutor-centered, directed pattern

Jaakko gives advice to Riitu: “You should find this kind of piece”. Riitu is searching for the right one and Jaakko follows by looking closely at Riitu’s work. When she finishes the task, Jaakko comments: “Yes, good, so and now this. Now you should try to find this one”. Typically, Jaakko follows Riitu’s work, checking that she is doing the right movements. Meanwhile, Jaakko gives advice like “Good, this one.”

The tutor is controlling and giving direct advice. The role of a “teacher” was noticeable in this vignette. Previous research in preschool children also supports the finding that children have a representation of the teacher and that they use this understanding in scaffolding other children (Verba 1998).

![Picture 2. Valtteri is teaching a game to Frans.](image)

5. Off-task- pattern

Markus is starting to teach Iivari the game. Iivari comments, laughing: “Very easy one!” Markus also laughs, but gives Iivari the next piece. Iivari makes some off-task movements that make Markus laugh again. They start to finish the game quickly and then pieces fall on the floor. Both of the boys are
laughing and moving restlessly. They just put the pieces on the table without looking at the model.

This extract is an example of two boys who started to show difficulties in concentrating, restlessness, laughing and moving around. They finished the task; however, a competition situation arose between them that resulted in disorganization. It is difficult to find reasons for behavior like this, but one reason could be the social dynamics of the pair, for example, the quality of the friendship or things what happened before the game playing.

**About pedagogy and children’s voices – good-enough learning environment**

The observations revealed various ways children could teach and learn from each other. Traditionally, learning has been linked to the notion that knowledge is best mediated from a competent adult to an incompetent and passive child (Williams 2001). In this article, the idea that children can learn from other children was examined. All children assisted their partners through a variety of tutoring strategies. Expert children provided a variety of forms of assistance, including especially facilitating and encouraging modes. They also corrected mistakes and tried to maintain their tutee’s attention. However, there are some requirements for the good peer-learning situations. First, children have to be active. There is evidence that when language is shaped into suitable cultural tools for the intellectual task, discursive interaction promotes development of individual reasoning and learning (Rojas-Drummond & Mercer 2003). It seems that children usually don’t try to “scaffold” each other’s learning, but they achieve this simply by using effective communicative strategies for solving problems together (Fernandez et al. 2001). Secondly, the meaning of the adult is significant for fostering learning. Lastly, the role a child has in the tutoring process is important. It affects his/her activity in peer-learning situations, because as tutor the child is usually more active than as tutee. There is evidence from earlier research that, at best, tutoring gives the child positive self-esteem and a feeling of being appreciated. Good learning experiences and meaningful learning experiences involve a sense of belonging and sharing (Soini 1999).

It is important to consider not only the content of an individual child’s comments but also the overall discourse structure of the interaction. Williams (2001) examined children’s everyday activities and stated that in these situations,
children have opportunities to learn much about life around them – about rules, ways of acting, routines, and discursive practices. As she stated: *Knowledge and skills are often tacit but children learn those from each other through social practices.* Preschool can be a starting point for lasting relationships and togetherness. Young children can already have a rich repertory to express their relationship, friendship, and togetherness (De Haan & Singer 2001).

Cultural norms and expectancies direct the pedagogy in classrooms and children’s group. There is a strong agreement that we should not aim to educate children to become passive, but adaptive and active learners. One way to orient to learning is to look it as an individual or personality characteristic. However, the research has showed learning to be strongly social phenomena. Matusov *et al.* (2002) argues that a great part of developmental psychology is the study of children’s learning to participate in ways that are valued in the institutions and cultural practices of everyday lives. Researchers should become more aware of the institutional traditions of lives of children and thus be more able to make more sense of the observations of development. Children learn more than the content of the lessons. The Matusov *et al.* (2002) study contributes to sociocultural work in which human development is examined in terms of changing participation in activities within cultural institutions.

A shift is needed considering human development as age-related individual skills to children develop by participating in cultural systems. The results of individual children’s behavior (like children’s concepts of own learning or social identity) should be placed in sociocultural and situational context to help to develop the early childhood education. The children’s voice has been missing in psychological and educational research. Children are not used to being asked questions or to be as a focus of adult’s interest. Children should be viewed as social actors with their own opinions and own ways of constructing learning and not as passive recipients (Smith *et al.* 2005.) Young children are capable of reflecting their own learning and to discuss about it with teacher, peers and own parents. In the discussion photographs, video episodes, computers, books and child-centered story telling are useful ways to support children’s reflection. These opportunities are not widely used and classroom culture should be changed to a more open and innovative direction. Focus on learning could help classrooms to become rich learning environments, where children’s own voices are listened to and elaborated collaboratively.
References


Joint story-book telling for the learning of number names

Sinikka Kaartinen

Current findings on the nature of students’ learning practices and achievements in mathematics classrooms in Finland, and in many other international contexts, demonstrate the urgent need for the development of mathematics instruction. At present, students do not seem to find school mathematics education motivating enough. Mathematics instruction is viewed by many students at all levels of institutional education as not meaningful, being disconnected from real life. It has been suggested that the potential of real life contexts could better support the development of children’s mathematical thinking (Hannula 2005, Mattinen 2006). Research has demonstrated that whereas learning differences in reading and language present at the start of schooling in Finland will be balanced, in mathematics achievement, they will deepen (Aunola et al. 2002, 2004). Knowledge of children’s abilities and difficulties in learning mathematics in kindergarten is therefore important in order to pre-empt learning difficulties in formal schooling.

It has indeed also been argued that there is a need to develop early childhood mathematics education towards instruction that is coherent, that is focused on important mathematics, and that is well articulated across the grades (the National Association for the Education of Young Children, the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics). The role of the adult then is to introduce mathematical concepts, methods, and language, and to help children to examine mathematical concepts in depth (Ginsburg & Amit 2008).

The aim of this chapter is to investigate mathematics education in an early education classroom that is based on the idea of collective negotiation of mathematics in a community of learners (Cobb & Bauersfeld 1995). The goal of the community is that its participants, consisting of children, parents and educators, collaboratively construct a dialogue for the support of the children’s meaningful mathematics learning. In this network, experiences and pedagogical expertise are shared and jointly constructed on the basis of formal and informal observations of the children’s mathematical activities across settings and situations.
Joint story-book reading as an example of mathematicizing

Joint story-book reading offers a viable context for children to engage with meaning making and to communicate their ideas on the basis of the visual communication represented in the book. In this chapter, I suggest that joint visual book reading prepares children to participate in communication as future citizens (Hopperstad 2008). Joint story-book reading is included in many of the learning activities in which children in Finnish kindergartens participate. In joint story-book reading activities, children collaborate with their peers and the kindergarten teacher. However, joint mathematical big story-book reading is not a typical activity in Finnish kindergartens. This is because we lack big book teaching material and, on the other hand, we do not typically have institutionalized mathematical learning sessions for small children in Finnish kindergartens. This study applies international mathematical big book teaching material.¹ In this study, the dimensions of the big book were high enough (37 cm x 49.5 cm) for the group of children to co-construct the story jointly. The mathematical big book applied in this study integrates basic concepts for the learning of number names with children’s stories. Attractive illustrations and familiar story line rich in mathematical content create a fun, engaging and effective learning process for children.

According to the sociocultural approach (Vygotsky 1962, Vygotsky 1978, Wertsch 1991), children participate in a community when they externalize their thinking with the help of the visual representations represented in a big book and communicate their ideas to the other members of the learning community. In this chapter, the focus is on the developing reading related interaction among children aged two to three years at the beginning of the 20-month observation period in a kindergarten classroom community whose pedagogy in the learning of mathematics draws on the sociocultural perspective.

This chapter applies joint story-book reading as a tool for kindergarten mathematics education, with the aim of investigating child participation in culturally organized activities of mathematicizing. The roots of the concept of mathematicizing in this study lie in the work of Bauersfeld, who defines learning in the following way: Learning is characterized by the subjective reconstruction of societal means and models through negotiation of meaning in social interaction (Bauersfeld 1988: 39). Whereas Cobb and Bauersfeld (1995) investigates

¹. Published by ETA/Cuisenaire (www.etacuisenaire.com)
mathematical interaction at primary school level, in this study, the emerging mathematical interaction, defined in this study as mathematicizing, is investigated in a three-year long project. It started in June 2007 at kindergarten level with children aged two to three years at the beginning of the 20-month observation period. In Bauersfeld’s words, participating in the processes of joint mathematical book discussions in a mathematics classroom is participating in a culture of mathematicizing.

In the procedure of mathematicizing (Elbers 2003), the mathematical joint story-book reading activity constructed in the kindergarten classroom community plays a central role; it serves as a source for the participants to develop verbal and non-verbal reasoning as well as mathematical understanding for early number concepts, including the learning of number names. This process intertwines everyday knowing with mathematical tools and procedures. The pedagogical approach applied in the present study takes a holistic perspective on mathematics learning, which integrates procedural and conceptual elements of mathematical knowledge. The conceptual structures are constructed in a community of learners in which the participants learn from one another and contribute to the development of joint knowledge.

In addition to cognitive development, the approach aims at developing the children’s social skills and personal attitudes to mathematicizing. The goal of the approach is to support the learners’ cognitive strategies initiated by the learners themselves. In addition, it aims to arouse real interest in the learner in applying elements of mathematicizing such as hypothesizing, testing, modeling and analyzing. Collaboration and social interaction foster the development of children’s metacognitive skills, which are seen as essential components of intellectual behavior. Evaluation of the children’s learning is formative, individualized, and continuous in nature. It guides the community of learners in planning and monitoring their learning processes and development.

The specific design principles applied in the construction of the mathematics learning environment in this study are:

1. Mathematical content arises from the children’s daily life and is connected with their everyday activities.
2. Authentic and meaningful problems arouse the children’s motivation
3. Jointly negotiated feedback, and opportunities to revise one’s work based on that feedback, enhances children’s learning
4. Social structures that encourage inclusive and active participation help children to feel valued and respected, promoting their identity at work in relation to mathematicizing

5. Children are valued participants in the design of mathematical activities in the classroom.

The mathematicizing community

The daycare center that participated in the study is a private daycare center located in the northern part of Finland. The pedagogical philosophy of the daycare center consists of partnership – which means close collaboration with parents in childcare – and action evaluation and participation, which involves listening to the children’s voices in the design and implementation of the curriculum. The usual starting age for the children is two years, and they continue in the daycare center until they start their primary school at the age of six to seven. Altogether 11 two to three-year-old children at the beginning of the 20-month observation period (three male, eight female), their kindergarten teacher, and a university researcher participated in the study. The kindergarten teacher and the university researcher shared a joint responsibility for the mathematical activity in the classroom community. During the first 12-month observation period, the mathematical activity was taught weekly and during the second eight-month period, it was taught five times per term. In the project, a research based instructional emphasis is placed on the role of cultural tools (such as Cuisenaire rods, diverse geometrical models) in supporting the children’s mathematical cognitive skills; that is, counting ability, visual attention, and metacognitive knowledge.

The adult members of the pre-school learning community studied in this research share joint pedagogical principles (cf. Rogoff et al. 2001) in mathematics learning and instruction. In this community, learning is viewed as a collective negotiation process, where collaboration is used as a tool for building on the learners’ interests. In these networks, learning activities are constructed by the learners as well as by the teachers and parents. These classrooms are places where the educators engage not only in nurturing the children’s learning but are also themselves learners, through their involvement with the other participants of the learning community.

This study draws on videotaped and transcribed data gathered from two joint story-book reading episodes. The classroom interactions are subjected to a qualitative analysis in order to investigate, evaluate, and disseminate the pedagogical ideas behind the classrooms. The applied mathematical big book was
The Fluffy Ducks by Jill Bever and Sheilah Currie, with illustrations by Barbara Spurll, and it was published by ETA/Cuisenaire, 2005. The first learning activity (Episodes 1–3) described in this study, was videotaped on 14.9.2007 and it represents the mathematical activity at a time when the big book was novel and the children were not familiar with its content. The second learning activity (Episode 4) described in this study, was videotaped on 2.4.2009 and it represents the situation where the children were already familiar with the content of the big book. The selection of these episodes is based on the research idea, which tries to trace the development of child participation in mathematicizing. The university researcher and the kindergarten teacher participated as teacher-researchers in these mathematical sessions.

The study was conducted from an ethnographic perspective, with a focus on aspects of everyday life (Green & Bloome 1997). The writer of this chapter is the university researcher participating in the teaching in a joint story-book reading sessions. In this guest-teaching role, she interacted with the children and participated in the videotaped joint book reading activities.

**Examples of young children mathematicizing**

In this chapter, emphasis is placed on four categories grounded in the data as follows:

1. Joint book discussion characterized by number names
2. Joint book discussion characterized by classification
3. Joint book discussion characterized by participation rules
4. Joint book discussion characterized by mathematical questioning

The unit of analysis of participation for the teacher and children was an utterance. Utterances are defined as phrases that are distinctive in content and include turn taking between the teacher and children (Wells 1985).

Next, in this chapter, the results will be discussed with case-based descriptions representing each of the four categories.
Results

*Negotiating rules for participation*

Episode 1. Inviting to participate (videotaped 14.9.2007, 4 children present)

1. guest teacher: would Elli be the next to tell about mathematics, go ahead and tell
2. Elli: I don’t want to
3. guest teacher: one can tell about this
4. Liisa (teacher): what a lovely double page
5. Antti: me
6. guest teacher: let’s wait for Elli
7. Elli: I don’t want to
8. guest teacher: you can tell a little bit to the other schoolchildren, you don’t need to, you don’t have to, who would like to

Here the guest teacher invited Elli to participate in story-telling, but Elli was not eager to talk about the mathematics of the open double page, pages 2–3. This led Liisa (teacher) to admire the big book and this led the other children of the learning community to express their willingness to participate. Antti expressed his willingness by raising his hand and by saying “me”. His classmate Kalle expressed his willingness to take a turn by raising his hand. The guest teacher continued by inviting Elli to participate, but Elli did not change her mind, although the guest teacher tried to invoke the role play nature of the activity by referring to her classmates like the duck-character school-pupils in the activity portrayed in the book. Elli’s reaction was typical for her in novel situations; she withdrew from social interaction although she was very familiar with the mathematical content of number names. Altogether, in this part of the activity, the children practiced such social skills as showing interest in others, giving and receiving, empathy and effective communication.

*Story telling by classification*

Episode 2. Classification as a joint book reading activity (videotaped 14.9.2007, four children present)

9. Antti: me
10. guest teacher: Antti can have the next turn
11. Antti: they are singing
12. guest teacher: yes, you can tell us whatever you want to
13. Inka: a tree, then a house, a bell is ringing
14. Antti: no, me
15. Antti: one..., then birds and a cat
16. Elli: I have no place
17. Kalle: they are at school
18. Liisa (teacher): my cutie-pies, let’s do this: I’ll use two chairs and let’s put the book on the chair
19. guest teacher: then everyone will see, ok, a good idea, everybody has to be able to see because this is everybody’s school, all of ours
20. Kalle: I can’t see from here
21. Liisa (teacher): everybody has to sit down, otherwise we still can’t see

This episode highlights nicely how the visual representation of the big book mediated the children’s classification of things such as a tree, birds and a cat as well as classification of events such as “they are singing” and “a bell is ringing”. The children constructed jointly the story represented by the book and also Elli expressed her willingness to participate by expressing her dissatisfaction about her place. This switched the interaction into organizational mode where the teacher organized the learning environment by using two chairs to lift the position of the book so that everybody could see the big book better on which the joint story reading activity was based.

**Story telling inspired by number names**

Episode 3. Collaborative story-telling and counting (videotaped 14.9.2007, four children present)
22. Antti: there is a bus, he’s using a bus
23. Elli: there are cycles and skates
24. Antti: there are also skates and cycles
25. Elli: yes there are and there is a flag
26. Antti: a chicken-flag, there is a chicken on the flag
27. Elli: and then there is a bus
28. guest teacher: will you count for us Elli how many pupils there are
29. Antti: no, I will count
30. guest teacher: let Elli count
31. Elli: I don’t want to
32. guest teacher: okay then Antti
33. Antti: one two three four five six seven eight, …, twelve
34. guest teacher: quite a lot, if you can find twelve
35. Elli: then another page
36. guest teacher: okay, please go on, let’s go there

Here, in this episode, Antti and Elli constructed the story jointly. They seemed to inspire each other in joint book story reading. Their joint interest concentrated on the vehicles and a flag. The data reveals that Antti and Elli addressed their speech to each other. After Ellis’s and Antti’s speech closure, the guest teacher invited Elli to participate in joint mathematicizing. Elli was not eager to count the number of the duck-pupils, but instead, Antti joined in the counting activity eagerly. After Antti’s mathematicizing activity, Elli took the initiative to turn to the next page.

**Collaborative mathematicizing**

Episode 4. 20 months later: mathematical questioning (videotaped 2.4.2009, 5 children present, including Kalle and Elli from the earlier session)

1. guest teacher: how many ducks are there altogether Kalle
2. Kalle: one, two, three, four, five
3. guest teacher: how many kids are there altogether
4. Inka: one, two, three, four, five
5. guest teacher: how funny, there are as many kids as ducks. Kalle, look at how many flowers there are
6. Kalle: one, two, three
7. guest teacher: yes, hey, Kalle, if we take one flower away, so how many flowers are there still left
8. Selma: two
9. Kalle: two
10. guest teacher: Kalle, if we take two ducks away, so how many are there still left
11. Kalle: one, two, three
12. guest teacher: yes, should we turn to the next page and it would be Selma’s turn
13. Elli: then it would be Alma’s turn and then mine
14. guest teacher: Selma, go ahead and read the book
15. Selma: those ones go by bus, there is a grunty-pig who is driving
16. guest teacher: who is driving
17. Selma: a pig
18. guest teacher: what is the color of that pig
19. Selma: bright pink
20. Elli: no, it’s normal pink
21. guest teacher: Selma, how many ducks are there going home
22. Selma: one, two, three, four, five
23. guest teacher: how many ducks are there sitting in front of the bus
24. Inka: two
25. Selma: two
26. guest teacher: what about.. how many ducks are there sitting in the back
27. Inka: three
28. guest teacher: if we take three ducks away, how many are there still left
29. Selma: one, two, three, four
30. Elli: look, one, two, three
31. guest teacher: okay
32. Alma: when we take three ducks away, how many are there still left
33. Selma: one
34. guest teacher: good Alma, you asked a very good question, Selma, how many flowers can you find there
35. Selma: one
36. guest teacher: well, Alma, you go on and ask a question like that
37. Alma: how many are there still left, when we take one away
38. Inka: one
39. guest teacher: okay, good
40. Alma: when we take two away, how many will be left
41. guest teacher: how many
42. Alma: none
43. Inka: there is none at all
44. guest teacher: do you know which number we use to say if there is none
45. Kalle, Selma: zero
46. guest teacher: yes, what does it look like, go ahead and draw it there, yes it is a little bit like an O
47. Selma: it is round
48. Elli: no, it is more like oval
49. guest teacher: thank you Selma, Kalle and Inka, now it would be Alma’s turn

This Episode 4 highlights nicely the co-construction of the mathematical activity in the community of learners. The guest teacher initiated the activity by posing a mathematical question, which was successfully answered by Kalle. This led the guest teacher to pose a mathematical question related to a subtraction problem, which was answered by Kalle and Selma (turns 1–9). The social and cognitive elements of the activity were balanced and the children participated in the role defining process (turns 12–13). Selma started by storytelling in the joint book story reading session but the guest teacher focused her attention towards mathematics by posing a mathematical question. Selma did not understand the question and Elli tutored her by focusing attention. The guest teacher accepted the children’s solutions by understanding that the question was a little bit too difficult. Then Alma formulated the question again and Selma found the solution. Alma got positive feedback and her question led to a nice chain of mathematicizing, where the meaning of the number zero as well as the symbolic notation for number zero were negotiated.

Discussion and conclusions

The data of the study reveal that the children adopted an informational stance in joint story-book reading; they shared their knowledge about the topic. This study demonstrates that mathematical content offers a suitable environment for small children to refine their social and cognitive skills. The use of the mathematical book in this study can be evaluated on the basis of four cognitive attainment elements, which are early number concept, verbal reasoning, non-verbal reasoning, and reasoning of spatial awareness. Social skills that seemed to be practiced in the activity were showing interest in others, giving, and receiving. These are all elements of effective communication. In this study, full participation in the joint story-book telling required telling, listening to, and understanding age
appropriate stories. From the social point of view, in this study, the characteristics of the use of the joint story-book in the early education classroom were closely connected with the children’s dispositioning toward participation. This brings up questions of creativity, power and responsibility is the conceptualization of joint story-book telling that takes place around the four elements of action, reflection, communication and negotiation (Illeris 2002). In this study, creativity, power, and responsibility were distributed across the members, when the participants in the early education classroom community were encouraged to participate in the activity building in joint story-book reading; characteristics of learning activities which support community building in the early education classroom can be said to be collaborative participation, shared expertise among members of the community, and the possibility for participatory processes to be visible and articulated.

In this chapter, the joint story-book reading activity was anchored in collaborative problem posing and solving, and the jointly constructed story was fascinating enough to require shared expertise in order to cope with the situation. The learning situation was anchored on tool-mediated book discussion in a setting related to the children’s own experiences of the world around them. In this learning community, the children’s learner identity was formed through participation in the early education classroom. This was seen in the way the children expressed their willingness to participate when co-shaping the activity throughout its execution.

Some might be concerned about a risk of a cognitively overloaded curriculum in this approach, or suggest that the inclusion of academic content could be at the expense of social and emotional skills development. A three-year-old is, after all, more typically a learner in dyadic relations such as parent-child interaction, and the very fact of participating in the early education classroom could be challenging for such a young child. Thus it is important to emphasise here that the approach valuing collaborative learning intertwines social and cognitive learning, paying attention to both simultaneously. The children were here considered as participating members of the learning community having partial sharing control in the construction of learning tasks, and yet each child is also valued as an individual within the positive, nurturing adult-child relationships of the day-care centre.

The inquiry oriented, participatory approach to mathematics learning challenges the text-book oriented approach usually applied in classroom instruction. Whereas the text-book oriented view of later mathematics education stresses the individual construction of paper and pencil procedures in the counting activity, the approach selected in this study puts a particular emphasis on the
sociocultural prerequisites for mathematics learning for younger learners. In pedagogical practice, these conditions can be realized in learning situations stressing authenticity, tool-mediated activity, social interaction and discourse, joint problem posing and solving, and distributed expertise (Brown & Campione 1994). In the inquiry oriented mathematics classroom presented in this study, the children practiced the learning of number names and investigated the structure of number with the help of countable book-characters. Geometrical and spatial awareness was promoted when the children experienced interesting patterns in the playful school environment of the ducks in the book.

As the data of this study highlight, the histories and identities of the children can work as a resource and challenge for the learning community and, reciprocally, the interaction of the learning community can work as a resource for the individual child to negotiate and renegotiate his or her position and interpretation. Socially shared experiences in the course of communal learning activity appear to create a joint platform for meaning making across various modes of interaction shaped by the activity, such as the semiotic, material, scaffolding and identity modes. The cultural tools in the learning situations provide the children with the means to structure their experiences of their living environment and to relate them to the culture of mathematicizing. As a pedagogically responsible member of the culture, the teacher's responsibilities and challenges in early education classrooms could be seen as twofold; on the one hand, to support the children’s enculturation towards full membership of a learning community in the classroom and, on the other hand, to support the children’s personal growth as responsible members of the classroom. The multidimensionality of the mathematical story-telling interaction, which intertwines the social and individual, may have the potential to educate children who are able to participate in the cultural activities of mathematics, to critically monitor them and to take responsibility for re-creating them.

The approach presented in this study offers important information about scaffolding and participation in mathematicizing in early education classrooms. It should be remembered that this kind of approach also involves challenges. For instance, the teacher needs to have a high degree of pedagogical and subject mastery. From the pedagogical point of view, the involvement of all of the children present in mathematics learning situations poses another challenge to the teacher. To conclude, the descriptive examples presented in this chapter offer the possibility to provide educators and researchers with lenses through which to examine the social construction of mathematics teaching and learning in the early education classroom.
References


Children as experts in designing a play environment

Pirkko Hyvönen and Marjaana Kangas

When we asked a university student if children can be experts, she answered by posing a rhetorical question: Do children need to be experts in any other domains than play? In this chapter, we provide answer for the question. Overall, we examine and illuminate children’s expertise in collaborative play environment design process and consider that creation process from the viewpoint of the current expertise studies.

Expertise studies deal mostly with adults emphasizing knowledge, experience, and education and working life. This has traditionally meant that without having some expertise, there would be little opportunity for an individual to appreciate the appropriateness of a new idea, to comprehend key problems, or to express solutions in meaningful way (Finke, Ward & Smith 1996). Expertise, however, is a multifaceted, life-wide, and life-long phenomenon, that will be actually constructed beginning in childhood (Bereiter & Scardamalia 1993, Chi & Koeske 1983, Lajoie 2003, Palmquist & Crowley 2007ab), which in turn allows us to dissect it from the children’s position as well. Traditional approaches have emphasized individual trait components, cognitive processes and mental structures (see Alexander 2003ab), but we will examine expertise from fusion of cognitive, emotional and social (cf Ackerman 2003) approaches.

Gaining expertise is always learning, where all forms of knowledge (see Tynjälä 2007) is represented. In this manner procedural knowledge that denotes skills and processes is also important. (Bereiter & Scardamalia 1993.) Our standpoint in learning follows the basic ideas of the learning sciences (LS), which combines constructivist, social-constructivist, socio-cognitive, and socio-cultural theories of learning (Sawyer 2006). Accordance expertise is based on children’s earlier knowledge and experiences and it is always situational (Bereiter & Scardamalia 1993; Sawyer 2006b), thus it should be studied in authentic contexts. Yet, laboratory experiments have been the prevailing research approaches (see, Chi 2006), although recently, studies in informal contexts have also been executed (e.g. Palmquist & Crowley 2007ab). The present study context is informal by its nature; it is authentic because it is meant to be for playing and other child-centered activities. The idea of expertise includes children as active participants in research processes, especially in cases where research concerns children (Hyvönen &
Kangas submitted). However, as some other authors (e.g. Wardle, 2003) in the educational research field have also noticed, children’s authentic perspective is somewhat missing as it pertains to the play environment and playground design.

The previous two studies on children in designing play environment

This study follows our two earlier studies, where we used same data as in the present chapter. In the first study, we dissected children’s views of an ideal play environment (Hyvönen & Kangas 2007) in order to find out children’s perspective and guidelines for designing and constructing new playgrounds and playful learning environments (PLE)\(^1\). Therefore, we asked children to describe and draw the environment where they would like to play: what kinds of activities it would afford and what kinds of elements there would be. Thus, in designing an ideal play environment, the children adopted the role of playground designer and in small groups collaboratively ideated the ideal playing environment.

As result of the analysis of the children’s suggestions for the ideal play environment, we found that children prefer play environments that consist of several physical structures, such as sports, nature and playground artifacts; soccer fields, forests, various slides, huts etc. The ideal play environment provides various possibilities for physical activities as well as togetherness. In nature, children emphasize animals, trees, woods, flowers, rocks, and mountains. The interesting result is that children’s play environments in fact reflect rich emotional play worlds. Although the children designed accurate artifacts and play areas, their play worlds and the designing process were generally rather emotional than physical. As a result, for the question “what playground designers suggested”, we found six different emotional play worlds, which bring out happiness, fright, care, aggression, excitement, and amusement. (Hyvönen 2008, Hyvönen & Juujärvi 2005, Hyvönen & Kangas 2007.) The emotional tensions caused socio-emotional challenges, which are also important in terms of the process of the development from novice to expert (Hatano & Oura 2003).

The second preceding study explored children’s creative collaboration and the role of narrativity of these playful designing situations (Juujärvi, Kultima & Ruokamo 2005, Kangas in progress, Kangas, Kultima & Ruokamo in progress). The study showed that to collect data from a group of children who, in many cases,

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1. A PLE is an outdoor learning environment in which playing, learning and development take place using the whole body. In addition to researchers, children’s views were recorded during the process. (Hyvönen, 2008, Hyvönen, Kangas, Kultima & Latva 2006).
are collaboratively engaged in mutual design and creation, establishes the power of collaborative knowledge creation (Kangas in progress). Narratives usually emerge as play, verbal action, and as joint emotions, which became more complex and stronger during the narrative episode. The richest and most complex narratives emerged in playful situations characterized as spontaneous, a manifestation of joy and a sense of humor, which interrelate strongly with divergent thinking (see Lieberman 1977). In addition, the study produced the concept of shared narrative thinking that has a special role in collaborative knowledge creation (Kangas in print; Kangas et al. in progress). Shared narrative thinking was reached especially in the situations where the children knew each other well and were used to collaborating, and to playing with each other. This notion supports Vygotsky’s (1986) argument that the depths of understanding emerge between people who have close psychological contact, being able to communicate with each other using condensed verbal means.

These results of the children’s playful designing situations, as well as views of collaborative creativity and narrativity, provide an interesting standpoint for consideration of the situations from the from expertise perspective as well.

Accordingly, the present study offers a novel perspective for children’s collaborative action with the intention of dissecting the same data in the light of expertise research (e.g. Bereiter & Scardamalia 1993, Hatano’s & Ingagni 1986, Hatano & Oura 2003). We illuminate how children-centered collaborative playful designing situations have various interfaces with the results of expertise studies and the two perspectives on expertise. The perspectives are 1) novice and expert and 2) routine and adaptive expertise.

Methodologies

The empirical data were collected at the end of 2003 and the aim was to give children the voice for gaining information for real purposes: to develop playgrounds that would correspond with today’s technology and provide novel tools for children to act in creative society. The data collection started with the children, because their viewpoint is usually missing in designing play provisions (Armitage 2001). To achieve as authentic data as possible, we arranged the data collection sessions so that the children designed play contexts in small groups.

2. Developing playgrounds included in the Let’s Play project and SmartUs consortium. The purpose was to design and construct playful learning environments for educational purposes.
Collaboration and playfulness (Hyvönen 2008, Hyvönen & Ruokamo 2005, Kangas in print) were emphasized in these sessions.

The data consist of drawings by pre-primary children aged from six to seven and of discussions with them. The sessions were video recorded, discussions were transcribed and the drawings were photographed. The preschools were chosen between the kindergartens that organize pre-primary education. Children (N=49; 31 boys and 18 girls), who had written consent from their parents, took part in the study.

The children were told that the results of their creative ideating would be used for real purposes: to design new types of playgrounds in their hometown, Rovaniemi. We collected data from five preschools around the city of Rovaniemi, which lies in the northern part of Finland. We arranged a total of 15 creation sessions, each lasting 30 to 45 minutes, and involving six groups of boys, five groups of girls and four mixed groups. During the creation sessions, we told a frame story in order to stimulate the children's imagination and to provide an atmosphere of creativity. In an imaginary world, any kind of play was possible and any kind of environment could be ideated. We asked children to describe the environment in which they would like to play: what kinds of activities it would afford and what kinds of elements there would be.

After the frame setting, the children drew pictures and discussed vividly, adopting the role of a playground designer. The children made use of their own particular knowledge and experience, a productive source of variations (Greeno & Saxe 2007, Inagaki & Hatano 2002). In accordance with 'story-crafting' (Karlsson 2003), we named the method 'image-crafting' (Hyvönen & Kangas 2007), because during the process, the children form an image of the ideal play environment. In doing so, their imagination and the whole body is involved: they talk, play, draw, suggest, and look around to boost their inspiration. Crafting refers to the means through which the image is processed into a visible form. Image-crafting is an event of social interaction and collaboration, which invites children to commit to ideas publicly (Greeno & Saxe 2007, Inagaki & Hatano 2002).

Image-crafting suits children, because imagining, drawing, coloring, and playing are natural ways for them to express their intentions and desires (see Hopperstadt 2008). The researchers’ role in data collection was to orient children into the task, to listen to them very carefully, and to encourage and inspire children to imagine and draw. We also proposed some questions during the process. The purpose of the questions was to provide more information of children’s desires and
intentions. Occasionally, children totally avoided the questions; sometimes they used questions to elaborate their ideas, and sometimes questions led to discussions.

The empirical data were coded (see Hyvönen & Kangas 2007) using the grounded theory (GT) approach (Strauss & Corbin 1998). Although the concepts and theoretical conclusions are based mainly on data, interpretation is always needed and the analysis requires a "close reading". As an analytical tool, GT stimulates the inductive process and avoids standard ways of thinking about phenomena (Strauss & Corbin 1998).

The data that have provided valuable insight for children’s emotional play worlds (Hyvönen 2008, Hyvönen & Juujärvi 2005, Hyvönen & Kangas 2007) and co-creation and narrativity (Juujärvi, Kultima & Ruokamo 2005, Kangas in print, Kangas, Kultima & Ruokamo in print) are next elaborated through expertise studies. Methodologically, we have qualitatively analyzed the process of children’s creation and results of that creation process and categorized events and results according to the two angles.

**Dissecting children as experts**

Our current interest deals with children’s expertise in playful design situations, which we have studied and elaborated from two angles. Grounds for choosing these angles lie in literature review, where children’s expertise is considered through these perspectives. The first “novice and expert” deals with domain and general expertise (Weisberg 2006a, b), where development of expertise is seen as a life-long and life-wide continuum. Novices and experts are defined particularly through the idea of “islands of expertise” (e.g. Crowley & Jacobs 2002, Palmquist & Crowley 2007ab). The second perspective illuminates children’s expertise in the light of routine and adaptive experts (e.g. Bransford 2001, Hatano & Inagagi 1986).

**Novices and experts**

Problem solving is one of the key elements in development of expertise. Experts also possess integrated bodies of domain knowledge (see Alexander 2003, Bereiter & Scardamalia 1993, Hatano & Oura 2003). We assume that children’s integrated body of domain knowledge is related to play and play environments. Experts are effective at recognizing the underlying structure of domain problems and they select and apply problem-solving procedures. Furthermore, they can retrieve
relevant knowledge and strategies with minimal cognitive effort. (Alexander 2003, Bereiter & Scardamalia 1993, Hatano & Oura 2003) The main problem that was posed to the children was the following: We were going to construct a new type of playground, but we are not experts in play or playgrounds. We do not know what children wish for it. It would enclose something that does not yet exist in playgrounds. Further ideas could be realistic or absolutely non-realistic.

As we presumed, children provided solutions for the problem in collaborative and playful situations and along fifteen creation session. For the most part, their ideating went smoothly and with minimal cognitive effort (see Alexander 2003, Bereiter & Scardamalia 1993, Hatano & Oura 2003). In inactive situations, we supported their activity by posing questions.

When comparing novices to experts, the latter are advanced in perceptual sensitivity (to perceive play possibilities), categorization skills (to categorize elements of the play environment), flexibility (to ideate something which does not yet exist) and detailed understanding (for instance safety elements). Despite that, the novice-expert division does not refer to “worse and better”, because in collaboration situations novice and expert can similarly scaffold each other.

Gaining expertise as a process (Bereiter & Scardamalia 1993) and as adapted from Weisberg (2006a) to this study context, the continuum is a life-long and life-wide process; therefore, children, and older individuals as well, should increasingly be taken into academic expertise discussion. From a developmental perspective, children develop their expertise along the continuum through following steps:

- Children’s prior knowledge about their own and other’s experiences
- Children learn from their own and other individual’s experiences
- Children learn from formal knowledge. They learn issues that are relevant for solving problems

From a problem solving perspective, children work out problems along the steps above. According to Weisberg (2006a) there are two ways to solve problems. As domain-specific experts, children use their prior knowledge as a basis for transfer of knowledge to new situations, where that knowledge provides a foundation for innovations. This was exactly the aim in the creation sessions: we expected children to figure out what they already know about play and play environments, and then to create novel, even imaginary, adaptations, and they did so. Weisberg (2006a) uses the concept of expertise to refer to the capacity to perform constantly,
at superior level, without a regard to how the capacity was acquired (2006a). He (2006b) defines an additional concept, reproductive expertise, which includes fruits of the production as well. More advanced general experts solve problems by analyzing them thoroughly. Children probably can reach general expertise as well, but these data do not indicate clearly enough these types of episodes. Mozart also failed to reach general expertise during his lifetime.

Another perspective for novice and expert is island of expertise, which brings to light that children and novice adults can, as experts, build their knowledge constructions and deepen understanding about phenomena they are interested in. Islands of expertise underline that developing expertise starts from childhood (Chi & Koeske 1983, Crowley & Jacobs 2002, Palmquist & Crowley 2007ab). Chi and Koeske (1983) proposed that relatively young, even four-year-old children are capable of developing detailed and organized knowledge of dinosaurs. Islands of expertise become platforms on which to practice learning habits and to develop conversations about abstract ideas, concepts, and mechanisms. Even preschoolers can think more like an expert does, which is very different from a beginner's approach to the subject (Chi & Koeske 1983).

Island of expertise refers to the domains of relatively deep and rich knowledge that children develop when they are passionately interested in something, like dinosaurs, volcanoes, space, trains or animals. An island is a collection of knowledge, interests, and activity around a specific topic. (Crowley & Jacobs 2002, Palmquist & Crowley 2007ab). Island of expertise hence stresses the emotional and cognitive nature of expertise. The following three descriptions are characteristics of the process of constructing islands of expertise.

1. Constructing an island is constructing knowledge structure. This takes place through various kinds of activities within the domain, such as conversations, play, reading and visiting places. Constructing takes time, islands emerge over weeks, months, or even years. Constructing islands refers to children in their everyday activities, within communities of practice, mostly in informal environments. (Crowley & Jacobs 2002, Shaffer 2004)

2. Children are not alone on their islands. On the contrary, islands are co-constructed through negotiations, explanations, and problem-solving situations, which take place in everyday practices and especially in play. The children talk, read, play with and learn about their passions in collaboration with parents, peers, or other people (Palmquist & Crowley 2007ab). Thus, expertise is not merely knowledge constructing and emotionally driven activities, but it is also a social phenomenon, which is noticeable in the study of Palmquist and Crowley (2007ab).
The parent’s or educator’s role is to support the motivation and keep up the children’s interest. In addition they can support the process by conversations. However, parents/educators may miss these opportunities. Palmquist and Crowley (2007) investigated how parents talk and interact with 5–7 years-old children who were assessed according to their dinosaur expertise. Parents gave up the chance to challenge and extend the child’s knowledge. The study was executed in an informal learning environment, in the natural museum dinosaur exhibition. It showed that children who were tested as experts did not gain from conversations with their parents. In fact, novice families engaged in more overall learning talk than did expert families and in expert families, children did the most of the talking while their parents remain relatively quiet. The parents missed children’s learning opportunities.

3. Islands constitute an archipelago. Through coordinated activities that are consistent with particular community of practice, participants could develop epistemic frames, which support connections between “island” knowledge and novel domains. In accordance with transfer in learning, children can use experiences in one context to help them deal with new situations. (Palmquist & Crowley 2007ab, Shaffer 2004.)

**Results of children as novices and experts**

We have qualitatively classified our data in accordance with islands and archipelagos. We integrate domain specific knowledge (Weisberg 2006 a, b) with islands of expertise (Crowley & Jacobs 2002, Palmquist & Crowley 2007a b) as processes and products. The main islands are nature, play activities, and physical constructions (Figure 1), which are clarified next.
Children evidenced knowledge and understanding of *nature, play activities, and physical constructions*. The largest island of expertise among the children in this study is *nature*, which is inherent in all the sessions. The nature includes weather (sun, storms, clouds, rainbows), vegetation (woods, jungle, flowers, plants, trees, flowers, grass, bushes), rock material (mountains, caves, rocks, volcanoes, hills, sand and beach), water systems (ponds, lakes, rivers, sea), animals (monkeys, wild cats and cats, birds, bears, tigers, turtles, spiders, foxes, pigs, lions, bees, butterflies, rabbits). In addition, climate, weather conditions, seasons and camp fires relate to the nature. (Hyvönen & Juujärvi 2005) In addition to structures, which are easier to comprehend, nature includes behaviors and functional systems, which indicates a more elaborate network of ideas representing key phenomena.
and their interrelationships (Hmelo-Silver, Marathe & Liu 2007). Structures and functional systems are interlinked with imaginative constructions such as a mushroom-shaped slide, musical caves, magic flowers, slippery palms, and a valley of bum-baboons. (Hyvönen & Juujärvi 2005) The following drawings (Figures 2 and 3) exemplify nature in children’s drawings:

Fig. 2. Nature elements.

Fig. 3. Animals.

Nature, however, is meaningless without having a connection to play activity, which is another main island of expertise. This kind of connection illustrates the idea that through coordinated activities, children develop epistemic frames, and tie one island to another (Crowley & Jacobs 2002, Palmquist & Crowley 2007 ab).
**Play activity, another island of expertise**

Play activity was comprised of tiny islands, yellow spots, which in these data are traditional outdoor games such as hiding, sliding, riding, fighting, competing, constructing, destroying, climbing, swinging, swimming, digging, jumping, running and hanging. Also sports such as playing soccer and skating with a roller blade were important among children. Driving with cars, airplanes, ships, elevators and rockets; playing with commercial toys, animals and soft toys were ideated. In addition baking waffles, playing role-play, adventuring, dressing up, and playing music were included in designs.

Once children simultaneously drew, discussed, and played in the situation, they also made perceptions about affordances (Hyvönen 2008): what possibilities for action (play) their ideas provide. In fact, children constructed affordance compilations; in other words, children *connected various play affordances in order to create a larger entity for play*, a ‘play world’. This happened collaboratively in some sessions. The phenomenon could be interpreted as connection of islands of *procedural knowledge* (sliding, climbing, swinging, swimming, jumping, hanging etc.). Procedural knowledge is knowledge about how to do something, and it is related to the procedure to carry an action out. The following figure (4) includes a series of actions.
The design includes two ponds, which are connected by waterways and two swings, stairs and a deck. Pattern recognition makes it possible for children to know which activity possibilities are included and which are not included in that play world. The pattern recognition process occurs without effort, and then frees mental resources for other uses (Bereiter & Scardamalia 1993).

In one session, the boys showed destructive, noisy, and competitive patterns of behavior by playing fighting pirates at sea. Although the activity of one boy group was based on competition in an environment of fight, they still had to engage in problem-solving during the combats against one another's pirate ships. Finally the activity transformed into collaborative role-playing at the same sea context.

During the drawing session, children really engaged in activity in their nature environment. A group of boys designed a hot Sahara-type environment. Suddenly, the boys became heated, too. This example shows that, in pursuance of idea-generation and imagined play, children put their souls into the environment and into the conditions it affords, and feel them very concretely, even at the bodily level. The following extract shows that Peter felt heated up when the boys created
a hot atmosphere for their play world. Peter: I’ll put [draw] some brown here, because it is so hot in here.

Henry: Ha-ha! I’m going to make this hot too.
Andy: I’m going to put some smoke here.
Peter (leaves the others and goes under the table nearby): It is too hot, so I’m sitting here.

Our data are not the best to gain an accurate in depth understanding of children’s islands of expertise; however, some perceptions are worth discussing. The first notion is that their formal knowledge was intensely integrated with imagination, which was purpose of the creation sessions. For instance, when we categorized the data accordance with different sounds, we perceived that children invented lightning to provide music when it struck water.

Miikka: There are many musical lines here.
Miikka: They come from the lightning
Researcher: Lightings make always music?
Miikka: When the lightings strike on the water.

In addition, boys created different square-form musical boxes, which they could play by themselves. The interest for playing music came out, once two boys said they like playing music and another confirmed: “I play drums”.

The third island, physical construction

Physical constructions denotes vehicles (cars, snowmobiles, ships, airplanes, rockets, racing cars and ‘boat machines’), buildings (play houses, castles, ghosting castle, homes, swimming hall, tents for Indians and magicians, gigantic houses, upside-down house, apartment play house, ‘swing house’, ‘funny house’) playground equipment (climbing frames, slides, gigantic slides and swings, etc.), amusement park equipment (ball pool, water slides, ghost trains, Ferris wheel etc.), sport equipment (climbing wall, skate ramp, soccer fields, spectator stand, boxing sack, goals, trampolines etc.) and others such as beehives, guns, computers, traffic lights, flying flannel dresses, magic cabinets, flags, and circular saws.

One group of boys got inspired by a dark house or hut (Figure 5) The house must be without any windows, totally black and lightless. Further, the floor area must be tiny, but walls quite high. There is nothing inside. The boys laughed and seemed to share a joint understanding about their idea.
Fig. 5. Dark hut.

We researchers wondered what they would do with a house that is tube-like, without light to see. It would be very crowded if filled by a couple of boys. That exactly was the point, the purpose was to be blinded and to bump and collide with walls and other boys. We think that light and space provide possibilities for play, but the boys, as experts do, figured something else out that others had not seen (Bereiter & Scardamalia 1993).

Domain-specific experts solve problems based on their prior knowledge and learning (Weisberg 2006 ab). In these data, it came out by novel inventions, which were clever combinations of existing affordances.
Fig. 6. Various novel inventions, such as ‘hat piano’, ‘musical wagon’, ‘house attached ladders and swings’ and ‘house attached ladders and slide’.

The hat piano, musical wagon, and houses with swings, ladders and slides are examples of inventing something new on the basis of existing knowledge and experience. These afford physical exercise as well as moving by car and playing music.

Minor islands

Some minor islands, constructed by a few children, are worth mentioning. One girl indicated two particular islands by being extremely interested in digimons (Figure
7.) and flags. She expressed her interest by informing: “I can draw all the
digimons. I have drawn them at home. I can draw all the flags in the world.”

![Fig. 7. Two digimons.](image)

She denied creating anything else other than digimon creatures. In this situation,
she was alone in her island; she did not interact with other children or their ideas.
Presumably, her island of expertise was either an obstacle to create something new
or she could not integrate her island into the new context (archipelago) (cf. Shaffer
2004).

Domains that children brought out were not all dealing with play and play
environments. During the sessions some girls discussed adult-like conversations
about adult’s TV shows that they followed regularly, and family compositions,
such as life in divorced and re-arranged families. That recounts for us that some
children, in their daily life, start to build ‘islands’, which we assume to include
adult life.

**How do children gain knowledge of nature and activities?**

In the domain-specific and general expertise (Weisberg 2006 ab) and island of
expertise (Crowley & Jacobs 2002, Palmquist & Crowley 2007ab) – the idea is
that children gain knowledge and construct islands in their everyday activities, particularly in informal contexts, such as museums. The following examples shed some light on how children combined two different islands of expertise and their knowledge of natural science.

In one session, children integrated their ideas and created a certain slide, in which they combined nature with play activity. The product (slide) is a part of the bogey mountain (nature); it is a lion-like animal with a very long tongue (animal). Children climb to the mountain and back of the animal, they have excitement, and finally they slide down (play activity). In fact, slides as a whole, were a very fascinating element for children to modify with the knowledge of nature, for instance with volcanoes. The following excerpt illustrates that children have understood Finnish seasons and forms of water during the year, which includes science education in formal schooling. This is another example of **formal knowledge, which is intensely integrated with imagination**.

The children figured out slides and slopes for each season.

Reeta invents: It would be icy slide.

Iida thinks that then they need to put skates on, but it is problematic: If we put skates on, the ice would be broken.

Reeta provides a solution: If we start from here, first we slide down by bottoms and then by skating.

Iida ponders the same slide through a year: Hi, it would be, it would be a sandy slide, and then it would be a snowy slide and then watery slide.

Iida: Jee

Reeta: During wintertime, it is an icy slide.

Children gain domain-specific expertise in their everyday activities, in various environments; for instance, when they play outdoors during the year, in different seasons, and find affordances for sliding. Finnish children are privileged to play a lot outdoors around the year, where they learn about nature as well. Nature is learned not only by playing there, but also by visiting various places. During data collection, some of children suddenly mentioned justifications for how they had gained certain knowledge. For instance *I have visited Korkeasaari Zoo*: this is the way that Reeta showed how she knew about wild cats.

Our data collection with drawing and ideating is typical everyday practice for pre-school children. We perceived how they also gained knowledge by imitating and following other children and adults. In fact, this is the way that Mozart gained domain-specific expertise. (Weisberg 2006 ab) In one session, one boy drew a
house, which inspired the other boys to create various houses and activities around them. In another group, children were eagerly designing skating ramps, then suddenly one child drew a twisted slide, an adaptation of a skating ramp, which in fact is a straight and quite wide slide. In our research, the sense of humor and imitation of other children are emphasized as the triggering power of imagination and creative processes. (Hyvönen & Juujärvi 2005).

We do not conclude that children in these examples have more powerful reasoning strategies than do other children (Chi 2006), nor do we argue that children have constructed deep conceptual networks, but we state that in a collaborative situation, and authentic playful context with meaningful problem solving tasks, children executed domain-specific expertise in the light of Weisberg’s (2006ab) theory.

**Routine and adaptive experts**

Hatano & Inagaki (1986) assume that children can construct corresponding conceptual knowledge by performing a *procedural skill*. With that conceptual knowledge, they can be flexible and adaptive. Accordingly, they can discover other procedural knowledge. Hatano and Inagaki (1986) proposed two courses of expertise, *routine and adaptive expertise*. Comprehending the distinctions between adaptive and routine expertise has important implications for children and their teachers and parents, because adaptiveness enhances learning through problem solving (Crawford, Schlager, Toyama, Riel & Vahey 2005). In order to develop problem-solving abilities, children need to develop fluent routines as well as adaptive expertise (Hatano & Inagaki 1986, Hatano & Oura 2003, Lin, Schwartz & Hatano 2005). However adaptiveness does not simply happen after children develop routine expertise (Bransford 2001, Hatano & Inagagi 1986).

As routine expert children cope and successfully apply knowledge in a familiar situation or context and solve familiar tasks, they can develop to be fast and exact. For instance, they learn to make a sandwich in the morning or organize a game board in a certain way. Developing does not necessarily require understanding, questioning, or looking for new angles. Most of the problems in daily life do not require adaptive expertise (Crawford 2007); instead, development of fluid routine expertise is sufficient. Development is then evidenced as more efficient, effortless, and fluent practices.

In routine tasks, children use culturally embedded and accepted scripts and models. Through reflecting and understanding these scripts and models, children
can, however, develop towards adaptive expertise. (see Hatano & Inagagi 1986.) When children develop in routine tasks, capacity for learning more complex procedures will be freed (Bereiter & Scardamalia 1993). In this state, the educator’s role is to guide children in their actions.

Adaptive expertise, as adapted from Crawford (2007) is not viewed as fixed or intrinsic attributes of children, but rather as a set of cognitive, metacognitive, social, and affective strategies, where children abandon routine problem-solving strategies. In these situations, children favor learning-oriented approaches to problem-solving – in other words they need to understand instead of just to perform something. Children as adaptive experts, as modified from Sawyer (2004), are more flexible, inventive, spontaneous, encouraging and creative. They deal with novel, unexpected situations, and build knowledge at the same time (Crawford 2007). This, however, requires environments where children are afforded unfamiliar, unexpected, and exceptional situations rather than repetitive tasks. For developing adaptive expertise, complex environments and situations should be provided (Hatano & Oura 2003, Hmelo-Silver et al. 2007, Sawyer 2004). In complex environments and problem solving situations, other people (peers, adults) and cultural artifacts are considered meaningful (Hatano & Oura 2003, Sawyer 2004).

In terms of expertise and creativity, particularly in the supporting process of expertise, it is important to provide environment that encourages the reduction of everything to routine. Creative experts are experts at taking successful risks in their domains (Bereiter & Scardamalia 1993), which denotes adaptive experts.

**Results of children as routine and adaptive experts**

Our data provides examples of both, and usually in the same creation episode. The designing process starts always by pondering existing play environments, i.e., they utilize first prior knowledge of play environments, as mentioned earlier in this article (e.g. Sawyer 2006a, Weisberg 2006ab).

**Routine expertise**

Defining routine expertise as coping and successfully applying knowledge and solving familiar tasks, the next discussion illustrates this kind activity quite well. The children have a knowledge base on foxes but they are not confident in how to use this information in this playful situation. In the excerpt, the researcher and the
girls, Oona, Leena and Sanna, share the kind of problem-solving situation, when the children are designing their ideal play environment by drawing and by discussing.

   Researcher: Do you think if there would be any animals in the forest?
   Sanna: Jee, there are foxes, I guess.
   Researcher: Foxes?
   Sanna: They are kind of nice foxes.
   Researcher: Kind foxes.
   Oona: …which are afraid of people.
   Researcher: They are afraid of people?
   Sanna: No no. They are nice, they will not be afraid.
   Leena: Animals, indeed, they are afraid of people.
   Sanna: Jeah, they easily do so. However these animals are such as are not afraid of people.
   Researcher: It can be possible.
   Oona: Except leopard.
   Leena: Bears are afraid as well.
   Sanna: Yes, but once they have a baby bear and it is newly born, which they have to protect against humans, then they will not be afraid.
   Researcher: What would the foxes do there?
   Oona: One can only stroke them, otherwise their mother gets angry.
   Sanna: No, I will not suggest to stroke either.
   Oona: But can.
   Sanna: Yes but…Pretending could, but not for real.

In this conversation, children propose *domain specific formal knowledge* about animals and their behavior during breeding time. They also propose fictional knowledge about animals in this present imaginary situation. The episode illustrates the negotiation, where children solve a problem if animals are scared of people. At the end of the episode, Sanna’s utterance *Pretending could, but not for real* involves a suggestion of an imaginary play world where everything is possible.

The following episode represents the same discussions later, and it illustrates the design process, where the researcher has an important role in creating appropriate conditions towards children’s adaptive expertise; i.e., for being flexible, inventive and creative.
Oona (to researcher): Would you draw here, sand for instance? Hi, make it a volcano, for instance. Use red color here.
Researcher: Would you help me a little bit?
Oona: Yeh, I will.
Researcher (suggesting): Would it probably be a play park with a volcano? Isn't that frightening at all?
Oona: Sure! It would be frightening.
Researcher: But if it were false volcano?
Leena: It would be made of sand.
Researcher: Would it then provide lava?
Oona: Yes it will.
Sanna: It is false lava indeed, which is not burning at all.
Oona: Yeah!
Sanna: Hei, would we pretend that …
Oona: Here as well, lava erupts
Sanna: Hei, would we figure out that this lava is a certain slide?
Researcher: It would be quite nice… slide made of lava, it is really a good idea!
Oona: That kind of spiral lava ladders. (twisted ladders composed of lava)
Researcher: spiral lava ladders?
Oona: Yes.
Sanna: Jee, we could climb upwards by using those spiral lava ladders.

Compared to the first episode, now children are involved more deeply in the collaborative design process, which is similar to play (cf. e.g. Juujärvi et al. 2005). This leads them to have the possibility to engage more intensely in the play world and act as expert players.

Boys faced an unexpected problem-solving situation, while designing and playing at the same time (Figure 8).
Fig. 8. Fighting at the sea.

Designing a fighting environment drew the boys into fighting circumstances, where tricky situations emerged rapidly. They had to solve various problems and finally the battle turned to collaborative joint activity. The episode is an example where routine play suddenly provides possibilities for adaptiveness and gaining expertise. Gaining ‘expertise’ is a developmental process as well as a method, a way to perform in highly demanding situations (Crawford, et al. 2005, Sawyer 2004, Scardamalia & Bereiter 1993). Highly demanding situations should be relational to individuals’ level of development. Developing adaptive expertise includes overlapping continual phases from routine expertise with facts and procedural knowledge to more flexible and creative problem solving abilities.

Self-regulatory knowledge comes from child-development research, where children have been demonstrated to lack self-regulatory knowledge to attain their goals (Bereiter & Scardamalia 1993). However, on the basis of these data, it seems that children are able to regulate the relationship between fear and safety once they have committed themselves to role-playing and the plot. Creating the plot with frightening, even scary, situations comprised unexpected problem-solving states.
The following narrative describes how the children constructed a ghost story and finally turned torturing tickling to a smooth ending.

Kaisa: These here are poisonous mushrooms, this frightens, really frightens. Though this is just a mushroom, it really frightens (giggle). Every single time you ask something, the mushroom makes something evil to you.

Researchers: What does it do?
Kaisa: Something terrible and funny.

Researchers: Funny or terrible?
Kaisa: Fun- fun- funny, it may…
Iina: It may tickle!
Kaisa: You see, it comes here and torture.
Kaisa: It is pretending torturing.
Iina: Then you fall down into an ice-cold lake from the mountain!

Researchers: What could you play there?
Kaisa: Well, we can play there, what was it… dog that is in danger.

Researchers: Ahaa.
Researchers: How do they torture there?
Kaisa: They just tickle.

Researchers: Tickle.
Julia: It is the same here.
Kaisa: And guess how it can be stopped?
Researchers: How?
Kaisa: If you sing a song.

Discussion

Our aim was to illuminate children’s collaborative design processes from the expertise viewpoint. Children showed three main islands of expertise, and they showed various episodes of routine expertise, and few episodes towards adaptive expertise. The development of expertise is a journey or path, where children are not dichotomously either novices or experts (Aleksander 2003, see Lajoie 2003) or either routine or adaptive experts; instead, they are on the way. In order to understand and foster that journey, the following perspectives are discussed.

1. Expertise is always about knowledge and every kind of knowledge is needed, for instance declarative, procedural, and hidden knowledge of expertise in developing, performing, and maintaining it (Bereiter & Scardamalia 1993). Do
children gain knowledge or is their knowledge merely naïve thinking? It seems that pre-primary children from northern Finland have gained manifold knowledge of nature, play activities, and physical constructions. In addition, they do not only integrate their islands of expertise, but they integrate them with imagination, by being creative playground designers. Interesting notion is that aggressive, earsplitting and competitive episode, when boys were fighting at the sea, seemed to provide plenty of unexpected problem-solving situations. They had to solve these cognitive conflicts in order to carry on the battle.

Inagagi and Hatano (2002) conclude that young, preschool children do have autonomous domain-specific knowledge of biological processes, which are also included under the domain of nature. Alexander (2003) signifies that understanding can be broad (how much children know about nature) or deep (how much they know about specific domain topics, e.g. about volcanoes). Our aim was to identify children’s “islands of expertise” and knowledge areas dealing with play environment at a group level, not to test and evaluate their knowledge. Therefore additional studies are needed for testing and evaluating children’s knowledge at individual and group levels.

2. Expertise is always about emotion and motivation as well. Understanding motivational and emotional dimensions of that journey explain why some children carry on in their journey toward expertise while some yield to necessary challenges (Alexander 2003, Bereiter & Scardamalia 1993). An important question for teachers and parents is then how to support children’s curiosity and interest in playful situations and in informal contexts? In other words, how to support them to build new islands, where interests, activity and knowledge are integrated (Palmquist & Crowley & Jacobs 2002, Palmquist & Crowley 2007ab).

3. Expertise is also a social phenomenon and it is distributed (Greeno & Saxe 2007, Hatano & Oura 2003), hence collaborative perspective has been essential. It has been generally understood that when children play, they often share their fantasy world and construct the stories of play through collective activity. This also emerged in playful research situations, where children were involved in collaborative design processes while creating their ideal play environments; expertise emergence produced rich and vivid play worlds with major domain-specific “islands” and some minor “islands” as well. The educator role is hence to invite children to commit their ideas publicly and make use of their particular knowledge (see Greeno & Saxe 2007).

It has been suggested that the opportunities to work and play with a peers of different expertise provides children with a chance to learn effective strategies by
seeing them used, and used effectively, in the course of solving a problem (Gauvain 2001). Hence other children, teachers and parents (Azmitia 1988, Palmquist & Crowley 2007ab), as well as cultural tools (Cole 2007, Hatano & Oura 2003) such as play environments, are crucial for gaining expertise. In peer interaction, expertise as a certain feature promotes learning better than do other features (Azmitia 1988). The benefits of collaboration are especially pronounced for children who were novices and were paired with children who were experts. Collaboration, however, does not occur just by putting children together; successful collaboration often requires practicing and tutoring as well (Hyvönen 2008).

The process of expertise could begin very early (Bereiter & Scardamalia 1993, Hatano & Inagagi 1986). Hence, we finally conclude that in terms of life-long and life-wide expertise development, the particularly aimed adaptive expertise is important for offering possibilities for children to solve problems, learn from their experiences, and to learn to be sensitive for perceiving problems (Bereiter & Scardamalia 1993, Crawford 2007, Hatano & Inagagi 1986). In particular, experience yielded a highly developed viewpoint for conceptual understanding (Bernstein & Crowley 2008). For educators, this means providing various environments filled with “problem spaces” (Greeno & Saxe 2007) and various practices, such as play opportunities.

The journey of development of expertise should be made visible (Lajoie 2003), for instance, by creating digital portfolios. The ideas, drawings, and discussions of children are, in that sense, worth saving and reflecting upon. Portfolios provide insight for children and their educators regarding transitions in expertise. This is one way to support the real thing; evidence for reinvesting mental, emotional, and social recourses in progressive problem-solving (see Bereiter & Scardamalia 1993).

Finally, the answer for the question if children need to be experts in any domain than play is following. Play-activity is one of the main expertise islands in this study. In order to be an expert in play, children need content for play. In other words, it is difficult to play with nature-related ideas - which is another island of expertise – if understanding of the nature is very narrow. Neither imagination nor creativity does emerge from scratch; they need sources of information. On the other hand, children can construct their knowledge and understanding in play.
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Children in Research
Block story: Listening to child’s narrating at home

Elina Viljamaa

- Mom, can I take a hammer and nails?
My 5-year old daughter, here called Aino, comes up to me with her question. I allow her to take a hammer and nails and she goes out. After a while, I go outside and see her sitting on the ground and hammering. In front of her, there is a big hill of small and big blocks. Behind it is a forest with very big trees. On the other side of her, there is our house and on the other side, not very near, is sauna building. It is autumn, September. There is still a lot of vegetation, although you can see leaves on the ground too. She has taken a big block and now she is hammering nails into it – but not only nails. I see different things, like small sticks and dead leaves, lichen, grass, even a lingonberry, all hammered on top of the big block. I go and get video camera. The following I have written from beginning of the videotape.

Aino points at one stick and tells me what it is.
- Okay. Look, here is the pier. Then… (Aino)
Aino turns around and takes a
- Where is …the. pier? (little sister, 3 years)
- Where was the pier? Show her. What else was there? (mother)
- Boat. Sailing boat. (Aino points to a nail) Finland. (points to a bark) Swedish (points to a lichen) …and…(points to a bark)
- Russian (brother, 9)
- No..no…but…Yes, Russian. (Aino)
- It is fine, isn’t it? (Aino)
- Yes! (mother)
- And into there still one straight nail… (Aino, holds one nail and starts to hammer it)
- Let me see. (little sister)
- It will be a fine pier. There is a boat. And a bridge from where you can go there. (Aino, pointing)

Aino is hammering. Her whole body is doing the work, her mouth is open. Then she shuffles her body and nestles her hammer. She twiddles the hammer in her hands and tells:
- And…and…guess what! Les’s carry this in front of our house because Santa Claus usually comes from there and Santa Claus looks that “Oh, how fine it has been done…” (Aino)
- Mmm, lets do so. (mother)
- And if he asks then in that winter, that “Who has made that?”, so lets say him that Ain... … Me. I had made it. If we just remember to say. Maybe we don’t. (at the same time she picks leaves from the ground and puts them on the top of the block.)

…

- There. (Little sister points to a lingonberry)
- Yes, there. Is it a lingonberry? (mother)
- Yes. (Aino hammers) Oh, a mosquito, walked on my brow! Then…Mom, take a picture of that now! (Pictures 1 and 2)

…

- Only three nails can be hammered any more…. (A piece of wood falls down from Aino’s hand and she picks it up) Mosquitoes are stupid!

![Fig. 1. Aino is hammering.](image1)  ![Fig. 2. Aino’s Block.](image2)

**Background**

This was the beginning of one telling episode. It is part of vast research material that I and my children and their friends have constructed with very many different ways in the middle of our every-day life. The material includes different forms of stories and telling, for instance, written narratives about children’s imaginative play, discussion episodes, children’s videotaped and photographed activity, telling about imaginary friends, dreams, fantasy etc. Some of these the children have constructed by themselves, some are based on children’s telling, but I have given them a form, some have grown up in interaction between me and the children. The same children are participants in the research at different ages during the years 2002–2008.
My focus is in children’s telling, narrating, in its very many variations and in its meaning for children and the adult who is listening. My first interest was in children’s imagination playing, where I saw number of narrative elements. From there, my concern has spread to children’s many rich ways to use narrating in their everyday life. This example here, my daughter talking and at the same time working with a block, hammer, nails, lichen etc., is from the year 2008. Through it, in this article, I want to describe the nature of children’s narrating.

I use here words ‘telling’ and ‘narrating’ as synonyms. The focus of my research is on the nature of children’s spontaneous narrating as a special form of knowledge and knowing. My research is based on the narrative approach and I also use and develop telling as a method. My methodological interest in particular concentrates on how to do research with children in an ethically sustainable way (Children’s Geographies 20008, Estola et al 2009). The main point is that every child has his/her own knowledge about his/her life (Hurtig 2006, Karlsson 2006, Nelsson 1989). It is impossible to catch it, but I, as an adult and a mother, can be nearby it. Like ethnographers, I share my time with children, although in this process, the researcher after collecting enough material does not go away. Added to this, I also do my research autoethnographically, for instance by writing myself into episodes and discussions. Also, for me, narrating is a way to know more about children’s telling and my own place in encounters with children (Clandinin & Connelly 2000, Conle 1999.) Being very close with children who are participants in research is a question that I notice and write about. It does not automatically mean understanding better or not seeing things that are very near. (Coffey 2005, Estola, Kontio-Logje, Kyrönniemi-Kylmänen & Viljamaa 2010.)

Rather than analyze, I will now retell this telling moment in dialogical way. The foundation thought is that Aino’s ways of thinking and telling and being in the world are different from mine. Irigaray (2002: 123) writes how we too often make the other our own—through knowledge, sensibility, culture. To understand the difference is the only way to encounter each other. To respect that, means that I move the focus from analyzing and interpreting what Aino is telling more into the way that I tell what kind of echo or resonance it creates in my mind. I am listening to her telling in dialogue with other researchers, some philosophers and people with whom I have discussed. Löytyymiemi (2004), for example, discusses this type of listening, retelling and dialogical knowing.
From form of story to meaning of telling

What comes to our mind when we think up a story? Different kind of written or told stories, fairy tales, novels, short stories etc. are easy to recognize as stories. We have learned how a good story has a beginning, an end and a good storyline between them. This Aristotelian way to define a story has been the foundation for story conception in Western Countries. From literacy and linguistics, the concept of a story has come into research of humanities. This happened at the same time in different sciences and has been termed the narrative turn, or, as Hyvärinen writes, it is better to talk about three narrative turns. (Hyvärinen 2008a.) After that, there has been a lot of writing about limits of story and storytelling, experience and telling, narrative and narrating. Hyvärinen pulls this discussion together in his many articles (Hyvärinen 2004, 2007, 2008a, 2008b). Because of the literacy background of narrative concepts, for a long time they have carried the thought of using words, (spoken and written) when telling stories.

Children, especially very little children, do not use words equally like adults do, and that might be the reason why researchers have not been interested in their stories as much as those of adults. Children’s stories have been compared with adults, and are often seen as weak and have not been taken seriously. (Engel 1995, 2006, Juntunen 2006). In addition, methods to study children’s lives have not underlined their own thinking and voice. (Alanen 2006, Greene & Hill 2006). However, there is empirical evidence that when children are engaged appropriately in research, they are able to make significant contributions (Birbeck & Drummond 2005, Karlsson 2000, 2004). In child research, there is increasingly a need and interest to develop methods where the child’s own perspectives are taken seriously. Stories reflect experiences and therefore studying children’s storytelling offers one way to understand their own insights.

However, are words the foundation for story and telling? Thinking so, we would accept that a child who does not yet speak cannot tell stories at all. However, a feature film, a theatrical performance or an opera can include stories told with words but also with action. A good story can also be told without any words, as in silent films. Is it possible to think of music like a story, music telling us a story about something? Artwork? Dance? Action? In my research material, there are many stories written from children’s imagination playing, where I see many narrative elements, even though sometimes only a few words are said. Engel writes that playing is the foundation of narrative (2006). I do not think of action generally as narrative, but I see that it has different meanings in different
situations and therefore the same action can be narrative or not narrative at all. I will give one example. In police and robber play, my child is running as a robber, *he/she is* a robber and his/her whole body tells about being a robber and running away. I can only imagine what kind of storytelling is going on in his/her mind and I see running as an essential part of child’s telling. However, if I take an exercise and go for a run, the meaning of running is different. (cf Hyvärinen 2004, 2007.)

Now I will move the focus from the words and form of a story into the way that a story works. Although I write here about children’s telling, the same works with adults. The ways of telling are sometimes different, as we will see later. Engel writes that story (telling) is giving a shape for experiences. When children tell, they move between their experiences and telling about them, and both change each other. (Engel 1995, 2006.) Therefore, the important thing that happened for child yesterday, and the story that he/she tells about it today, are not the same. After few weeks, years, the story has changed a lot. When telling about experiences repeatedly, they become part of child, of his/her identity and life. Different things intertwine together with experiences in a way that is meaningful for child. For children, telling is a way to know and understand the world and different things and happenings around them and, at the same time, a way to understand themselves. (Engel 1995, Nelson 1989.) Jerome Bruner writes about two different modes of cognitive functioning, of thought; the paradigmatic or logical-scientific way and on the other hand, the narrative way. They both provide distinctive ways of ordering experience and constructing reality. They both complete each other, but Bruner argues that the narrative way has not been noticed sufficiently. (Bruner 1986.)

We get a need to tell, when something shakes up our world, differs from our routines, breaches the canonicity of our lives. By telling about what happened, we try to give meaning to it. (Bruner 1986, 1990, Tolska 2002.) In children’s everyday life, disorganized feelings might be enclosed very often. This is their first time to be in the world. They encounter many things and happenings for the first time and are surprised and inspired of them. What we adults do not even notice can be novel and enormous for children. For example, the way I open the ice-cream packet makes my 6-year old boy wonder and ask numerous questions. Engel writes that *telling is pervasive in children’s life* (Engel 2006: 200). It is my belief that children use telling to organize their experiences even more than we adults do. The ways that children tell are not always the same as those we adults use, and can therefore be hidden from us.
Narrating in a Block Story

In my example episode, many levels of stories and telling can be seen. One is a videotape that can be thought of as a story about Aino and her working with a block. I have written down what is said and done in the video and that is another level of the story. Then there is the story that Aino is telling, in ways that I can hear and notice, and which in my mind gets a form and meanings that I understand to give for it. One very important story is the one that Aino tells in her mind. I can see parts of her telling, most is hidden from me. Momentarily, her telling has a shape that is visible for me and other children. In those moments, narratives and narrating are an invaluable source of insight into what children think and feel and how they think and feel (Engel 2006: 209–210). In other words, storytelling is like a window opening to a child’s experiences. Of course, what I see and understand is never the child’s own experience and telling about it.

Still, I want to make distinction between ‘being a narrative’ and ‘processing narrativity’ (Hyvärinen 2008b), and focus here more in ‘processing narrativity’. In Aino’s telling, I am interested about how she uses narrating to weave together her experiences, places, material, real and imaginative others, words and actions. Like Ochs and Capps (2001) write, the point can be more in narrativity activity. Gubrium and Holstein also write how making a distinction between stories and the storying process offer grounds for thinking narratives as something interesting on its own (Gubrium & Holstein 2006: 1).

I will now look at Aino’s telling through three things. First, I write about how action and embodiment are a part of her telling. Then, I think over how her telling is in relationship with the place where she is and the material that gathers her. The third point is how others, real and imagined, become part of her telling. As I think, forgetting one of these changes the wholeness. Although I write about them here, one by one, they cannot be distinguished clearly but they are woven together

- Action and embodiment

Aino tells here about a pier, a boat, and countries like Finland, Sweden and Russia, Santa Claus etc. Besides words, she tells a lot by doing things. Her telling is bodily and it includes a lot of action. She takes bark, leaves and lichen from the ground, she hammers them into the block, and at the same time, when she talks she twiddles the hammer in her hands. Later she runs to the sauna building, carries more nails for her work, and lies on the sauna floor for a long time without saying anything. She also talks about action (e.g. Let’s carry this…, Santa Claus usually comes…). I see her action but not what is going on in her mind. Probably they are near each other. I think it is not possible at all to distinguish action and words
when thinking her narration. I have tried to somehow describe her bodily telling by writing about it, although it is, of course, not any more the same telling that was going on that one day in Aino’s own mind, or between Aino, her sister, two brothers and me.

Rogers, Casey, Ekert and Holland (2006: 162) write how children experience and interpret the world in ways that are inherently embodied. Embodiment, as Hyvönen & Marjomaa (2004) describe it, can be thought as expiring, doing, knowing, planning and interaction where we cannot make any distinction between knowing, feeling, and expiring in our body or in our mind (Hyvönen & Marjomaa 2004). Thinking and talking, hammering, carrying, laying running etc can here be seen very narrativity, they all are woven together in Aino’s telling. She moves between two levels; in her action and talking, she gives forms for her experiences and perceptions. Her actions and talking bring other experiences into her mind. For example, she showed and told me about a pier, a sailing boat, and different countries from her block. After that, she hammered for a while and when hammering, somehow it comes to her mind that Santa Claus would like to see her work. (cf. Engel 1995.)

Children very seldom just sit down and tell what they have in their mind. My 5-year old boy wondered once, how come adults, when they meet, can just sit and discuss together for so long a time. He had noticed that he himself never could do so. Children think and know by doing, they know with their body. Merleau-Ponty (2000) writes how everything comes in to our consciousness through our body. We are in the world through our body every moment; we perceive and understand concepts with our body (Hyvönen 2000, Merleau-Ponty 2000). This seems to be clearer for children than for me. I often see my children lying on the floor that has an underfloor heating or beside a tumble drier. Warm places attract their bodies like magnets. My body does not hear that call because I have learned that people normally do not lie on the floor. It does not come up to my mind when I feel cold. I think children, who do not know so well how things should be, are able to listen to their bodies more than we adults are.

- Place and materials

Place and things in the place are also an important part of telling. This story could not be told in some other place, for example, inside our house or when sitting in the car. All that we tell, we tell from certain place and different places, and in our telling, place and places are always present (Karjalainen 2008). Here, Aino is sitting on the ground, near our house, near very big trees, in the autumn. The place, things that are possible to do in just that place (hammer, run, take things from nature, climb, feel autumn, feel the ground, notice mosquitoes, pick lingonberry,
work with the block…) are in dialogue with things that comes up to her mind. Which is first, her idea of a pear and then seeking something that can be a pear, or a piece of bark that brings an idea, maybe a memory of summer and peer into her mind? It is impossible to know that, but there is not one without the other. There are things too, in her environment that is not woven into her telling. Her body, her mind, her thinking, her feelings, her senses are in dialogue with the physical world and the material around her, and with some of them she has a more intense relationship, by taking them as a part of her storytelling. What she chooses and what she tells is meaningful for her, in this moment, in this place. After a while, and from other place, she would tell differently (Karjalainen 2008).

The way we experience reality and how it gets meaningful for us is in a phenomenological approach called intention. Because reality can be seen as very abstract, word situations can be used to mean that reality, in which we have relationship. There is another reality too, that is in being, but not our situation before we somehow experience it. (Merleau-Ponty, 2000, Perttula 2005.) In my example, there are different things, the place, different materials, people, etc., in Aino’s situation. They are in reality all the time, but they are not in her reality, in her situation, until she has a relationship with them. Around her, there are numerous blocks, leaves; lingonberries etc. and some of them are in her situation. With one block, she has a very intense relationship, few dead leaves are woven into her storytelling, one special piece of bark is a pier and a nail is a sailing boat. A memory of Santa Claus brings him for a moment into our enclosure and Aino’s situation too. Other children are doing their own work near Aino, and I do not know how well she realizes them. There are moments when they surely are in her situation, when taking part in her telling. Other people can be thought as a part of place too. First experiences of place and space are involved in children’s relationships with other people. Other people are the basic environment, more mental and social than physical. (Rusanen & Torkki 2000.)

- The others

Telling is always shared. We always tell for somebody, we have an audience. Although we are alone, write a text, think in our mind, we somehow imagine the other, who is listening, or reading our story. (Eräsaari 2004, Karjalainen 2008.) Of course, there can also be real others really listening. The real or imagined others are an essential part of telling and influence how the telling goes on and what is told.

Here, Aino is telling for me. Before I came, she already was hammering and also talking and imagining in her mind, I guess. I do not know how that telling would go on, but somehow. When I came, she started to tell for me. I become such
a part of her narration at that moment I was in her situation. It can be thought that Aino performs for me. Narratives can be looked as a strategic performance within specific and multileveled context that order embodiment, situation and discourse (Langellier & Peterson 2004, 39–40).

There is also Aino’s 3-year old little sister, asking things of Aino. After the foregoing short episode, little sister takes part in Aino’s working; she wants a block too and also nails and a hammer. Aino’s 7- and 9-year old brothers are also nearby, take part, and contribute to Aino’s telling. For example, Aino was not going to tell about the Russian before her brother suggested it to her. In addition to the fact that others affect Aino’s storytelling, her telling influences others, too. The lived and taped story goes on so, that Aino’s sister and one brother go and get blocks, hammers, and nails. Sister starts to hammer leaves and other things on her block, as Aino did, while brother engraves a boat. Their own and shared telling goes on. (cf. Ochs & Capps 2001.)

**The end of story is often beginning of new stories**

Words distinguished from context, from the place and audience they have been told to; change the whole story and storytelling. Something very important disappears or changes if we divorce a content of a story from its context (Hyvärinen 2008b). Words also cannot be the whole story or the only way to tell stories to narrate. Children, especially, use many rich ways to tell, and in their telling, they use a lot of doing, acting, and different materials from their environment. This can be seen very well, for example, in their imagination playing. Children’s way to live is very comprehensive, at the same time they play, run, sing, make art etc. How and what they perceive depends on bodily states and feelings, which extend into how they use language, construct memories and make meaning of living in a unique physical, relational and cultural world (Rogers et al 2006, 162). Their telling resembles their way to live. In their telling, they weave together words, different materials, and things that are available to use, acting, environment, and other people (real or imagined, creatures etc). Telling is lively and it goes forwards like a flow, things that they need are drawn along into the flow and are given a meaning that comes from the child’s mind. The past, this time, and the future are present in their telling and not in a traditional temporal way. They move very easily in time, place, reality and imagination. Everything is woven as a new weft by very story-like way, a new meaningfully way for the child.

When studying children’s stories and storytelling, it is easy to agree with Ochs and Capps (2001), who express that stories are not something static, they do
not have only one good form. More than the Aristotelic model, children’s stories and their telling resemble writer Skiftesvik's definition about an advanced story.

An elementary story starts from one point and goes on straightforward into other point, usually chronologically. In an advanced story, points of the beginning and the end gets darker, levels of time changes, people come and go, the main story creates side-stories, tensions and riddles arise. The end of the story may offer solutions but it can also be the beginning for a new story. The story is like a life, who knows the point where it ends. (Skiftesvik 2005) (Translated by the author)

Children’s stories and storytelling are often open-ended, as is their way to live too (Engel 1995). I cannot say where the end of this story is. Here, I was told a very little part of it. As I already mentioned, Aino ran to the sauna to get more nails and continued her hammering and talking. After a while, Aino, her two brothers and little sister went to the sauna building. Inside the sauna, the boys climbed up to the roof, while telling many real and imagined things. Telling about these would be another story. Aino laid on the floor. Suddenly, she went to get her block.

_Aino has brought her block near the sauna. She takes more and more leaves, sticks, etc. from the ground and hammers them onto her block. She takes earth, too, and talks. The whole block is covered with things and earth so that the nails cannot be seen any more. The boys are climbing up to the tree and from the tree they go to the roof. After a while, Aino’s little sister and brother go and get blocks too. Sister starts to hammer. She takes leaves from the ground and hammers them on her block. Brother engraves his block. He says that he is making a boat._

_After a long working period, Aino carries her block near to the door of our house (for Santa Claus). Her little sister wants to do the same. On one side of Aino’s block there is a piece of wood that looks like an arrow. Aino turns it. Under it is a hole._

_November. There the block stands. Nothing is told about it for me. Things that were not hammered on it fall off. Snow covers the block. It gets frozen and things hammered on it fall down too. Nails stay in their place. Very often, I see the whole block fallen down. And then standing again. A few times I heave it up too._

_December. I would like to put a candle on the block, but when Aino notices that, she says that it cannot be done. Santa Claus cannot see the block if I do so._

_Christmas. A few days after Christmas, Aino remembers her block and says that Santa Claus saw it when he came._

_March. Blocks have fallen down and are under the snow. I’m waiting for spring to see what happens._
References


183


Ethical insights and child research

Eila Estola, Marikaisa Kontio, Taina Kyröniemi-Kylmänen, and Elina Viljamaa

In this chapter, we concentrate on our own experiences about ethical issues when doing research with children in the field of educational research. The presentation demonstrates that the traditional research ethic guidelines and codes, such as informed consents, are not enough to ensure good research. We argue that in addition to traditional research ethics, we should also consider research as a special relationship between researchers and, in this case, children. In this paper, ethics of care will be the theoretical concept to look at this special relationship. This theoretical concept has practical consequences and this is what we especially talk about. Our examples are all focused on children’s everyday life from the children’s perspectives. The first section of examples handle Elina Viljamaa’s narrative research, in which a researcher is a mother doing research with her children, the second, Mari-Kaisa Kontio’s study, is an international research study including diverse methods such as participatory observations, interviews, and videotaping. The third section examples are based on Taina Kyrönlampi-Kylmänen’s research and is about a phenomenological interview research in which interviewees are small children and it also broadens ethical issues towards Levina’s understanding about the other as the Other, to see the face, a secret to encounter.

Ethical issues are becoming more and more important in childhood research, as the knowledge and understanding about children and adolescents is growing and as new research methods emerge (Children’s Geographies 20008). In this paper, we talk about how we have tried to live with ethical challenges and tried to solve them. In fact, sometimes these dilemmas cannot be solved but the researchers have to live with them. This also is an ethical challenge. Our aim is not to ignore the significance of ethical codes or informed consents. Many general guidelines such as the UN Convention and the Rights of the Child are necessary. Guidelines that a researcher needs to respect children, protect them, understand their intimacy, and never harm the children are important and must be taken seriously. Ruoppila (1999) summarizes this by saying that to maintain and support children’s wellbeing is the topmost guide of all research of children.

When conducting research with children, it is essential that all research procedures are sensitive to children’s wellbeing. Especially when research may
also focus on personal and intimate topics, special questions about research ethics are raised. In these situations, traditional research ethics focusing is not enough. Protocols can fail to protect participants, since they are rigid and not encouraged to be reflexive and take care of all participants. Protocols do not address the children as active participants but often consider them as immature objects of the research. Trying to think through all the ethical issues beforehand from the data collection to the end of the project can limit, rather than enhance, research. (Einarsdottir 2007, Flewitt 2005, Leeson 2007.)

A new approach is needed. More important than following the ethical rules, is to concentrate on personal codes that take responsibility for the ‘other’ and have respect for otherness. This kind of ethics is based on relational morals, such as caring, and emphasizes the uniqueness of children and situations. It is fundamentally important to see the entire research process as a moral practice from the first beginning to the end of the research (Flewitt 2005). Ethical questions are ambivalent and uncertain, often having to be addressed in the field; they are contextual, emergent and situational, dependent on the relationship between the researcher and participants and what is mutually discovered through the process (Dahlberg & Moss 2005, Leeson 2007). Researchers need to be flexible and acknowledge that additional skills such as careful listening and caring are essential parts of the ethical researcher’s work (see also Syrjälä, Estola, Uitto & Kaunisto 2006).

New collaborative research methods have changed the situation and raise a question: should there be different ethical protocols for children and for adults? Although researchers have different opinions in this respect, we join with those scientists who consider children as a special group in research (Allmark 2002, Aldersen & Morrow, 2004). These researchers emphasize some points. Children’s age and level of cognitive ability require additional attention regarding how to inform them about research. Children often want to please the adult and that is why children can feel uncomfortable in saying ‘no’. On the other hand, children may not answer anything at all, or something very short and uninformative, not because of what is asked but because of the unfamiliar researcher.

Trying to think through all the ethical issues in advance, from the data collection to the end of the project, can limit rather than enhance research (see Leeson 2007: 132). It seems obvious that the most important aspect is the researcher’s own attitudes towards children, since this influences the choices of methods, the analysis and interpretations. The age of the child is not the only criterion; the competence of the child is more important. It is critical to talk in a
way that a child understands. When thinking about the informed consent and protocols, new approaches are needed and have also been developed. There are many cultural differences at which age a child can decide if she or he wants to consent. There might also be many abstract words that children hardly can understand related to her or his engagement in the research. This all means that a researcher has to consider carefully what children might think about this particular piece of research, about these particular issues, and not talk about general protocols.

As already mentioned, it seems to us that ethics of caring offers one theoretical concept and tool to conceptualize ethical challenges. The concept supports asking questions relevant in doing research in close and long-term relationships. It pays attention to human relationships, encountering, and responsiveness, supports seeing ethical questions as unique, requiring decision-making in the situation at hand. It also complements the abstract formulations of ethical protocols, that can be used as a tool to evaluate the different phases of research. (Elbaz-Luwisch, Moen & Gudmundsdottir 2002, Noddings 1984, 1992.)

Ethics of caring makes researchers ask a couple of important questions and to challenge some previous and often taken for granted assumptions about resolving potential problems from the beginning up to the end when planning the research. From the caring point of view, researchers are responsible for their relationships with the participants in the course of the entire research process. If a researcher really wants to be ‘other oriented’, she or he should think about the motives of the research. Are the motives to get funding, to make a career, or do they arise from real concern for those participating the research? Is the research with, for, or about participants? As we earlier wrote, the traditional research has seen participants as objects, not partners. At the end of the research process, there are baseline agreements about rights, duties, and the publishing of the results.

A special issue that has not been talked so much is the researchers’ sensitivity to the participants’ emotions and to their own emotions. Nevertheless, some experiences about emotions during the research process have been published (Erkkilä & Mäkelä 2002) and every researcher who has ever done any field work has experiences about many, often contradictory, emotions: joy, happiness, shame, guilt, uncertainty, irritation. Ethics of care can help researchers to be able to live with emotions and take them even as a power of research.

Before we will look at the concrete examples, we summarize that each researcher needs to take her or his responsibility instead of ethical protocols. This means being sensitive to the questions such as:
– How to treat the participants as the owners of their own story?
– Does the research promote the good for those involved in the research?
– How to protect those who are near to, but not involved in the research?

Next concrete examples will depict researchers’ practices, emotions, ethical challenges and feelings of uncertainty.

Doing research with children at home

Besides that doing research with children means an enormous change in thinking, it is also an ethical choice. In this section, Elina Viljamaa briefly describes her research project and reflections about what doing research ‘with children’ means in practice.

I have produced a wide range of material at home with children. The material includes different kinds of stories and telling; children’s spontaneous telling, episodes between children and adults, stories written about children’s imagination playing etc. The research frame is not very traditional; I am a mother of a large family and at the same time a researcher; the children that take part in my research are my own children and sometimes their friends, too. Doing research in the middle of our family’s everyday life has empowered an opportunity to produce material with very many different ways in spontaneous situations over a long period (2002–2008). The same children take part in the research at different ages. My ongoing research is based on a narrative approach and I use ethnographical and auto ethnographical methods. My interest is in children’s rich ways to tell and use narrating as their way to know (Bruner 1986, Nelson 1989, Viljamaa 2010). Children’s ways to live and tell are inherently embodied (Rogers, Casey, Ekert J & Holland 2006). They tell stories with words, but also with action; for instance, in their imagination playing (Schiller 2005, Viljamaa 2009).

The methodological and ethical question is how does narrating work as a place to encounter child and his/her way to live and think. I agree with Susan Engel (2006), when she writes that children’s narratives offer insights into their experience of their world. However, we can never catch others, hear child’s thinking and experience like he or she him/herself, but we understand it through our own life history (Perttula 2005, Löyttyniemi 2004). It is also important to notice that for children themselves, narrating is not only representations of feelings and experiences, but it also provides a fundamental intra- and interpersonal
process through which children make sense of themselves in the world (Engel 2006: 200).

If research is thought of as a process where the researcher has his/her interests, plans different steps of research, gets permissions from parents and authorities, takes care of anonymities, realizes research etc., this kind of research cannot be done, or it would be hard to accept. When doing child research in this way, where children are taken from the margins into the middle of the research, every step of the process has to be rethought again (Alanen 2007). The main guideline is that children are not objects; they are not passive, but active, participants and they influence the research process in its every stage. However, the one who has the responsibility of the entire research and choosing is the adult. Still, children’s influence does not only extend to my practices in the research process, but also to my thinking, to me myself. What does this all mean? Let us have a look at what happens in the next short episode. My 5-year-old son was telling about a mother who died in the war and I wanted to take part in his telling.

- One ordinary mother died in war. She just swerved but then she started to sleep / fell asleep. And she was laid to rest. And she just shouted that “I was dead in war! I was dead in war! I was dead in war!” Still she is shouting.
- Yes. If you really die, you cannot any more speak or shout anything.
- Well, everyone knows that.

My little son’s telling gave me, for a moment, a possibility to see what is in his mind and how he thinks. My stupid, adult comments stopped his telling. He could not go on and I didn’t hear more about his thoughts about the dead mother. In any case, this episode was not unnecessary. It showed me how important it is to notice and remember that a child’s thinking goes in his own ways, which are often different than mine. If I want to hear and see a child’s own knowledge and ways to know, I have to give up on my desire to explain how things ‘really are’, with my tendency to dominate and to think that I have the right knowledge. Irigaray (2002: 121) writes how our manner of reasoning, even our manner of loving, corresponds to an appropriation.

To understand that child is another than me, and his/her ways to be in this world are different than mine, is the basic ethical question. It means that I can never completely catch a child’s thinking, but only touches of it, if even that. Löytyniemi talks about dialogical knowing, that leads up to ethical encountering. It does not mean that I understand a child’s experience in an empathic way, but rather that I accept him/her as different from myself. It is possible to understand a
child’s experiences only as far as his/her telling somehow resonates in me. At other times, I can only wonder at him/her. Wondering the other can be the moment before I know in dialogical way, a moment before I gain an insight (Löyttyniemi 2004). In this next episode, my 4-year old daughter bicycled up to me with a chive in her hand. She had a question and thoughts to share with me.

- Mom, is this chive dead?
- Well… it doesn’t look like dead, I think.
- It is dead. It is so small.
- Well, I don’t know…I don’t think I even know when a chive dies.
- On Friday.
- On Friday?
- Yes. All small ones always die on Friday.

I am again near the child’s own knowledge, listening and wondering with my daughter. I have to adjust my role as one who is not understanding and knowing. My daughter has her own knowledge about how things are and I have to respect that without trying to expound. I was still thinking what to say, when she took her bike and went forward with the chive in her hand. What we talked about was enough for her. It has to be enough for me too, although many questions came to mind when she had gone.

When living with children, there are, at every turn, situations where I have to quickly decide what to say and do and how to react. There is no time to think and plan. Very often I feel like the little boy in Elina Karjalainen’s story. The boy, called Small Angry, threw his teddy bear overboard into ocean and later he repented for his action. However, as Karjalainen notes, unfortunately, very often later is same as too late. (Karjalainen 1977: 13). The better ways to do things come to mind usually later, not in the situation they should come. Making mistakes, feelings like embarrassment, shame, failure, incompleteness, and unreadiness are part of research, like they are part of life, too (Josselsson 1996, Lindqvist 1999, Mazarella 1997, Syrjälä et al. 2006).

And who ever can know when a chive dies? After a short discussion with my daughter, I started to think that. Does it happen at that moment when you pick the chive? Or when you eat it? Maybe it dies in autumn, in that minute when there is no chlorophyll in the chive anymore? Near such big questions, I feel myself very small.
Doing research on children’s everyday life

Not only intimate and close relations between a researcher and the participants give rise to ethical questions. In this section, Marikaisa Kontio describes ethical issues when studying everyday life of young children by applying combinations of quantitative and qualitative methods.

I discuss what it is to enter the usual everyday life of young children as a researcher having a traditional background of research ethics. I share some of my field experiences with you, especially those connected with ethical issues. These thoughts are raised years after the actual research work. At that time, ethical questions where handled in a formal and traditional fashion. Only some time ago, I learned another way to approach ethical issues when dealing with research work. The ideas of ethics of caring (Noddings 1984) gave me a reason to rethink the time of my fieldwork.

Different ethical questions were raised during the different phases of the research process: before, during and after data collecting. I approach these field experiences with the tools/ideas of the ethics of caring (Elbaz-Luwisch, Moen & Gudmundsdottir 2002, Leeson 2007, Noddings 1984). The ethics of caring highlights the personal responsibility of the researcher and her/his decisions during the whole research process (Noddings 1984).

I used to collect data for a large international research project, Cultural Ecology of Young Children (Tudge 2008). The ethical matters in the project were managed in a traditional, ethical protocols way (Leeson 2007). The traditional way relies on the informed consents and protocols. There, all formalities were well considered and organized before going to the field. This type of procedure is meant to support the fieldwork, to provide a supportive and objective frame for the researcher. However, at the same time, the researcher as a person is somehow neutralized. He or she could hide her-/himself behind these codes. When leaving the ethical considerations to this stage, the decisions at hand during the research work are in danger of losing their ethical importance. Yet, when rethinking my field experiences, I see that I had to make many decisions that were related to ethical issues and that could not be considered beforehand. These had to be solved in the situation.

Ethical issues have certainly always been both beforehand and 'at hand' questions, but only now these 'at hand' ethical questions are about to receive increased attention. Ethics of caring provides a complementary perspective to the
ethical codes approach. What were these 'at hand' situations at different phases of the research when I was doing research with children?

The ethical issues are already revealed before getting to the field, when contacting and meeting children and their families for the first time. Recruiting families to participate in the research happened using a certain protocol. It was based on high ethical concerns in terms of permissions, selecting the research areas of the city and getting the list of families from that area. The initial contact with the potential families happened by letters and by phone calls that soon followed the letters. There was even a protocol for the first phone calls as these were full of the researcher's personal decision-making. How much should the research be ‘advertised’? How much to persuade the contacted families, by saying there will be no trouble for them or emphasizing the matter of the little sum of money? What if children were not willing to participate but the parents were? These types of ethical questions were met during the first meters of the field research.

When a family was considering to participate, I visited them – and met the children first time. This was the point where my personal being became significant. Ethics of caring has raised the issue of researcher's personal ethics while doing research: respect of otherness and responsibility for the other (Leeson 2007) - in children in this case. How to talk to children? How much to follow them during the first time of meeting? How much attention to pay to the parents and how much to children? And what about children who didn't like the idea of participation at all?

During the observation on the field, children and their families were asked to continue their everyday lives, going about as they would do without the researcher’s presence. I was following children everywhere they went during the agreed observation time. We had an agreed upon sign to tell me where or what situation I was not wished to enter. This happened couple of times by the adults and two to three times by the child. It was easier to respect the adults sign than the child's sign, I noticed.

There were some situations in which a child seemed frustrated. What should have I done? Once a child started to play by hiding himself and asked me what I am doing? Why I was following him? I remember trying to explain to him that I'm interested in his play and that I have agreed with his parents to do so.

A very usual ethical question during the field work was the distance to the child: how far away should I stay? Should I stand or sit in order not to annoy the
child or other persons? The following extract gives an example of distance taking and position in the research space:

Piia, a working class Finnish girl, is playing outside on a playground near her house with her mother, father, and the baby at 8 on a Thursday evening in June. Piia is on the swings, and her mother tells her to put her shoes back on and continues talking with another child’s mother. Piia goes over to the slide, and she and some other children count to decide the order in which they go down. When she has her turn, her mother takes her home, where she has a snack and then cleans the table. (Tudge 2008: 252.)

The ethics of caring raises a question about responsibility towards the participants. One way to show responsibility after the actual material collecting, is to keep a close contact with children and their families. After the data collection and observations, I met the children and their families several times while interviewing parents and collecting questionnaire data. Families got a copy of a videotape filmed during the fieldwork time. Professor Tudge, the leader of the project, also visited several families a year after the observations. He even travelled to the Southern part of Finland to meet one family.

Parents were asked for a permission to use the videotapes for research purposes. This formality is part of the ethical code logic. The ethics of caring type of consideration appears at least now when I am using the videotapes as my research material. I am wondering, should I ask the permission once again, this time from the child him-/herself? Should I talk with those children who are now adolescents about their memories and their thoughts?

Meeting children and families, and talking afterwards about their experience, has mainly supported my experiences that I have made right decisions. The feedback I got was encouraging and not one of the participating families interrupted the collaboration. My feeling is that I have managed to show respect both for the children and for the entire families.

My short rethinking of the fieldwork period shows that there are ethical decision-making situations during the different phases of research work. These situations are unique, not universally impossible to resolve in advance. In addition, children and families are unique with their special dynamics. Finally, the researcher is a unique person who makes many decisions related to ethics while doing research.

Encountering children? I would say I had a kind of implicit responsibility for the children. It felt natural not only to go and collect the data, but also to meet
these people as persons. I tried to find out their emotions, wishes and intentions by playing with them, by listening to them and by giving my time and thoughts to them outside the observing time also.

According to my experience, traditional research ethics and informed consents offered a good frame for organizing the data collection. But as I have learned afterwards, I have made lots of ethical decisions during different phases of research. At that time, I did not consider these as ethical questions. I interpreted these decision-making situations more on the basis of my personal being, feeling and seeing (Bae 2005).

The personal thoughts and feelings of the researcher are strongly present when making decisions in the field. The researcher should be prepared to meet the at-hand decisions better than at the moment (Bae 2005, Rautio et al. 2008). I felt many times uneasy because of my decisions. I would consider them afterwards by talking with my friends, but mostly keeping the thoughts to myself. Even when families and especially children were mostly welcoming and all the consents were signed, I still had questions of whether I was really allowed to do this.

Research at children’s homes, participating in everyday life, is a special and demanding activity because of its sensitiveness. It demands a certain attitude to enter homes and you cannot be successful with the ‘pure’ scientific attitude. Much of the empathy and respect and human presence is needed. The ethics of caring provides some tools in this direction.

Ethical issues in interviewing children

The last examples open a new window into the research ethics by combining Emmanuel Levinas’s philosophy with research ethics. Although we, elsewhere, use the concept of ethics of caring, in this section we want to show that there are other ways of looking at the research ethics that also emphasize the uniqueness of the individual and the situation. The doctoral thesis of Taina Kyrölammi-Kylmänen (2007) described the experiences of everyday life and contributed to the child interview as a method. The data consisted of interviews with 29 children between the ages of five and seven years in northern Finland. The goal of this writing is to reflect ethical issues in interviewing children in the frame of the phenomenological tradition of Emmanuel Levinas.

As I interviewed the children, my interest was especially to try to find out the children’s own understanding about their everyday life, and especially about the parents’ work and its consequences. My research interest drew me to the
phenomenological tradition and this is how I found Levinas. For Levinas (1996: 69) ethics was the first philosophy. Fundamental to Levinas was the idea of encountering of two persons. At the heart of Levinas’ thinking was the importance of the faces of the other, the eyes and the gaze of the other. He pointed out that when looking at the other person, you always have to remember her or him as the Other, as a secret. For Levinas, the origin of the ethics is in the Other and as such, it differed from the ethics of rules, duties or rights; not something to conceptualize in a cognitive concept but rather like a religious-like passive opening to the otherness. (Levinas 1996, Oksala 2001: 65.)

Applying Levinas to a research interview means that a researcher has to protect and respect the child and to make sure that the child trusts the interviewer and participates in the research voluntarily. Although I, as a researcher, try to catch the child’s perspective, I have to remember that it is not possible. As a researcher and human being, I cannot leave the ethical discussion to other persons or authorities. I need to keep in mind that a human being lives with other human beings and, thus, becomes a person. This is always an ethical process (Varto 1994). Other people can show how things can be recognized in different ways and how one can live in different ways.

Levinas concentrates in his philosophy on the importance of the other person as the initiator of the ethical awareness of a human being. One does not have to think about ethical questions ‘when everything is the same, all is like me’. (Varto 1994: 71). People easily think that the other person is similar to themselves, opposite to Levinas’ thoughts.

In the following, I will describe through two examples my ethical behavior in the research interviews. In the first example, I made the child like myself, which comes out in the way that I direct the discussion. The result was that I overlooked the child’s point of view.

Child: (Pekka, 5 years): Guess what?
Interviewer: What?
C: We caught a fish this big (shows with his hands).
I: Who usually wakes you up for the daycare?

The following is an example where I empathize with the child’s experience and give him a chance to finish his story. According to Levinas (1996), I was interested in his thoughts and experience.
I: Who are the persons you love?
C: (Siiri, 5 yrs): Well, like my little sister, mum and dad and all grannies and grandpapas. But if they are like mean, it feels bad and I’d like to like make noises. Shall I tell you what I did once?
I: Well, go ahead!
C: Dad got mad, so I got mad at him. So I ran away from home. And I went to the grannie’s.
I: You went to the grannie’s?
C: No, I went round.
I: And dad was worried.
C: Yeah and they came with a bike to meet me. Then we four left together
I: How did you fix up?
C: Well, we didn’t actually. We fixed it up and we have fixed it up many times- no more fighting but we have, though.

According to Levinas, the Western philosophical tradition is characterized by respecting alikeness. The otherness and difference has been a problem that has to be made familiar and known. The problem with this kind of thinking is that it is like a circle: the aim is to know what is already known. As a World War II survivor, Levinas was especially concerned about the danger of totalitarianism, the ideology of one truth (Tuohimaa 2001, 151–152) He thinks that unpacking the totality is possible only through the otherness (Levinas 1996, 68–74). Hence, the philosophy of the Other and importance of face has a huge political impact as well.

Coming back to the importance of face as a fundamental ethical basis, Levinas (1996, 68-74) argues that if we observe and describe the color of the other person’s eyes, we take him as an object. On the contrary, the real encountering happens when we do not even notice the color of the other person’s eyes. Instead of seeing the color of the eyes of the child, my aim is to see the child as the Other. The Other person, the Child, has shown me, concretely, how another person is needed to give rise to ethical awareness. When a child tells his/her secrets to the researcher, the researcher has gained the trust, and then, perhaps, has encountered the child. The interviewer cannot leave the child with anxiety, but with a feeling of tender protection. At its best, an interview is a positive experience for the child, where she/he receives the undivided attention of an adult person. (e.g, Lahikainen, Kirmanen, Kraav & Taimalu 2003, Ritala-Koskinen 2001, Thompson 1992.)
Conclusions

Our examples from various research methods and research stages opened some windows to the multiple ethical questions a researcher faces when working with children. When taking seriously every child’s uniqueness, this means that we have to consider research in a new way in all steps: material collecting, methodology, analysis and interpretations, and reporting.

Questions about power is a special arena when thinking about research with children and the ethics of caring. Einarsdottir (2008) has pointed out a few important issues related to power. She argues that a researcher should make participants feel comfortable. ‘Natural settings’ are therefore recommended. A researcher should be sensitive of using the methods in the way that suits to the children. In practice, this means that attention should also be paid to the non-verbal behavior as well. For instance, children may say ‘yes’, when a researcher asks for permission to ask questions, but the body language may tells something else. This is because children often want to please adults. Elina Viljamaa’s research is an excellent example about diverse methods in collecting research material.

Special ethical problems can arise when reporting the results. For instance, according to the traditional ethical codes, anonymity is one of the main principles. Indeed, it is essential to protect those involved in the research. However, it might be possible for people to recognize not only themselves but also those close to them. Again, Elina Viljamaa’s research is a good example about these challenges. What is a researcher to do in the situations when anonymity is not clear or even more, when the participants can be identified quite easily? There is no exact right answer. However, a researcher can do many things. A researcher has to be honest with those involved in the research. In many cases, participants can be identified only by those who are close to the participants. For instance, in our research project in two small villages, the villagers might recognize some participants, but no one else.

There are also solutions to hide some facts by telling ‘fictional’ stories. This means that a researcher changes some details and retells a mixed story in which the results however are based on the correct analysis of research material. Sometimes participants want to use their own names. This can be also a problem, because in the course of time, the opinion can be changed. Again, we face the question that a researcher also has to make the final decisions in these situations. Sometimes it can be according to the ethics of caring not to be as open as participants want.
New research methodology argues that research results do not represent any objective results in the correspondence sense, but are more or less researchers’ constructions. Even more, when doing research with children in intensive discussions, interviews or long lasting contacts, the results are co-constructions between researchers and participants. There is no knowledge in the participants’ minds that a researcher can ‘take out’. This means an ethical challenge for the researcher. A researcher faces questions as we described above. Am I sensitive to all voices, or do I silence some voices?

Repacking the ethical tool bag

Finally, we suggest to repack ethical tool bag when doing research with children, by arguing that instead of informed consent, we should talk about ‘process consent’ and pay special attention to the ethics of caring.

1. The aim towards ‘ethical symmetry’: Ethical symmetry is a practice where ethics is regarded as a continuum where all features of the research project and the needs of the participants, children, and adults are acknowledged. Differences between participants are allowed to emerge rather than being rejected. The individual participant’s needs are appreciated.

2. Instead of aiming mastering the entire process to encounter the participants and accepting the situations that are ambivalent and uncertain, often having to be addressed in the field.

3. Accepting the research as contextual, emergent, and situational, dependent on the relationship between the researcher and participants

4. Careful listening and caring as essential parts of the ethical tool bag

We finish by introducing one ethical problem related to the present publishing politics in academia. We are urged to publish in international research journals to a scientific audience. Our experiences about doing research have made us think of research as an ethico-political practice. From this point of view, we can ask if a researcher should also report the results to the participants. In our case, this means reporting the results to the children and their families. The ethical demand is to use the language familiar to those involved in the research. The familiar language can mean photos, drama, videos in addition to the written language. As Mockler (2007: 92) elegantly puts it, by citing Stenhouse (1981: 17), Too much research is published to the world, too little to the village.
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INSIGHTS AND OUTLOUDS:
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