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Charlotte Ringsmose
Grethe Kragh-Müller *Editors*

Nordic Social Pedagogical Approach to Early Years

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International Perspectives on Early Childhood Education and Development

Volume 15

Early childhood education in many countries has been built upon a strong tradition of a materially rich and active play-based pedagogy and environment. Yet what has become visible within the profession, is, essentially a Western view of childhood, preschool education and school education.

It is timely that a series of books be published which present a broader view of early childhood education. This series seeks to provide an international perspective on early childhood education. In particular, the books published in this series will:

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- Examine how early childhood education is researched locally and globally
- Examine the theoretical informants driving pedagogy and practice, and seek to find alternative perspectives from those that dominate many Western heritage countries
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Introduction to the Nordic Social Pedagogical Approach to Early Years

There is an increasing focus on early childhood education quality globally, reflecting a growing political awareness that education starts earlier than primary school and that high quality in early years influences children's learning and development in a lifelong perspective. This increased political interest in ECEC internationally can be regarded as a consequence of the now comprehensive research across countries evidencing a correlation between quality learning environments and young children's development both in the short and long term (Heckman 2006; Bauchmüller et al. 2011; Gupta and Simonsen 2013; Esping-Andersen 2011; EPPSE 2015). It is generally acknowledged that high-quality preschool programs in early childhood are of importance far into adulthood, both for choice of education, work, professional performance, and social and relational competences (Huntsman 2008; Heckmann 2006; Belfield 2005).

Around the world, philosophies of early childhood education vary. The OECD report"Starting Strong II" (2006) points to two different traditions when it comes to preschools: the Nordic tradition and the French-English tradition – a "social pedagogical approach" and an "early education approach" or "the readiness for school tradition."

The Nordic tradition is based on a sociocultural theoretical premise that children grow through interaction and communication in shared activities with adults and other children. This social learning approach emphasizes play, relationships, and outdoor life, and learning is presumed to take place through children's participation in social interaction and processes.

The aim is to study major characteristics in the social pedagogical approach by investigating the key characteristics in the Nordic approach. What are the characteristics of the pedagogue? What are the important features that the Nordic approach develops? What are the relationships with children in different traditions in what is called the French-English tradition or the Anglo-American tradition and the characteristics in the Nordic approach?

We want to investigate how children can enjoy childhood and at the same time become able to actively participate in society and develop the social and cognitive skills and competencies that individuals require to do well in society. The experiences

and learning children gain in preschool centers stay with them for life and form important foundations for the child's development and learning opportunities.

The book does not intend to represent details in differences between the early year approaches in the Nordic countries nor to present each of the Nordic countries. The book aims to explore what is called the social pedagogical approach and what is distinctive in the Nordic approach to early year education and care. Also it is not intended to provide a full picture of the French-English or Anglo-American tradition but to give some examples of different educational philosophies that strongly influence childhoods.

The idea of the book originates from Denmark – and has more chapters by Danish researchers. The Nordic countries share many of the same philosophies and traditions, even though some aspects vary from country to country. The contributions to the book from Iceland and Norway share many of the same elements of what is called the Nordic tradition. Within the Nordic countries, there are variations and cultural differences, but these are not the aim of the book.

This book aims to critically explore how the social pedagogical approach supports children's learning and development. It takes the Nordic perspective in order to learn from this, maybe before it is too late. There is a concern in many of the chapters as a consequence of the push for learning in early childhood education. The push for learning may affect children's right to a childhood. Across traditions, children learn, develop, and become ready for school.

The Content of the Book

The chapters are grouped together in two parts. Part I is *Danish/Nordic Child Care Tradition*. Part II is *Key Characteristics in Nordic Child Care Unfolded*.

Part I: *Danish/Nordic Child Care Tradition*
The first five chapters describe and discuss the Nordic tradition in child care – everyday practices, underlying policies, values, and development of the child care sector. In the chapters, there is a concern and discussion about the move away from the Nordic tradition and toward more structured learning approaches.

Part II: *Key Characteristics in Nordic Child Care Unfolded*
These chapters deal with some of the key characteristics of Nordic child care tradition – the importance of play and outdoor life and the importance of children's participation, rights to have an influence on their everyday life, the tradition of lived democracy, relationships between pedagogues and children, the children's own perspectives on everyday life in child care, and the traditions in collaboration with parents. The key characteristics of the pedagogue are also discussed. Finally, it discusses how the quality of the child care should be led from the Finnish perspective, during the times of societal changes.

The Content of the Chapters

Part I: *Danish/Nordic Child Care Tradition*
Chapter 1 – *The Key Characteristics of Danish/Nordic Child Care Culture*
Danish/Nordic child care culture is characterized by the homely atmosphere, the informality and personal relationships between pedagogues and children, and the children's freedom to play and influence everyday life. The Danish/Nordic child care traditions are strongly influenced by the German philosopher Fröbel's philosophies of gardens for children and his thoughts on the importance of children's free play in natural surroundings. Aspects of the Danish/Nordic tradition are discussed in relation to English-French tradition child care.

Chapter 2 – *Values in Danish Early Childhood Education and Care*
Three common values were identified in this Nordic study, democracy, care, and discipline, which were communicated, expressed, and negotiated through interactions between pedagogues and children in the study. Democratic values deal with children's autonomy and possibilities of participation. Caring values are linked to a special relationship that targets and supports the child's needs. Disciplinary values are defined as the system of underlying rules, norms, and existing order, which regulate children.

Chapter 3 – *The History of Children's Engagements in Danish Child Care*
Based on a historical analysis, it is argued that children's engagements have played a central and crucial part throughout the varied pedagogical approaches that make up the Danish tradition and its pedagogical methodologies and practices. Yet, due to a strong present-day educational perspective within center-based child care, along with the application of standardized and evidence-based programs and evaluations, the pedagogical tradition is fundamentally challenged and changing.

Chapter 4 – *Opportunities and Challenges in Icelandic Early Childhood Education*
The Icelandic tradition emphasizes democracy, well-being, care, and interpersonal relationships reflecting the Nordic traditions of child care. As in the other chapters in this section, there is a concern about the challenges facing early childhood education and care in an era of increasing globalization with academic pushes and pressures to increase accountability and also with Iceland moving from a homogeneous society to becoming multicultural.

Chapter 5 – *Comparative Perspectives on Early Childhood: Choices and Values*
Policy developments in Denmark and England are examined in order to identify key differences as well as similar movements in the development of the early year curricula and provision in the first 15 years of the twenty-first century. By contrasting and comparing key discourse, similarities, and differences in the Danish and the English ECEC, we aim to elucidate the impact from governmental policies on reshaping early childhood. The countries are chosen as representatives of the differ-

ent traditions, the Nordic "social pedagogical" approach and the French-English "early education" approach.

Part II: *Key Characteristics in Nordic Child Care Unfolded*
Chapter 6 – *The Role of Play in Danish Child Care*
Children's play is central in child care in the Nordic countries. This chapter describes how children's play with peers and friends is supported by the pedagogical environment of Danish child care. The environment facilitating children's play is illustrated with reference to typical Danish child care practices and research results on quality of child care. Play is considered an important developmental activity for children.

Chapter 7 – *Outdoor Education in the Nordic Region*
This chapter gives an insight into outdoor education in the Nordic region. Nordic ECEC practitioners often look upon nature as an important place for play and learning, and children in Nordic ECEC settings normally spend a large part of their day outdoors. The nature preschools are examples of this where most of the time is spent in nature.

Chapter 8 – *Children's Perspectives on Their Everyday Lives in Child Care in Two Cultures: Denmark and the United States*
The emphasis on children's rights to be listened to and given an influence on everyday life in child care is studied here investigating children's perspectives on their everyday life in child care in two different cultures – Denmark and the United States – in order to investigate similarities and differences between the two cultures and the impact of this on children's everyday life in child care in the two cultures.

Chapter 9 – *Increasing Pedagogical Attentiveness Towards Children's Perspectives and Participation in Toddler Child Care*
Adults' attentiveness toward children's perspectives and what children experience here and now is a prerequisite for their well-being and learning. This study opens up for an open and curious approach enabling a new understanding of children's relational being and their intentions and meaning making. By changing their attentiveness and coaction with the children, practitioners create opportunities for participation available for the children in toddler child care. A pedagogical sense of presence is a prerequisite for the development of the practitioners' attentiveness and inquisitive approach toward children and coaction.

Chapter 10 – *Children and Pedagogues as Partners in Communication: Focus on Spacious and Narrow Interactional Patterns*
Relational qualities and communicative aspects create premises for children's participation. Child-adult communication contributes to how everyday interactional processes evolve. Qualitative differences, described by the metaphors of spacious and narrow patterns, are interpreted in terms of their potential for children to express themselves and take part on their own terms.

Chapter 11 – *How Positive Childhood Experiences Promote Children's Development of Democratic Skills in Denmark*
Danish children and youth people perform at a high level (take first place) in international studies that measure being prepared for living and acting in a democratic society. The foundation for the development of democratic skills is shaped through policies, culture, and practices in families, primary school, and child care. The Danish historical and cultural values of democracy are part of children's everyday lives.

Chapter 12 – *Re-metaphorizing Teaching and Learning in Early Childhood Education Beyond the Instruction – Social Fostering Divide*
A reconceptualization, or re-metaphorization, of learning, communication, and education is presented trying to avoid residing to one of the poles of the dichotomy examining and reflecting on the guiding metaphors constituting different perspectives on early childhood education and care practices, such as child care and preschool. Identifying perspectives provides a way of construing central features of preschool – such as learning and caring, the social and the individual, and play and learning – as integrated rather than disparate features that need to be related.

Chapter 13 – *Collaboration Between Child Care and Parents: Dilemmas and Contradictory Condititions in the Institutional Arrangement of Child Care*
Collaboration and coordination between parents and professionals is an important part of child care practice. Parental collaboration in the pedagogical practice is often a rather paradoxical effort, developed in relation to contradictory historical and institutional conditions and requirements to treat parents both as equal participants, consumers, and clients. In this way, challenges and dilemmas in parental collaboration in child care are analyzed in relation to larger societal conflicts about the relation between society and citizen and the overall purpose of child care as state institutions.

Chapter 14 – *The Professional Identity of the Danish Pedagogue: Historical Root in an Education with Focus on Democracy, Creativity, Dannelse and a 'Childhood Logic'*
The chapter provides insight into what characterizes the early care and education (ECEC) workforce, "the pedagogues," in Denmark, aiming to provide opportunities to consider similarities and differences to ECEC professional identities in other countries The professional identity of the Danish early year pedagogue signifies itself with its professional and educational roots in democracy, emancipation, egalitarianism, and a good life.

Chapter 15 – *Leading Pedagogical Quality in the Context of Finnish Child Care*
Although there has been much international interest in Finnish early childhood education and care (ECEC) as a result of the country's PISA success, the field is facing significant changes that bring both challenges and opportunities. The country's decades-old Child Care Act is undergoing renewal, the New National Core Curriculum for ECEC is being drafted, and child care is currently battling recent

unfavorable government decisions. Under these circumstances, Finnish child care needs to focus on maintaining and further developing the quality of its services more than ever. This chapter covers the importance of the quality management of early educational services, a context where strong pedagogical leadership is demanded. By focusing on Nordic values in quality management, this chapter discusses the leading of pedagogical quality and its premises in Finnish child care during these times of change.

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Part I
Danish/Nordic Child Care Tradition

Chapter 1
The Key Characteristics of Danish/Nordic Child Care Culture

Grethe Kragh-Müller

Abstract As globalization has escalated over the years, interest in studying the differences and similarities between child care in a range of countries and cultures has also increased. This chapter focuses on the characteristics of the Danish/Nordic child care tradition.

The OECD report "Starting Strong" (Starting strong II: early childhood education and care. OECD Publishing, Paris, 2006) describes two general trends within child care policy – an English/French tradition emphasizing the child care centers as preschool and the Nordic tradition, which has a socio-educational approach. The present chapter highlights what characterizes the special Danish/Nordic tradition in everyday child care practices.

This has been studied partly through observations conducted by foreign researchers, and partly through our "own eyes," i.e., a Danish study on the differences between Danish and American child care cultures. With these starting points, the article sums up the special qualities that are found to characterize the Danish/Nordic child care culture – the homely atmosphere, the informality and personal relationships between pedagogues and children, and the children's freedom to play and influence everyday life.

The article explores how these special characteristics are closely linked to historical developments in the Nordic region, from industrialization to today, when growing democratization has also given children a voice in society. Topics discussed include, e.g., German philosopher F. Fröbel's thoughts on the importance of children's free play in natural surroundings, the Danish reform pedagogy, and developmental psychology and their influence on the values and conventions that are part of the Danish/Nordic tradition. Finally, the various aspects of the Danish/Nordic tradition are discussed in relation to English/American child care.

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Introduction

Increasing internationalization is fueling interest in studying and discussing the many different traditions worldwide for establishing and operating child care centers. In particular, interest has focused on the differences in relation to educational philosophies and everyday practices in this field across the globe. Internationally and nationally, discussions are gravitating toward how everyday educational practices should safeguard and promote children's well-being as well as developmental and learning conditions to optimize educational quality.

The OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development) report "Starting Strong" (2006) describes two general trends within child care policy – an English/French tradition emphasizing the child care centers as preschool, and the Nordic tradition, which has a socio-educational approach – with a focus on play, relationships, and outdoor life and where learning is assumed to take place through the child's participation in social interaction and processes.

However, what characterizes this Danish/Nordic approach to child care? What are the special characteristics of this approach and tradition? Why is this so and from where does it stem?

This chapter will attempt to answer some of these questions. The chapter will describe aspects that visitors and researchers from other cultures notice and find puzzling when visiting and observing the Danish/Nordic tradition. This is followed by a review of a study that aimed to explore child care culture – practices, organization, and values in child care in two cultures – United States and Denmark. Finally, an attempt will be made to deduce and discuss special aspects of Danish/Nordic child care culture – to identify the key hallmarks and their sources.

In the Danish tradition, settings for children aged 0–3 years are called "vuggestuer" which means "rooms with cribs" or "nurseries," while settings for children aged 3–6 years are called "børnehaver" or "gardens for children" – in German "kindergartens." In this article, the word kindergarten will be used together with the word child care for settings for children aged 3–6 years, as this is the word that is most commonly used for this setting in Denmark.

International Reactions to the Danish/Nordic Child Care Tradition and a Comparison to American Child Care

Visiting child care centers in other countries is both exciting and serves a dual purpose: First, you can learn from each other's different ways of organizing educational work, from the different mindsets, from the different ways of implementing the educational work, and from the different educational content in specific everyday educational practices. Secondly, it is a productive way of reflecting on your own approach to child care as you suddenly discover that even individual aspects that you consider natural parts of your own perception of life in child care actually

constitute part of a range of potential choices. This part of the chapter will look at the ways in which researchers describe Danish/Nordic child care facilities and how this tradition can be compared to American child care.

Foreign Research in Danish/Nordic Child Care

In the article "Danish educational practices: An international comparison," two foreign researchers (one American and on Australian) describe visiting Danish kindergartens and their reactions to and assessment of the practices observed (Jørgensen 1998).

The two researchers highlighted various aspects of kindergarten life as particularly Danish. Firstly, they noted that the physical settings did not resemble an institution and were very homely – cozy, with sofas, decorative cushions, and tea lights. The researchers thought that the homely furnishings at the centers must be due to the children needing homely warmth because they spend so long in child care every day. Finally, they noted that the coziness was part of a more widespread Danish tradition.

The two researchers had difficulty understanding that materials and toys were packed away in boxes on bookcases so that the children had to ask an adult to get them. Seen from a Danish perspective, the phenomenon is probably linked to the kindergarten being perceived as the child's second home – and therefore on this point it also resembles home – it is tidy – and materials and toys are cleared away in bookcases and cupboards.

The pillow rooms or "tumble rooms" – where Danish children can withdraw from adult observation to play wild games – were considered very special, both because the children played without supervision and because energetic games seemed to be such a large part of life at kindergarten in Denmark. Similarly, the large playgrounds attracted attention, and questions were raised regarding why the children were outside so much in bad weather.

Concerning the educational content, the researchers noticed the informal everyday atmosphere – "it's almost like home with the children calling the adults by their first names and talking to them freely." They experienced that the pedagogues established not only a professional relationship with the children but also a personal relationship. The researchers therefore experienced equality in the relationships between the pedagogues and the children.

The two researchers noted how Danish educational practices strive to provide children with the opportunity to influence everyday life in child care. The Danish pedagogues' attitude was that the children should be permitted to play without supervision. For example, they noted that in many places, the children could choose for themselves whether they wanted to be inside or outside and noticed that a small group of children was permitted to play in the playground without an adult present watching over them. The comments related to whether the kindergarten was insured against accidents.

Regarding the curriculum, the researchers found the kindergarten to be "themeless" with educational activities reflecting the children's perspectives in relation to the pedagogues' activities and how much initiative was in the hands of the children. They were surprised that the children remained busy with their own activities and played in a very enthusiastic manner. Regarding planned activities, the researchers were surprised that some of the activities, such as baking, were initiated for their intrinsic value and not because the children should learn something, e.g., about measuring and weights.

However, despite many areas of Danish child care being well respected, especially the equality in relationships between the pedagogues and children, respect for the children and their interests, and the children's opportunity for influence, the researchers also expressed reservations when comparing the practices with child care traditions in their native countries. They expressed particular concern about whether the Danish children learn anything and whether their need for stimulation is adequately accommodated by Danish kindergartens.

Young Learners Around the Globe: Nordic Early Childhood Philosophy, Policy, and Practices

The American journal *Young Children* (Sept. 2004) describes child care traditions and cultures in a number of different countries. One of the articles reviews the impressions of American researcher J. Wagner during a number of visits to the Nordic countries while studying the traditions evident in Nordic child care culture.

Wagner describes (2004) how she was both charmed and alarmed by her experiences in the Nordic child care centers. "How free, how competent, how playful, how adventurous these children seem. How relaxed their teachers seem. But my American school administrator's heart has skipped many a beat (W *on't someone get hurt? Aren't they breaking about 100 child care regulations? Won't someone get sued? Why do I think of them as risky when the Nordic teachers think of them as an everyday part of childhood?).*"

Wagner (ibid) pointed out that both politically and in terms of legislation as well as in public circles, child care is expected to be safe for children while comprising aesthetically good learning and development environments for children. She noted the homely furnishings of the child care centers and the family-style relationships between pedagogues and children. The Danish children's influence and opportunity to play behind closed doors without adult supervision, e.g., in pillow rooms, were described as aspects of the Nordic tradition, along with the focus on the children spending a lot of time outside in good playgrounds. The focus on the children being entitled to develop their own children's culture without adult intervention was also noted, as well as the children largely having the latitude to resolve their own conflicts.

The curriculum was described as being very flexible in terms of daily plans, with both opportunities for self-initiated play and scope for the pedagogues to choose activities that reflected the children's interests.

Wagner describes the following core values of the educational approach: Children's right to a good childhood, freedom, and equal relationships.

Children's life in child care can be considered as preparation for school or childhood as a special period of life. According to Wagner, the Nordic tradition focuses on children having the right to a childhood without always having to learn more – a childhood that includes playing, following their own ideas, and also taking risks without excessive adult supervision and control.

In relation to the children's scope for developing an understanding of democracy, she noted that the Nordic tradition allowed the children to "live democracy" rather than teaching them about it. The children therefore have an influence on everyday life, can help to make decisions, and are entitled to freedom – to free themselves from oppressive and external control. Finally, the concept of equality was mentioned – that all children should have equal opportunities to develop and be successful.

National learning plans were introduced in Denmark in 2007, and Wagner concludes by describing how the pedagogues and their union resisted having excessively structured plans and guidelines with a view to maintaining flexible everyday practices that could be based on the children's interests and protecting free play and a good childhood.

Child Care Culture in Denmark and the United States

In 2008, a study of child care culture in Denmark and the United States was conducted (Kragh-Müller 2013; Kragh-Müller and Isbell 2010.

The study was based on sociocultural theories of children's development. In this framework, children are considered active participants in society and in the culture where they live. Based on Vygotsky's theory (Vygotsky 2004)and further developed by Holtzkamp (2005) and Dreier (2008), children's development is interlinked with society and culture at any given time in history. Qualitative methods – interviews and observations – were chosen for the study.

The observations revealed several differences emerged between the United States and Denmark. In Denmark, observations showed that the children spend much of their time playing inside and outside. Informal relationships were found when observing the interactions between the children and the pedagogues. The children addressed the pedagogues much as they addressed their parents and called the pedagogues by their first names. If the children displayed emotions, the pedagogues would typically name the emotions for the child, helping him/her to cope.

The children were engaged in self-initiated play during most of the observations and the children could choose their playmates, where to play, and what to play. The children spent much of their time outdoors in the playgrounds, playing with sand,

riding bicycles, and on swings. While the children were playing, some of the pedagogues were observing the children, addressing them if conflicts arose that the children could not solve by themselves, or if children hurt themselves and needed consolation. Some of the pedagogues were busy doing office work, answering the telephone, tidying, or planning activities.

The pedagogues explained that the children spent so much time playing with peers because it was considered important for their development. Also because it allowed the teachers to do administrative work, as fewer teachers were needed to look after the children when they were playing. Spending time outdoors was considered important for the children's health.

The playrooms looked like a home, with sofas, dining tables, and high chairs for the children. Some play materials, though not many, were available in boxes on shelves for the children to take out when playing. Materials for creative purposes were not available to the children at all times but were administered by the teachers.

Based on the discourses, child care was thought of as the child's second home, and responsibility for the development of the children was considered to be shared by parents and child care staff. In the interview, the pedagogues said that they wanted the children to feel as secure and at home when in child care as they felt at home. There was widespread resistance to terms such as schools, classrooms, teachers, and learning. The pedagogues underlined that learning takes place through everyday practices and routines, and the pedagogues objected both to talking about child care as schools or preschools and to being called teachers.

In the United States, teachers stressed the importance of learning centers where the children can learn through play. While the children were playing, the teachers were observing and supervising the play or interacting with the children in order to expand their play and scaffold their learning. The relationships between the teachers and the children were friendly but more formal than in Denmark. The children addressed the teachers as Miss or Mrs. and then the teacher's first name.

Circle time was an everyday activity, where the children listened to story reading and were taught about different subjects. At the end of circle time, the children chose the center in which they wanted to play. In the afternoon, the children spent some time outdoors. The teachers explained that much of their time was spent trying to support the elements in the NAEYC accreditation process.

In the interview, the teachers said that nurturing relationships and respect for the children as small individuals were the most important aspects of quality in child care. Learning opportunities for the children were also considered very important, and the learning centers, based on a constructivistic approach, were set up with a focus on specific, planned activities to support learning through play. Beyond a focus on learning, another observed focus was on making the children behave properly and on trying to get angry or upset children to put their feelings into words ("use your words") or on letting the children spend time alone on a "time out" chair or elsewhere to cool down.

It was clear from the discourses that child care in the United States was referred to as school, the settings as classrooms, and the staff as teachers. The teachers

reported that this was partly because they found it important for the children to be well educated, but also to give more status to child care as an important place for children's development and to them as teachers.

The Danish/Nordic Tradition

The three studies above reveal a number of child care characteristics that span all three studies. Primarily, the homelike centers with their cozy furnishings and furniture and the relationships between pedagogues and children that resemble the children's relationships with their parents were noticed.

All three studies mention the focus on the children's freedom, equality, and opportunity to have an influence as something special, e.g., the children's freedom of choice to play without adult supervision. The emphasis on children playing outdoors is also noted, and the amount of time spent playing outside in bad weather was a source of puzzlement. Finally, children's learning opportunities through planned activities were generally attributed lower priority – which concerned the foreign researchers. However, the focus on children's opportunities for having a good childhood with freedom to play is deemed positive.

Yet, where do these traditions originate? This section of the article will attempt to explore these aspects.

Fröbel's Legacy

As shown, in this child care tradition, emphasis is given to referring to child care centers as children's gardens – kindergartens, gardens where children are free to play and explore nature. The Danish kindergarten tradition is strongly inspired by the German philosopher Friedrich Fröbel (1782–1852). Fröbel worked as a teacher and in that capacity established classes for young children to promote early development through play. He conceived and explained the concept of gardens for children, and the term "kindergarten" was coined in 1840 (Liberg (ed.) 1998). Fröbel was also the first to describe kindergartens as supplementing children's family upbringing.

Essentially, Fröbel thought that work (self-activity) preceded learning and action preceded cognition. He condemned the concept of too many subjects at school and thought that children should be self-activating, experiencing nature and creative activities. He also stressed the importance of play.

Fröbel advocated women's right to education, and his thoughts on kindergartens and the education of women kindergarten teachers spread quickly in Germany and other countries in Europe, including Denmark. Fröbel's ideas were banned for a period around 1850, as they were considered socialistic and atheistic. However, during the last half of the 1800s, the ban was lifted and many kindergartens were set up

in Germany. In Denmark, the first kindergarten opened in 1871, inspired by Fröbel's thoughts, and the first training colleges for pedagogues were named after him.

Fröbel considered the child to be actively explorative and believed that those raising the child should support the child's development of his/her essence while also supporting the child in experiencing the outside world. For example, he wrote to parents that it was important to avoid forcing children to conform and be shaped against their nature. If adults did that, he felt the children would be unable to develop into "beings who could unfold the divine essence within themselves, but instead would interact with others unnaturally and in a sickly way" (Fröbel, in Liberg 1998, p. 46).

Fröbel thought that prescribed learning, teaching, and upbringing were detrimental to human health. Instead, upbringing, learning, and teaching should be empathetic and provide the scope for freedom and self-determination. The child can then achieve a free and self-managed life, freedom understood in relation to refraining from promoting one's own interests at the cost of others.

According to Fröbel, play constitutes the highest level of child and human development as it constitutes the free unfolding of the divine essence (Liberg, ed., 1998). Play therefore creates happiness, internal and external calm, satisfaction, and peace with the world. Fröbel underlined that play is of great importance and is a serious matter for the child. Finally, Fröbel highlighted that children could develop best through care and being looked after (ibid). This accounts for the concept of kindergarten – a garden where children can play and explore nature freely.

Fröbel inspired the first "folkebørnehave," which was opened in Denmark in 1871 as a half-day kindergarten with an educational aim. This first kindergarten was followed by many similar kindergartens. Two Danish women – Hedvig Bagger and Anna Wulf were particularly active in the first kindergarten movement in Denmark and pioneered the debate on educational content in the kindergartens. They also participated actively in establishing the first training colleges for pedagogues both named after Fröbel.

In many ways, Fröbel's legacy remains an important part of Danish kindergarten culture. As seen, child care centers are still called "børnehaver" (children's gardens) by pedagogues, parents, and children. Free play has high priority and the children's free exploration outside is in the spotlight. The freedom to explore at first hand is also a fundamental aspect of the Danish tradition and is an aspect also highlighted in other research.

In addition to Fröbel, A.S. Neill, Maria Montessori's, and Rudolf Steiner's ideas on children's upbringing helped to inspire educational work in Danish child care centers and training colleges for pedagogues.

Free Play

Fröbel's emphasis on the importance of play is undoubtedly a major reason for the significance attributed to free play and outdoor play in the Danish/Nordic tradition. Up through the 1900s and with the development of child psychology, this focus on

play was underlined by research conducted by developmental psychologists, which showed that play has a major influence on child development, e.g., Russian psychologist Vygotsky, Swiss biologist Piaget, and, within psychodynamic theory, Freud and the American psychologist Erikson.

These psychologists describe how children develop through play. For example, each child develops a personality, including a self and an identity. Children also develop social understanding and learn to interact with other children. Through play, children develop fundamental motor skills, develop self-control, and process emotions and events that have been experienced but perhaps not entirely understood. Children learn about their surroundings, create preconceptions, develop an imagination, and learn to make sense of what is happening and how the world works. Much of the things that children learn is therefore processed through play.

Free play indicates that children can play freely – precisely as they wish. This corresponds with the definition of play – that play is a self-selected activity and something that children do because they want to and because it is fun. Children do not play because they want to learn but because it is pleasurable. However, when adults observe what children gain from playing, it is clear that through playing, children learn and develop a number of competencies and skills.

More about the role of play in Danish child care can be found in the chapter on play in this book written by Winther-Lindquist, 2016.

The Right to a Childhood as a Period of Life in Itself and Not as Preparation for Adult Life

Since the 1980s in particular, and up to the present day, an important aspect of the more general political and public debate has concerned whether children's life can be considered preparation for school or whether childhood is a special period of life. This topic is debated in many countries. Historically, this discussion was already reflected in the thoughts of French philosopher Rousseau, who described how childhood has intrinsic value not simply as preparation for adult life (Liberg 1998).

The discussion became particularly topical during the introduction of the national learning plans in Denmark in 2004 and the call for more tests for children – both of which met resistance among pedagogues and parents as the children's right to a childhood has been considered important. As mentioned Wagner also describes the Nordic child care tradition as emphasizing that children have the right to a childhood – without always having to learn more – a childhood where children can play, pursue their own ideas, and also take risks without excessive adult supervision and control, and with no particular goals.

At one end of the continuum of the discussion on children's right to a childhood, child development and learning is viewed as beginning as soon as the child is born and it is therefore vital to ensure that they learn the necessary competences from an early age to become skilled at participating in school and later in a vocational context. The view of children as future resource capital is linked to this perspective in

terms of international competition, as children are the adults of the future. Childhood is therefore considered preparation for adult life.

Those at the other end of the scale assert that childhood is a period of life in itself and that the child should not be seen simply as an incomplete adult but as a person in his/her own right with the right to well-being here and now. Childhood is viewed as the children's special life arena, which includes equality, influence, and the right to free play.

In the period of life comprising childhood, children live their lives not as passive recipients of the adults' attempts to socialize them and teach them something, but as *social actors* where, based on their own experiences of the world and own intentions, they interact with each other. The attention to children's life in this context involves understanding how children manage their day-to-day life and the challenges they meet.

In the 1980s, following this tradition, the emphasis was placed on the children's own development of a children's culture. Another aspect in focus was children's resistance to the adults' requirements, e.g., the adults' attempts to pressure them to learn things that they cannot appreciate as being meaningful to them.

The children's right to a childhood is clearly reflected in Danish child care. This probably contributes toward the experiences of the American and Australian researchers when they display concern about whether the children learn anything in the Danish child care setting. Both Danish pedagogues and parents talk about the importance of children having *the right to a childhood* where they can play and have the opportunity to be independent. However, on the other hand, it should also be noted that advocates for children having the right to a childhood also highlight the view that the child's "being" (having the right to be here and now) is closely linked with "becoming" (having the opportunity to learn something and develop the skills and competencies required to succeed in adult life).

Children's Rights and Influence on Everyday Life

In extension of the focus on care and acknowledgment as key parts of the children's life in child care in Denmark, the children's right to influence the child care (and home) and right to freedom for the child also have deep historical roots.

As far back as Fröbel, children's freedom and their right to influence their own lives were under discussion, and Rousseau's thoughts on children's upbringing were published in his masterpiece "Emile" from 1762. He describes a free-spirited child, Emile, who is permitted to unfold his innate nature and learn to pursue his own curiosity regarding, e.g., nature (Liberg 1998).

At the turn of the century and industrialization, the first women's movement became established in Scandinavia that fought for women's rights for freedom and the right to vote. One of its proponents was Swedish teacher and author Ellen Kay, who in 1900 published her book *The Century of the Child*," in which she advocated respecting children's special nature and needs. A number of prominent educational

thinkers following in Kay's wake also underlined children's right to have an influence, e.g., A.S. Neill, who differentiated between the free child and the inhibited child and put these ideas into practice at Summerhill School in England. Other educational philosophers also inspired reforms in the Danish educational practices, including Frenet from France and Paulo Freire from Brazil who, with his work "pedagogy of the oppressed," became influential in the discussion on children's right to have an influence.

In 1930, educational philosophies were similarly inspired by the new developmental psychology, e.g., psychoanalysis and the German psychoanalyst Wilhelm Reich, who after fleeing from Germany stayed in Denmark for a period before continuing his escape to Norway. These theories also emphasized that a child's development could be compromised if the child was oppressed.

More recently, children, like other groups of society, have been included in the democratic process, which has influenced family life and child care – both in relation to legislation and directly. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child was therefore signed by Denmark and consequently, children can now have an influence on their own lives in a number of areas. For example, the law states that children must have an influence on where they live if parents divorce, if the child is taken into care, and in a number of other situations. In 1997, parents' right to smack children as part of their upbringing was abolished.

Thoughts and practices arose concerning children's self-administration and self-determination. These were prompted partly by developments in society and legislation as well as resistance to structured educational philosophies. Self-determination stemmed from critical psychology (Dreier (ref) and Hviid (1994). The concept of self-determination is defined as the right to influence your own life conditions, taking into account the rights of others to influence their own lives. Hviid (1994) describes three factors that pedagogues should reflect on if they wish to highlight self-determination for children: (1) the extent to which the pedagogues investigate the children's experiences and interests, (2) the extent to which the daily educational practices are based on the children's interests and experiences, and (3) how the pedagogues address conflicts of interest between the children and the pedagogues.

With the child care act passed in 2007, it became law that children should be listened to and have an influence on everyday life, and each child care center should prepare a children's environment assessment and publish it on the internet where parents and other interested parties can see how the children rate the specific center.

This trend means that children have a different position in society than previously. Children are now considered active participants and subjects in their own lives with the right to exert an influence in contexts where they participate. This is also apparent from the insight and evaluations described in the three studies described in the beginning this chapter.

Wagner notes that at Nordic child care centers, the philosophy of equality – that everyone is equal – shines through as values in Danish child care. Fundamentally, it is not socially acceptable in Denmark to give the impression that you are better than

other people. In his book from 1933, author Axel Sandemose formulated what he called the law of Jante, which describes this phenomenon in a critical context. The law of Jante is therefore not a law in a legal sense but rather a description of the values of equality, which can have both positive and negative consequences. For example, he describes how you should not think that you are better than others or think that you are something special. Everyone should be considered of equal importance and you should neither boast about nor draw attention to your accomplishments.

In child care, this phenomenon is apparent in the attitude that competitions with winners and losers are negative. If there are competitions, for example, everyone is praised – not just the winners – and a low profile is kept in relation to favoring some youngsters more than others. Another similar value concerns everyone having an equal right to succeed (see also, e.g., The Xenophobe's Guide to the Danes, 2014).

That everybody should have equal opportunities in life also means that particularly socially disadvantaged children must attend child care and the parents of socially disadvantaged children can be ordered to send their children to kindergarten. Similarly, the Danish welfare system emphasizes that everyone should have equal opportunities, e.g., sending their children to child care, gaining an education, having the right to a state pension on retirement and in case of illness, as well as having access to a doctor and admission to hospital free of charge, as such services are covered via taxes.

Reciprocal and Equal Relationships: Care and Acknowledging Relationships

A study conducted by BUPL in 2010 shows that acknowledgment is a key aspect of Danish educational child care practices. A survey of all the country's local governments showed that acknowledgment was a main heading for educational work in child care in the majority of all Danish local governments – "The educational map of Denmark" (BUPL 2010). Similarly, the study "Quality in child care" showed that both pedagogues and parents found that care and acknowledging relationships are the most important aspects of good quality child care (Kragh-Müller 2013). However, why is this the case?

As an illustration of what is meant by the term "acknowledging relationships," a short story from a book written by the Danish author Jakob Martin Strid featuring a character named Little Frog is included (Strid 2005).

One day a meteor falls onto the frog family's house. The young frog found inside the meteor is adopted by the frog family. Little Frog constantly gets into trouble constantly by doing things that he is not supposed to do. For instance, he pours food over one of his siblings, paints his father's head while he is asleep, bakes the telephone, and washes books with soap and water. To solve the problem, his parents take Little Frog to the school psychologist, and while the school psychologist is

devising an action plan, Little Frog sets the psychologist's hair on fire, urinates in his bag, and cuts the telephone cable. Father Frog gets angry and Mother Frog starts crying so Little Frog runs away. Little Frog travels through many countries, managing to get into more trouble. Then just as Little Frog is walking along unhappily, thinking that no one could care for someone like him, Father Frog and Mother Frog arrive in a helicopter. They have been searching for him all over the world because they have missed him and want him back. They conclude that it does not matter that Little Frog is always causing accidents because he is their very own Little Frog, they love him and he belongs with them.

The story of Little Frog can probably be interpreted in many ways. It generally paints a picture of a curious, active, and experimental young child who is always getting into trouble and doing things he should not do. This is because, due to his age and development, he acts before he thinks and fails to grasp the consequences of his actions. It also touches on children's resistance to adults forcing them to do things and the "free child" and ultimately depicts the core of an acknowledging relationship in the interaction between the child and the adults as Little Frog's parents love him unconditionally – just as he is.

As shown in the section on Fröbel, historical roots advocate a non-authoritarian relationship between the adult and child, without force from the adult and in a reciprocal relationship, exploring the world together. These views are also among the core ideas of reform-based progressive education, which gained ground in child care centers and schooling up through the twentieth century. Inspiration for progressive education came from, e.g., philosopher John Dewey's and A.S. Neill's theories about more child-centric and lifelike educational practices. These ideas included that learning should be an active and democratic process based on the child's own experiences and interests.

The focus on child-adult relationships as central for child development and learning was another aspect of psychological research up through the twentieth century. For example, psychoanalysis focused on how the child's development is negatively affected if the child is raised with too much force in an authoritarian relationship.

Especially, research on the importance of relationships for human development became a very popular topic throughout the 1950s and 1960s in the transition from the industrial society to the informational society. This development is linked to children needing to develop different skills in the informational society (e.g., development of a strong self and social skills, creativity, and readiness for change) that differ from the skills required in an industrial society (obedience). Therefore, the trend is moving away from authoritarian-style upbringing toward equal relationships between adults and children.

Within developmental psychology, there is a focus on self-development and development of social competencies in connection with the discussion on the position of the self in postmodernism within psychodynamic theories, e.g., Winnicott 1960, and within post-structuralism, e.g., Gergen (2006). Other meaningful contributions illustrating the importance of relationships for human development include those of the English doctor and psychoanalyst John Bowlby (1994), the American

psychologist Daniel Stern (2000), as well as the English psychologist Peter Fonagy (2006), who described the link between attachment and development of self-regulation in the child.

In Scandinavia, Norwegian psychologist Annelise Løevlie Schibbye in particular has influenced the equal and reciprocal relationships between pedagogues and children, which the foreign researchers noticed when visiting Danish/Nordic child care centers. Schibbye's theory (2002) concerns the correlation between self-development and acknowledging relationships. Her theory states that being acknowledged as a person by others is a prerequisite for becoming a person. Self-development cannot be achieved alone. Fundamentally, the human species depends on human relationships for its psychological development.

Acknowledging another person means that you have the capacity to empathize with another person's subjective experience, respect it, and share the experience with the other person. Even though you may view a given situation in a different way, you can acknowledge the other view while respecting the other person's experience and feelings as being relevant for the other person (Kragh-Müller 2005).

Anna, who is five years old, visits a natural playground with her kindergarten and has been in the hen house to see the hens with the other children and a nature guide. Anna is fascinated by an egg she finds. She picks it up to look at it and puts it in her pocket when the others have left the hen house. Sometime later, the others are all looking for the egg, as they need it to make pancakes over the fire. No one can find it and Anna keeps quiet. Soon afterwards, the egg breaks in Anna's pocket and makes a terrible mess of her coat. Anna gets upset and cries. The pedagogue comes over and says: "Oh Anna, you thought the egg was so exciting that it found its way into your pocket. You forgot about it and now it's everywhere. That's made you unhappy." Another child lends Anna her coat and after a while, Anna cheers up again (Example from the Danish television program "The Secret World of Children", DR 1, spring 2016).

The pedagogue has acknowledged that Anna is unhappy because she took the egg and because her coat is messy. Schibbye believes that such an approach will give the child the opportunity to integrate her own experiences and develop a strong self. It will also provide the child with the opportunity to understand others and gain good social competencies because empathizing with others requires that the child can understand herself. Finally, the child will learn from her experiences if the adults do not scold and make her more emotional.

Schibbye underlines that acknowledgment is an attitude to life and not a question of technique (Schibbye 2002). If acknowledgment is used as a method, it results in manipulated acknowledgment, with the adult giving the impression of understanding the child while really wanting the child to do what the adult wishes, for instance, if the adult says to a child who does not want to wear waterproof trousers: "I understand that you don't want to wear waterproof trousers but you must because I say so."

Acknowledgment requires equality and involves the adult listening to and understanding the child's expression in accordance with the child's own experience (Schibbye 2002). The adult then confirms the child's experience, e.g., by putting it

into words and thereby confirming the child's experience. Acknowledgment also involves the adult recognizing the emotion, as well as being capable of differentiating between the child's and her own emotion or experience. Finally, it is important that the adult can reflect on his/her own standpoint and actions in the situation, e.g., the child in the example may not want to wear the waterproof trousers and reflect if the trousers may be too small, too cold or if something else may be the reason for the child not wanting to put them on.

Family and Child Care Responsibilities: Dual Socialization

The concept of children's dual socialization – that pedagogues and parents in collaboration play a role in the children's development and upbringing and that both parties are responsible for this – is a core aspect of Danish/Nordic educational child care practices. In principle, this understanding of children's life and development can be traced back partly to Fröbel, who, as mentioned, described how child care centers should supplement the child's upbringing at home.

Schultz Jørgensen (1975, 1999) describes three historical revolutions in the development of the family as a social institution. According to Schultz Jørgensen (ibid), the first revolution took place from about the 1500s–1700s, with the transition from the Middle Ages to newer times. In the Middle Ages, often several generations lived under the same roof with no distinction between family life and working life. The work was based in and around the family, and the children's development and introduction to a vocation took place through participation in daily life and work.

Between the 1500s and 1700s, the structure of the family began to slowly change, reflecting developments in society, in the direction of the first trade-based capitalism (the second revolution). The family gradually isolated itself and increasingly resembled a private nuclear family (Schultz Jørgensen 1975). The trend began in bourgeois families and later spread to the less wealthy parts of the population. This caused a split between family life and work. Consequently, the children's primary socialization – personality and character development as the basis for their subsequent integration in society took place behind the closed doors of the family. As the child was no longer part of working life, the introduction and training required to enter a trade had to occur in school – a special institution that arose for precisely this purpose and took care of the secondary socialization (training and preparation for a vocation). Gradually, the wage-earning family and the modern consumer family emerged.

A third change in family development occurred in connection with the transition from an industrial society to an information society. During this period, it became common for women to become educated and – like men – begin to work outside the home. Today, 96 % of Danish women have a working life and career. The family's social adhesive is therefore the emotional investment and interaction linked to consumption. This development has led to a number of changes in the family and in children's life.

Whereas the two parties in the family once depended on each other to maintain the family, now there is more emphasis on emotions as the basis for forming and maintaining a couple's relationship. A new focus on individuality and the quest for personal identity is also evident. There is a critical approach to the family as an institution and many different family structures have emerged. There are today many ways to provide a supportive framework for children and adults' activities outside the family (Schultz Jørgensen 1999). This trend also means that important functions previously carried out by the family are now entrusted to society, e.g., work, child care, and socialization of children, as well as care for senior citizens. Although the family remains of key importance, it relies on public service to maintain its cohesion.

As a result of this development, children's life now takes place in various arenas, both within the family and child care. Dencik (1999) therefore suggests that, as the primary socialization no longer takes place solely in the home but also in child care, instead of using the terms primary and secondary socialization, the term dual socialization is more appropriate. Essentially, the concept of dual socialization is that you cannot ignore one of the child's two life arenas or areas of life when understanding how children develop.

The two life arenas differ and have various interaction logistics. The family comprises an emotional and engaged environment for the children's well-being and development. The child is unique and cared for "despite everything," precisely as he/she is. At kindergarten, the child is in an environment with professional care – where the children are objects for the pedagogues' work efforts. The child is one of many children of the same age on an equal footing and can be replaced. The child is cared for "as a result of," i.e., the child should participate in the child care context in the expected way and must therefore earn the right to affection.

The idea of dual socialization could probably partly explain the phenomenon of furnishings that are generally homely – with sofas, dining tables, bookshelves for storing toys, and other materials, as well as the attempt to make the child care centers reflect "hygge." "Hygge" is a Danish word meaning coziness and warmth and is part of the Danish tradition, i.e., Danes decorate with cushions, tea lights, etc. as due to the weather relatively long periods are spent indoors in the winter. A certain amount of Scandinavian minimalism – simple furnishings without too much furniture and accessories – is also evident and this probably explains the phenomenon noticed by foreign researchers, who are surprised by how few materials are available to the children.

Summary and Discussion

By identifying special characteristics of the Danish/Nordic child care tradition, this article has explored the roots of this tradition and on this basis how it gradually changed, as society developed, into the tradition and everyday practices that are evident today and can be recognized in the Danish/Nordic child care culture.

However, can the Danish/Nordic tradition be understood to be a special "program" with specific goals and methods such as, e.g., a "Montessori Approach," a "Reggio-inspired" program, a "Play-based program," or something similar?

No – it cannot. It is not a specific "program" with well-defined goals and methods. It more closely resembles some specific perceptions, discourses, traditions, and a culture that have gradually developed. As mentioned, this has been influenced by the development of society, but also driven by research and values and philosophical, pedagogical, psychological, anthropological, and sociological reflections and discussions, both on local and national scales. These traditions can be largely recognized in all Danish – and probably Nordic – child care centers, also as the centers have been subject to the same developments in society, have the same economic conditions in society, and are subject to the same national legislation.

Nevertheless, major individual differences exist between the individual centers. These are due to many different aspects, e.g., pedagogues have a relatively high degree of freedom in relation to planning everyday practices in their particular child care center. This is beneficial. Firstly, the pedagogues are qualified for this by virtue of their education, and secondly, more job satisfaction often results when the pedagogues have a high level of influence on their own work. Also, when pedagogues have a large degree of influence, this generally impacts their relationships with the children, who also gain more influence.

The major differences between the centers also reflect that pedagogues at the individual centers can choose which educational aspects to prioritize at work and how to work toward the selected goals. For example, some centers focus clearly on developing growth-promoting relationships with the children, some focus on working to include vulnerable children, some highlight free play, some emphasize working on developing the children's right to have an influence, and some focus on their center having fixed frameworks – in the sense that the same activities happen at the same time every day.

Major differences can therefore arise in the educational quality from one center to another, just as the level to which the day-to-day pedagogical work is professionally well-balanced and justified can also vary significantly.

A number of different aspects can be discussed when reviewing the difference between the Nordic socio-educational approach and the English/French tradition in the area of child care.

If *the discursive meanings* are considered first, it will undoubtedly color the educational content at the center and thereby the children's everyday life significantly if you refer to and perceive child care centers as schools or børnehaver (gardens for children). There will be a more explicit focus on children's learning when terms such as school, classrooms, and teachers are used than with terms such as kindergartens and pedagogues. This is also apparent in the three studies reviewed, e.g., when the foreign researchers were puzzled by pedagogues initiating activities with children simply for fun and not necessarily with the goal of learning. Their concern regarding whether Danish children actually learn anything is another example.

If a child care center is considered a school, this affects the everyday life and activities that take place – which is also indicated by, e.g., a study by Löfdahl and

Prieto (2008). There may therefore be a risk that "a good childhood" – or the right to a good life as a child ("being," remaining in childhood) – can end up having lower priority than the children's "becoming" what they will become at some point in the future. This can be a problem when establishing the kind of relationships that promote development (subject-subject relationships) that are required for the children to develop the personal skills needed to succeed in the future, e.g., regulating emotions, the ability to focus attention, and social skills, more broadly.

With both traditions, it is therefore important to reflect that children both have time to enjoy a good childhood here and now while also having the opportunity to develop the skills required for subsequently doing well in school and society – a balance between "being" and "becoming."

The right to free play and to freely explore the surrounding world, including nature, is a core concept of the Danish/Nordic tradition. Across countries and traditions, play is the dominant activity of young children and the children's way of learning.

The Nordic tradition emphasizes *free play* – play during which children work out for themselves what to play and with whom. In the study referred to about life at child care centers in the two cultures (Kragh-Müller 2013), the child care centers in America focus more on the adults planning good play areas with good materials for the children so that they can expand their play and learn more. This is different to the Danish/Nordic tradition. The children's freedom to exert their influence also varies between the two cultures. In the American child care center, the children can choose among the options organized by the adults. In Danish child care, the children can choose from what they invent themselves, and they can engage in more energetic play, also without adults being present.

However, play is never free – children's play will always take place within the scope provided by the adults. It can therefore be discussed whether the Danish tradition could learn something in relation to whether the children can be provided with more exciting opportunities for play that include the chance to learn more from playing. Conversely, the American child care center could perhaps give children more freedom.

In Nordic child care centers, the children are out in all kinds of weather. Danish children can influence their everyday life, but it varies from center to center how much. In most centers they have to be outside a couple of hours around lunchtime, even if they prefer not to. This is based on the theory that fresh air is important for good health, but probably also on the notion that if they were to wait for good weather, they may not spend much time outside.

At an English child care center, Augusta(age 5) asks an adult "Why can't I call you Debbie?" Her teacher replies "Because we don't have that kind of relationship."

In terms of *relationships between children and adults* the study by Kragh-Müller (2013) shows that the adults in both the American and Danish child care centers believe that growth-promoting relationships between the pedagogues/teachers and children comprise the most important quality indicator in child care. In practice, however, the relationships vary. Therefore, as described, relationships between chil-

dren and adults appear to be more personal and equal in the Danish/Nordic tradition than in the English/French tradition. In the above example, Augusta's teacher explains that their relationship is more professional than personal.

It can be difficult for a person from one culture to describe relationships between children and adults in other cultures, as this requires in-depth knowledge of the cultures concerned. The three studies referred to in this context suggest that the Danish/Nordic tradition has a higher level of equality between adults and children with more personal relationships. Saying that relationships between adults and children in a child care center based on the English/French tradition are less personal and more authoritarian may sound offensive, and may not be entirely true, although this appears to be the case in the studies mentioned.

Relationships between adults and children, including how much influence the children have, is affected by something other than the overall cultural ways of being and the adults' conscious choice in relation to the nature of the relationship. For example, the adults' own experiences of child-adult relationships and how the adults were raised play major roles in the actual interaction between the children and adults in everyday practices. The tone in individual child care centers – e.g., whether the atmosphere is positive or the opposite – also influences the relationships that arise between children and adults. Therefore, major variations can be found across Danish/Nordic child care centers and probably across cultures regarding how acknowledging and equal the relationships are between pedagogues and children in practice.

In relationships between children and adults, the adults are always in power. Thus the adults can determine the nature of the relationships and how much influence the children will have. In a child-adult relationship, a protective influence is involved in terms of the child's influence. Young children cannot always grasp the consequences of their choices and decisions, and adults must therefore prevent the child from acting in ways that have a negative impact on the child or others.

The study by Kragh-Müller (2013) identifies a difference in the main focuses of the relationships. In American child care centers, teachers say that the relationship is important because you must know the children in order to be able to organize age-relevant learning opportunities for them. The Danish pedagogues think the relationship is important for the children's care, self-development, and social development. This is not because the American teachers think the children's well-being and care is unimportant, and equally not the case that the Danish pedagogues believe that the children should not learn anything, just that the main focuses differ.

To what extent should children learn academic skills from an early age and to what extent should they retain the right to a good childhood as a separate period of life in itself? And what is the relationship between play and learning?

It is unlikely that anyone would think that young children should not learn anything. Clearly, it is important that their opportunities for learning are as good as possible. It is more a case of how and what children should learn when.

Developments in society and the international PISA survey, which compare children's school performance across countries, have increased the focus on policies for schooling and child care in the different countries. The Danish/Nordic tradition is

therefore under pressure to begin more academic training with children at an earlier age. However, no studies have shown that children from the Nordic tradition cope worse than children from the French/English tradition.

This article should also be considered part of the debate on how much academic training should be conducted in the child care centers and as defending the children's right to a childhood. Across countries, discussions of a political nature are increasing the pressure to upgrade children's qualifications in relation to international competition. However, it is also important that children are not only seen as future capital but that they are still permitted to have a childhood.

Consequently, there are good grounds for pausing while in-depth reflections and research are conducted to establish what we want in relation to our children and what will provide them with the opportunity for the best possible learning and development in child care centers. We can learn from each other across cultures. However, it is also important to refrain from simply adopting readymade programs and ideas developed in a different cultural context. It is important to describe and retain the best aspects of the Danish/Nordic tradition so that these excellent qualities are not lost. With this in mind, we can gain inspiration from other cultures and use it to further develop educational quality.

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Chapter 2
Values in Danish Early Childhood Education and Care

Stig Broström, Anders Skriver Jensen, and Ole Henrik Hansen

Abstract Based on video observations, interviews and joint pedagogue/researcher analyses carried out in three Danish child cares, this chapter presents three common values: democracy, care and discipline, which were communicated, expressed and negotiated through interactions between pedagogues (In this paper, we use the term 'pedagogues' for professionals working in child cares.) and children. The study is part of a larger Nordic project (The research project, *Values Education in Nordic Preschools: Basis of education for tomorrow*, and Project No. 53381 were carried out together with Nordic research colleagues.) that aims to generate new knowledge on institutionalised fostering of values in Nordic child cares.

Democratic values deal with children's autonomy and possibilities of participation. Caring values are linked to a special relationship that targets and supports the child's needs. Disciplinary values are defined as the system of underlying rules, norms and existing order, which regulate children. The three values are presented one after another, but it is also shown how they overlap one another and are expressed simultaneously in everyday practice. In the end of the chapter, we sketch some pedagogical implications for values education.

Keywords Values in child care • Education • Democracy • Care • Discipline

Introduction

Pedagogues organise the children's everyday life in child care in order to support the children's well-being, learning and development, which in turn prompts a set of ideas, norms and values. Values are defined as principles that guide human action and by which actions are judged to be good or desirable (Halstead and Taylor 2000). Thus when this chapter discusses democracy, care and discipline as three common values, it is implied that democratic values are (often implicit) principles guiding pedagogues' and children's actions related to children's autonomy and possibilities

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of participation. The view on democracy, care and discipline *as values* are based on research made by Emilson and Johansson (2009a, b), who have studied values communicated between pedagogues and children during everyday life in child cares.

According to the Danish philosopher Knud Ejler Løgstrup (1997), values are an integrated part of human life and based in ethical reflections of 'the good life'. When people define a good life, a normative description of values is expressed. Examples of values related to a good life could be love, equality, freedom, justice, happiness, security, peace of mind and truth (Halstead, and Taylor 2000). In the book, *The Ethical Demand*, Løgstrup argues that 'trust' is the most fundamental value in human life:

> Trust is not of our own making; it is given. Our life is so constituted that it cannot be lived except as one person lays him or herself open to another person and puts him or herself into that person's hands either by showing or claiming trust (Løgstrup 1997, p. 8).

According to Løgstrup (1972), a number of values are seen as intrinsically good, such as trust, openness of speech and mercy, which he names 'sovereign expressions of life'. They do not emanate from the agent, but from life itself, and thus demand submission.

Regardless of how to understand values, they are an integrated part of everyday life. In home and in child care, children from an early age meet a set of varied values. Nevertheless, the child care organisation is characterised by a combination of children's 'free' play and own initiatives, plus the pedagogue's planned activities. The pedagogue's activity and relation to the children holds a unity of care, upbringing and teaching (Broström 2006) through which values are communicated. The prevalence of values in child care is self-evident and is almost seen as 'normal' or just something which, so to say, identifies life in child care (Gannerud 1999).

We are inspired by a conceptual framework of values and value fields (Emilson and Johansson 2009a, b) and our participation in the shared Nordic research project on values and values education in Nordic child cares. Based on an analysis of video-recorded data from three Danish child cares, we can describe three types of values embedded in the everyday life of Danish child cares, namely, democratic, caring and disciplinary values. Values of care are reflected by a concern for the well-being of others; disciplinary values refer to adapting oneself to rules and order and democratic values are directed towards one's possibilities of participating in, and influencing, a community (Emilson and Johansson 2009a, b). These value fields are interrelated and at times overlap; they can also be in conflict. The three values are also found in both the Danish and Nordic curricula (Einarsdottir et al. 2014).

Just as care, upbringing and teaching (and also play and learning) make up a unity (Broström 2006), caring, disciplinary and democratic values are often expressed as a unity and communicated simultaneously. However, for analytical reasons, we will present the democratic, caring and disciplinary values one at a time.

Democratic Values

The term originates from the fifth-century BCE Greek word *dēmokratía*, meaning rule of the people (*dêmos* (people) and *kratos* (power)), and was used to refer to the political systems of the city-states of ancient Greece (Hardt and Negri 2006). The Enlightenment movement of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries saw significant cultural developments that eventually linked democracy to liberalism. Early liberal thinker John Locke argued that each man has a natural right to life, liberty and property (Locke 1689). In this regard, liberty and equality are fundamental values of modern democracy.

When education and democracy are connected, it often falls to education to create, uphold and/or protect democracy. Biesta (2011) connects this perspective to two influential strands of thinking concerning the subject of democracy.

First is the individualistic perspective, with roots in the Kantian (2009/1789) emphasis on the rational human subject. Here the task for education is to create the rational, autonomous subject. Hence, education to democracy is about the individual developing autonomy, rational thinking and so forth. In child care, it is about stimulating the child's growing self-awareness and encouraging his or her exploration of the environment.

Second is the social perspective on the democratic subject, as emphasised by Dewey (2005). According to Dewey, the democratic subject emerges from participation in the democratic life. Democracy is a conjoint mode of living; subjectivity is socially mediated (see also Honneth 2006). In child care, this is about the pedagogue's ability to take the child's perspective and maintain a state of emotional presence or closeness and the ability to maintain playful social practices (Bae 2009, Emilson and Johansson 2009a).

Communicative Action Supports Democratic Ways of Communicating

We view democracy as a communicative social practice, based on the consensus model of democracy developed by Habermas (1987). This model connects democracy to communicative action, which is a mode of communication characterised by a mutual desire to get along, share knowledge, remain open and welcoming towards each other and fundamentally strive for consensus. Critical thinking, pluralism and diversity remain important values guiding interpersonal encounters.

Even though they are from a radically different theoretical paradigm, the values undergirding Habermas' communicative action resonate well with the values and principles behind the ethics of the encounter, as laid out by Levinas (1989) and further developed in an ECE context by Dahlberg and Moss (2005). In this set of ethics, for face-to-face encounters of humans, we should strive to welcome the Other or to remain open and listen. Where communicative action strives for consen-

sus, the ethics of an encounter strives for diversity and complexity. Both paradigms stress openness, tolerance and respect.

From a Habermasian perspective, communicative action is contrasted by strategic action, which is narrowly goal- and success-oriented and often leads to an asymmetrical subject–object relationship.

Bildung: Education to Democracy

We drew on the Didaktik tradition to extend the Habermasian focus on the form and principles of communication and to also include concepts to analyse the content/substance of communication in child cares.

The German professor Wolfgang Klafki (1998) describes Didaktik as a scientific, pedagogical discipline, the object of which includes all sorts of intentional (aimed), systematic, preplanned teaching (in the broadest possible definition of reflected assisted learning) and the learning that follows this assistance. From the Didaktik perspective, learning is conceptually subordinated to the ultimate goal of every educative process, namely, Bildung.

Bildung, or the child's comprehensive personal development, is a concept that tries to capture an overarching aim for all the child's learning and experiences. According to Klafki (1996), Bildung is about the formation of the child; it is about the child's appropriation of three core skills: self-determination, co-determination and solidarity. These skills formed as a unity in the individual can be seen as central to democracy understood as a mode of conjoint living (in the words of Dewey 2005).

We must be able and willing to govern ourselves, to actively participate in the transformation of individual desires into collective concerns (Biesta 2011) and to work to extend these possibilities for individual freedom and social participation to those people who, for various reasons, are cut off thereof.

From the Didaktik perspective, the question of educative substance [Bildungsgehalt]—the content question—subordinates all other teaching questions and problems, that is, teaching methods and their organisation, and it also subordinates other disciplines, such as educational psychology and instructional research (Künzli 2000).

Educative substance in the child care should be developed and implemented under the influence of the core societal problems of a given epoch, such as war, ecological crisis, socially determined inequality, etc. These problems do not only pertain to the 'adult world'; they qualify as key problems of a certain epoch because humanity—and thus children and adults alike—are affected by them here and now. As humans, sharing the same planet, we must face these problems together because they affect us all. They call upon us to work together to think of possible collective ways to better futures, and as such, they present a democratic challenge, requiring self-determination, co-determination and solidarity (Bildung) of the individual. The job of facilitating a fundamentally international awareness of societal problems in

the first years of a child's development is a task that must be undertaken in 'family-based upbringing, in nursery school, and of course, at school itself' (Klafki 1996, p. 9).

As such, exemplary content should be connected to the real world and its problems and wonders. But it should also extend the current worldview, interests and perspectives of the child. In the child care context, exemplary content should primarily allow for practical and concrete encounters in the concrete world and the co-construction of knowledge and experiences with skills in close relation to the child's own body or to caring pedagogues and peers. Experiences are mediated by verbal and/or social or emotional means.

Even though exemplary content is often used to assess and analyse concrete subject matter, exemplary learning is not exclusively related to physical objects. From a prime and meaningful example, a young child being comforted with a warm and caring hug from the child care teacher as the parents leave for work is arguably a child learning about the important dimensions of interpersonal relations (what Klafki calls the I/you problem).

Democratic Values in Practice

Democratic values are expressed during the planning of collective activities, where individuals or groups of children are participating. Here the children get to express their perspectives on common matters, and they can experience being able to influence the common agenda, thus developing a sense of co-determination. The pedagogues may then scaffold and frame these events. We provide two examples to illustrate this point:

- Today it is Freja's (3,6 years old) turn to plan the content of circle time. Bente, the pedagogue, sits besides Freja, and together they discuss different activities. Small premade cards and pictures represent different possible activities, and as Freja selects each activity, the corresponding card is put into the circle time briefcase. The rest of the children come in from the playground, and Freja is ready with a suitcase full of fun!
- As part of a thematic project on food and health, the children and adults of the Strawberry Room prepare a buffet for lunch. The pedagogues oversee the process and organise ad hoc tasks and groups. The children wash vegetables, slice cucumbers, peel carrots, etc. When everything is ready, they eat together, and Berit, one of the pedagogues, arranges a blind-tasting contest in order to facilitate playful learning of new tastes and ingredients.

We have seen some examples of how democracy was expressed as children participated in the planning of shared activities, such as the buffet and circle time. In the project's data, this is not the only way in which democratic values are expressed. Values related to self- and co-determination are communicated on the playground, in the locker-room, etc. As we will return to in the description of caring and disci-

plinary values, the circle time is a prime practical setting in which to experience how democracy is entangled in these two other values.

In both of the examples, we see adults striving to facilitate the children's co-determination. As Freja is pondering which activities to include in the suitcase, Bente is engaging in a conversation with her, asking about her thoughts, listening to her and helping her express her wishes. In this regard, we can see glimpses of communicative action, even though Freja is choosing from a fixed set of possible activities.

Because the topics and activities on the cards are loaded with values, we interpret them as educative substance and ask some critical questions. For example, one of the cards Freja chooses states that the group should talk about what Christmas is and why it is celebrated. This Christian tradition happens to be firmly in line with the cultural backgrounds of the children currently in the group—but how and when will the pedagogues make a similar card for Ramadan (Muslim holiday), etc. available? As Klafki pointed out above, democratic Bildung is not about affirming what is well known but about expanding horizons with relevance to key societal problems, such as those rising from cultural differences and conflict.

In a similar vein, one can also problematise the educative quality of the shared buffet. It is very relevant that the children learn about food, how to collectively prepare it and so forth, but in the example, the origin of the food was the local super market. Some of the children had been participating in the shopping trip for groceries. With reference to a key problem such as sustainable development, taking the children to the local farm to help harvest potatoes and carrots opens new potential for democratic Bildung. In other words, exemplary learning should depart from practical educational substance and link democracy to a critique of consumerism.

Caring Values

Caring values can be described as a particular way to be in relation to the child (Noddings 1986) and a special way to create zones of joint attention where the child and the pedagogue can share intentions (Tomasello et al. 2009) and thereby create a mind-expanding learning environment (Sheridan et al. 2009). In Denmark, a good place to start the description of care can be a recitation of the Danish early childhood researcher Sven Thyssen (1995, pp. 8–9). Thyssen stresses that caring is characterised by responsible actions targeting the needs of the child. By doing so, the pedagogue knowingly provides support for the child's mental development. Another Danish early childhood researcher, Agnete Diderichsen (2005), emphasised the value of caring in the child care as a special relationship that can be characterised as actions that target and support the child in his or her needs in the areas where development and existence take form. A caring relation to the child can be personalised and based on emotional actions. It can also be professional and built on the sense of responsibility (Noddings 1986).

These processes cohesively merge socialisation and adaptation of culture (values, norms, attitudes and behaviours) and, at the same time, denote the unity of care, discipline and education (Broström 2006).

The three forms of interaction, which together will be a unitary concept of care, are present simultaneously in the pedagogue's expression in the example from the practice presented below. None of the three elements are or could be absent. In the example, they are expressed primarily in a nonverbal manner through facial expressions, gestures and, last but not least, by the tone of voice, intonation and rhythm of the language used:

1. The emotional, caring interaction—The adult spontaneously follows the child's initiative (shared intentionality) and perspective or the 'careful value' (Hansen 2013).
2. The idea-generating and expanding, interaction-guiding and educative value—The pedagogue accompanies the child's discovery of the life world in the sense of a horizon of meaning in which the child always will act (Habermas 1987), names what he or she sees and follows the child's voyage of discovery (cultural learning). The pedagogue is engaged in the child's world; meanwhile there is a reflective, educational strategy aimed at expanding the child's skills. The pedagogue is the one that challenges the child's learning and, ultimately, his or her development and in the process, facilitates care. It is not a static notion of how the child is, but rather how children and educators can engage in an ongoing development. This requires a planned educational base adapted to each child's stage of development (Hansen 2013).
3. The disciplinary interaction—The teacher supports and gives the child help. Not negative, judgmental help but positive, constructive, culturally founded, caring values, which can be described as disciplinary caring values.

Noddings (1986, p. 30) described the caring pedagogue as one who manages to receive the other in him or herself and look and feel with the other—in other words, to become one. This is the devoted caregiver, someone who will understand the child's intentions and show that he or she actually cares. He or she also feels that care is a way of being in the world together with the one in need of care, namely, the child. Noddings (1986) stressed that caring's greatest achievement is its emphasis on the relation's importance, and it is especially the principle that the person receives the care itself that plays a significant role. According to Noddings, a caring relational act not only depends on the intentions of the person providing the care but is also determined by the effect it has on the child being cared for. If the teacher claims to provide care for the child, but the child does not experience this, the relationship between the educator and the child is not a relationship of care.

According to Hansen (2013), pedagogues' expectations of themselves establish prerequisite conditions for how they act in relation to the children. These expectations may stem partly from past experience as the caregiver and partly from their own childhoods, for example, relationship patterns, which they developed as children to maintain links with adults. Such personal 'survival patterns' become personal assumptions that, if you are not aware of them, create inapplicable caring

relationships between pedagogue and child. The idea is that when there is no sense of equality, the child becomes an object of the pedagogue's caring.

To mistake caring with approval and positive feedback disguises the point that care is a way to meet other people, which requires a conscious effort on several levels—ethically, cognitively and emotionally. Nurturing relationships requires changes in perspective to try to understand the other from that person's terms. Sharing intentionality requires an open, spacious, attentive pedagogue: the half of the relationship in which the adults take responsibility for what goes on. Reflecting on what is going on in the relationship, the pedagogue thereby learns new things about him or herself while he or she learns about the children. In this way, caring relationships construct the child as well as the pedagogue.

Caring Values Identified During Circle Time in a Nursery One Morning

Present in the circle were three pedagogues and a dozen children aged 14 to 34 months. They sang and the children took turns to select their own songs. The circle time was dominated by a boy, 22 months of age, of another ethnic origin than Danish. He was impatient and tried several times to attract attention by interrupting, and he tried to reach for the artefacts included in the song selection, which were placed in the middle of the circle. The three pedagogues agreed upon whom would take care of the boy, by gazing and nodding to each other. The intervention was careful in the sense that it established a secure relationship as the base, and at the same time, it held a disciplinary part that was communicated by placing a hand gently on the boy's arm with a mild but determined look. In the same interaction, one of the pedagogues steered the child's attention to the other children's song selections and also to the content of the songs. It was an intervention that required a significant part of the pedagogue's attention, yet she could still cooperate with the two other pedagogues.

Caring values in this example can be identified and described as a trinity of caring, discipline and democracy values. The pedagogues facilitated a careful environment and simultaneously communicated idea-generating and expanding interactions that also contained disciplinary values in order to underline the children's ability to respect one another's right to participate. This facilitated practice can be seen partly as a fundamental and emotionally based presence and partly as an intentional pedagogical effort (Hansen 2013). Caring can be identified as a special relationship where the pedagogues simultaneously capture the child's intent and direct the child's attention to a commonly shared goal, namely, the circle time. The pedagogue aims to stabilise the focus of the child and the group of children as a whole through tone of voice, body language and mimicry, along with touching the child on the arm and by intentionally making eye contact.

The understanding of care contains a cultural dimension in the sense that the pedagogue, as well as the child and the whole group of children and adults, at one time shared a culturally founded intentionality and simultaneously created a learning environment where all the children learned about themselves and the world.

Reflections on Caring Values in the Example

Caring values in the example are mainly communicated in a variety of emotional gestures, mimicry and eye and body contact. The pedagogues involved are all part of a Danish professional and pedagogical educated culture where care is seen first and foremost as an emotional relationship, in which the child feels secure and safe. And secondly, care is seen as a means of cultural expansion and disciplinary communication.

In the example above, the child in focus experienced a careful interaction in which he learns about social and cultural values in a Danish context, where he shares his life with ethnic Danes. In the process, he is educated and at the same time recognised for his presence, but the pedagogues facilitated caring values to the boy and the group as a whole.

With reference to the Danish understanding of caring values as described above, these values underline the special relationship that target and support the child's needs, both as a young child in need of care and as a cultural learner. The caring values are facilitated by emotional actions, as described above, where the pedagogue builds a professional security frame around the child.

In that sense, the pedagogue's actions can be described as a way to meet and recognise the child, which requires a conscious effort on several levels: ethically, cognitively and emotionally.

Disciplinary Values

Disciplinary values in the child care have an individual orientation and are directed towards adjusting individuals to be able to act in a harmonious way in a specific social context. That means to find a balance between obedience and self-dependence. Disciplinary values in the child care are defined as a system of underlying rules, as norms and an existing order that regulate children (Ehn 1983; Henckel 1990).

Different forms of disciplinary processes are used to communicate disciplinary values. Through social life, children will appropriate the embedded and expected social norms and values. This disciplinary process is expressed both directly and indirectly. Some norms and values are generally socially acceptable and expressed as communal values, which children more or less have to obey. Besides such deliberate discipline or moral education (Durkheim 1973), a smoother and faceless dis-

cipline is expressed through daily routines and play activities (Ehn 1983; Henckel 1990; Nordin-Hultman 2004).

Disciplinary values are generally acceptable values constructed in a social–historical context and express people's general views on 'the normal child' or the desirable child (Emilson and Johansson 2009a, b). However, across social and class prerequisites, disciplinary values deal with obedience, independence and achievements (Emilson and Johansson 2009a, b).

Disciplinary Values Between Liberation and Adjustment

Disciplinary values are values inscribed in everyday life, focusing on the maintenance of a social order. In any social interactions, there are some general expectations for considerate behaviour. Also, in a child care, the number of formal and informal norms and actions are stated both in the daily routines (e.g., lunchtime, indoor and outdoor play) and in more formal educational activities (e.g., circle time and learning activities), which direct children's behaviour and activity. Through everyday life in a child care, children acquire shared norms and values, a code of conduct, which more or less makes up a common base, and a shared morality (Durkheim 1973).

According to Durkheim (1973), education and upbringing have undertaken the responsibility of shaping common morals based on sense in a modern and postmodern society where religious values have lost their function to make up social cohesion. The current morality and the predominant values have two conflicting dimensions. On the one hand, the individual himself/herself has a preference for regularity, and on the other hand, there is the notion of a regulating authority. The two dimensions are united and constitute the fundamental element of morality, the spirit of discipline (Durkheim 1973, p. 31).

In the child care, pedagogues strive for the children's well-being, learning, development and Bildung, which calls for intentional and goal-oriented pedagogy defined as a unity of teaching, upbringing and care; such a practice could also be defined as 'edu-care' (Broström 2006). Herbart (Herbart 1841) united the dimensions of teaching and upbringing through which a child should achieve a masterful development (German: Mündigkeit). Though teaching, upbringing and care are expressed as a whole, the upbringing dimension in particular communicates disciplinary values to affect the emotional life and the children's will, in other words, their character (Herbart 1841). Herbart used the concept *Bildsamkeit*, which is defined as the child's sensitivity towards Bildung and thus the construction of a personal identity where knowledge and values are united.

Through upbringing, children achieve a culture's embedded values, norms, attitudes and morals. Thus, upbringing and the transmission of cultural values might be seen as a kind of adjustment to the culture or *inculturation*. However, upbringing does not necessarily mean adjustment. The British philosopher Robert Stanley Peters (1965, 1966) used the concept of *initiation* to balance between the conserva-

tive notions of education as cultural transmission and a more progressive understanding of education as cultural regeneration. Nevertheless, the concept of initiation has been criticised as transmission (Biesta 1997) and thus exclusion of the children's agency. In other words, discipline predominates the democratic dimension.

No doubt there is tension in educational work. Nevertheless, the pedagogues strive towards liberation and children's agency, so the interactions between pedagogues and children also hold an appropriation of cultural norms and values characterised by adaptation and adjustment.

In the child care, some disciplinary values are given, whereas others are constructed in the dialogues between pedagogues and children. Thus, it is of interest to investigate both the specific communicated values and the form and circumstances in which the values are expressed and managed. The ideal is to obtain a real democratic dialogue as stated by Habermas (1987). From this perspective, dialogue is defined as a deliberative process where two or more individuals interact and coordinate their actions based upon agreed interpretations of the situation.

The possibility to reach shared decisions via Habermasian communicative action is seen as an ideal in many child cares. For some decades, it was common in Danish child cares to arrange child care children in a so-called children's meeting (børnemøde) where they themselves (supported by the pedagogues) carried through negotiations and dialogues in order to solve problems and to obtain a shared understanding.

Based on the children's own decisions, they constructed the values that would guide their actions and cooperation. However, in order to practice democracy, the children need to master some disciplinary and caring skills—for example, being able to restrain oneself, listening to each other and expressing respect for the other children's ideas and suggestions. Thus, democratic values cannot be expressed in isolation. More such examples illustrate the need of disciplinary values.

Disciplinary values are expressed in all kinds of social life in the child care and cover a continuum from obedience to independence and achievements (Emilson and Johansson 2009a, b). Thus, values like dutifulness, adjustment, willingness and readiness, responsibility and eagerness to learn can be seen as disciplinary values.

Disciplinary Values Communicated in the Child Care Practice

The video recordings from three child cares provided us with rich material for describing the communicated disciplinary values. Below a number of episodes are shortly presented, analysed and discussed in order to identify the different forms of disciplinary values. However, regardless of the existence of the different types of disciplinary values, in general the concept of initiation (Peters 1965, 1966) seems to cover the way disciplinary values are expressed in Danish child cares.

Disciplinary values are communicated in different ways and with different intentions and can be categorised in three (overlapping) groups:

In the *first* group, disciplinary values are used in order to help an individual child to achieve success in a social activity and thus support the child's possibility to establish actual social relations and friendships in the long run. Such values might be called 'socially supportive disciplinary values'.

- In circle time, a boy is bodily restless; he moves around, makes noise and disturbs the children sitting next to him. The pedagogue asks him: 'Would you like to sit in my lap?' Regardless of the child hearing this as an open question or a demand, the boy agrees and puts himself in the pedagogue's lap, embraces her body and stops disturbing the circle time.

The pedagogue intervened in the situation by use of a smooth and faceless discipline (Ehn 1983; Henckel 1990; Nordin-Hultman 2004), which helped the boy to become a part of the playgroup and to thus obtain success. However, in addition to the disciplinary aspect, the pedagogue's intervention also contains caring and democratic values. Based on an interpretation of the child's motives and intentions, namely, to be a part of the group, she cared for him by offering him a place to sit close by. Through this action, she secures the boy's positive relational tie to the group. The maintenance of the relations between him and his friends is seen as a participatory perspective and thus a democratic value.

In the *second* group, disciplinary value is expressed in situations where the pedagogue tries to help children in conflict situations or children having conflicting interests. Because the pedagogue wants to protect the individual child or group of children, this form of disciplinary action could be categorised as 'protective disciplinary values' or 'harmonising disciplinary values'.

- Two three-year-old girls are sitting on the ground, drawing on it with their fingers and some sticks. A one-year-old boy observes the girl's drawing intensely, and he crawls into the drawing area and begins to draw on the drawing area. One of the girls starts to cry. The pedagogue carefully catches the boy's arm and, without moving him away, she addresses the two girls: 'You can also find a secret place where you can be alone'. The two girls leave the area, and the pedagogue stays back with the one-year-old boy who starts to imitate the girls' drawing activity.

The pedagogue disciplined the one-year-old boy by holding him carefully back. Although he was not allowed to disturb the girls' drawing, the pedagogue took the boy's perspective and gave him a chance to be present and learn how to draw in sand. She created a situation characterised by joint attention (Tomasello et al. 2009). The pedagogue was engaged in the boy's world; they had eye contact and a shared understanding. And after a while, the boy realised his main intention: to draw in the sand. Because the pedagogue was able to take the boy's perspective, the boy managed to convey his intention, and thus, he changed the existing order. Because the pedagogue decided not to take the one-year-old boy out of the drawing arena and then secure the girls' drawing, one might think she acted in a disloyal way towards the girls and their drawing interest. At first, the girls did not understand the idea of a secret place, but soon they realised the pedagogue was trying to secure their inter-

est and they happily moved on to find a place for themselves. So the pedagogue also dealt with the girls' perspectives, interests and autonomy, so both caring and democratic values were added to the disciplinary values.

The *third* form of disciplinary values is directed towards helping or supporting children's interests and intentions when they are threatened. While disciplinary actions are based on the idea of maintaining a democratic life, this form of values is categorised as 'democratic disciplinary values'.

- A group of 3- to 5-year-olds and a pedagogue have planned a popular play. The children sit in a circle. They are looking forward to the play, and their body language and facial expressions show joy. As soon as the pedagogue starts the play, a boy steps into the middle of the circle, dancing and shaking his bottom just in front of the pedagogue. To this interruption, she expresses with a correcting voice: 'No, John, take your place'. At the same time, the pedagogue gently pushes him towards his seat in the circle, saying: 'We do not need your bottom play. Let us play together, all of us'.

From an immediate standpoint, the pedagogue commanded the boy to sit still and not disturb the play, which can be perceived as a kind of outside disciplinary action. The boy had transcended the shared morality and the code of conduct (Durkheim 1973). Based on an idea of social cohesion, the boy needs to adjust in order to make room for the rest of the group's play interest. With reference to Makarenko (1969, p. 385), the pedagogue acted as a genuine authority, defining and reflecting the group's interest. The boy making the disturbance met an outside regulation, which did, in some way, support the boy from the group's criticism; hence, the disciplinary form 'socially supportive disciplinary value' was also involved.

Reflection on Disciplinary Values

Disciplinary values are communicated in many situations and with many nuances. Nevertheless, we have organised the expressed values in only three categories: socially supportive disciplinary values, protective disciplinary values and democratic disciplinary values, which are based on the pedagogue's efforts to create the best conditions for all the children's well-being and learning. When the three mentioned values are incorporated, in practice it might look like a kind of adjustment and limitation of the child's activity. However, although disciplinary values govern and, in a way, adjust, their fundamental principle and aim is to initiate a child into a group of children and into society (Peters 1965, 1966) and to make up an environment which can support the children's well-being and learning.

In the circle time sequence, the pedagogue invited the child to sit in her lap and thereby fended off a disturbing behaviour and a possible conflict with reprimands. Thus, she used her authority to regulate the child's behaviour so that both he and the entire group of children had a positive experience. By use of socially supportive

values, both the individual child's and the group's interests are taken into consideration.

The same dynamic can be seen in the sand drawing example. In a gentle way, the pedagogue used protective disciplinary values to make a world in which both the younger boy and the two older girls could carry through their ideas. She could easily have physically moved the young boy in order to protect the girls' drawing, but then she would have spoiled the young boy's harmony, along with his urge to explore the world.

In the play example, the pedagogue actually stopped the boy from further disturbance by using her authority and telling him 'no'. This could be seen as an outside and direct behavioural modification, but we categorise it as democratic discipline as the intervention was based on the interest of the entire group and also as an effort to include the boy in a group activity.

In summary, the communicated disciplinary values in the three child cares were not characterised by a random use of power, but were a mix of both caring and democratic values while the child care pedagogues strived to support all the children's intentions and activities—as long as they did not oppress those of the other children.

Descriptions of the above situations and activities illustrate how children are expected to follow and relate to the existing social order and show how pedagogues, in an emphatic way, made space for the possibilities of the children to use their abilities to change this order.

Educational Implications: Contributions to Values Education in Practice

We have presented our theory and practice on the three value fields and also described how democratic, caring and disciplinary values are overlapping, now and then merged together and often expressed and communicated in unity.

This study of values has deepened our understanding of the values in the everyday life of crèche (0–3 years) and child care (3–5 years), and it might contribute to a more reflective and goal-oriented values education in these settings. The study has contributed to shedding light on existing values, which earlier have been expressed at a less conscious level, what Michael Polanyi (1976) and others describe as 'tacit knowledge'. The concept of tacit knowledge refers to the idea that you actually know more than you are able to describe and explain. So via shared analysis of video observations and dialogues with the pedagogues, we were able to uncover the tacit knowledge found in values and elevate them to a conscious level.

Such a raising of values awareness and the way values are expressed and communicated opens for a more conscious and reflected values education. Yet we still are in a beginning phase; in our humble way, we plan to outline a few approaches or principles.

Though the three values are united, the weighting of an individual value is also determined by the particular child's age. No doubt caring values are strongly expressed in interactions between the pedagogue and young children, one and two years of age. Young children also have to experience a democratic everyday life and to realise themselves as subjects who influence their surroundings. In addition to the practical dimension of the senses, elder children are able to discuss and reflect values via dialogues with the pedagogues; they can be participants in a decision on prioritised and current values. Nevertheless, democratic values might be communicated on a bigger and more elaborate scale and at a more conscious level with older children since it is not easy to line up a few simple guidelines for them.

It remains an important principle for values education that the pedagogue is able and willing to take the child's perspective. Even the very young child must be recognised as a legitimate bearer of values and worldviews. Emotional presence and a playful attitude are also important qualities of a pedagogue who can facilitate learning through communicative action with very young children (Emilson 2008).

Caring values, as described in the chapter, contains other values as well, e.g., idea-generating and expanding values and disciplinary and democratic values. But caring values communicated by pedagogues also communicate the pedagogues' own worlds, and their values are non-intentionally expressed in a nonverbal manner. A pedagogue facilitates the intentionally planned pedagogical caring process on the basis of his or her own values. In that sense, the pedagogical process of communicating values facilitates the cultural education of the youngest children. In addition, it underlines the cohesion between a certain culture and the appropriate values. Caring values are therefore not neutral, but they are intentional and, in most countries, part of the legislation for child care and education. But the weight of the value is to a certain degree communicated non-intentionally and nonverbally.

As we have discussed throughout the chapter, everyday life in the child care is loaded with values, and as such, everyday joys, challenges and communication are a good starting point for pedagogues working with values education in practice. When working with preplanned activities as part of values education or maybe even developing a values education curriculum, exemplary teaching and learning should be guiding concepts. These concepts could be criticised for inspiring the creation of complex topics that might link to societal issues, but goes completely over the heads of the child care children. It is important to stress that whatever the topic or educational substance, a close and secure relationship to the pedagogue is the basis of most of a toddler's learning in child care. Exemplary teaching and learning should inspire pedagogues to go beyond isolated tasks, meaningless concepts and drill-like exercises. Exemplary teaching and learning in the values education context are concerned with the integrated physical, emotional, social and cognitive development of the whole child, through carefully reflected activities in the intersections of the child as an individual and the world as a complex, social and value-laden environment.

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Chapter 3
The History of Children's Engagements in Danish Child Care

Jakob Waag Villadsen and Pernille Hviid

Abstract In this chapter we investigate the role of children's engagements in pedagogical practices within the field of center-based child care. Based on a historical analysis, it is argued that children's engagements have played a central and crucial part throughout the varied pedagogical approaches that make up the Danish tradition and its pedagogical methodologies and practices. Yet, due to a strong present-day educational perspective within the center-based child care, along with the application of standardized and evidence-based programs and evaluations, the pedagogical tradition is fundamentally challenged and changing. We argue that the pedagogical transition at its core consists of a change from being grounded in the local living, and the concrete existence of the subjects being, to a more global perspective that draws on context-free and universal technologies. Through empirical investigations of such standardized practices, potential developmental implications are discussed and related to international research within the field. From a cultural life course perspective, it is argued that the pedagogical change at present creates an internal paradox because the standardized pedagogical practices with a "proven" effect always are an effect within a uniquely configured cultural life course. This is more or less explicitly noted by pedagogical staff as well and expressed with ambivalence toward these changes. Such ambivalence can point to synthesis and practice development. A methodology is suggested which focuses on the production of collective spheres of meaning-making and how these spheres, in the person's everyday life, become meaningful parts of the persons' cultural course of living.

Introduction

In this chapter we investigate the role of children's engagement in the pedagogical tradition of center-based child care. We do so from a developmental perspective not only considering how changing pedagogical contexts frames and channels children's development but also how transitions and transformation of the pedagogical

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traditions can be conceptualized. Thus, our perspective is developmental and historical at its core since the status of children's engagement within the institutional life centers around the question of what the pedagogical practices *want with and for the children* and how this relates to what *children want with their* "there being" (Heidegger 1962; Hviid and Villadsen 2014a). By focusing on the *wants* of both the children and the institutional practices, it becomes clear that neither the institutional practice nor the living children are static phenomena that can be conceptualized in themselves. Instead they are vital being(s) living, unfolding, and developing under specific conditions and thereby generating an anchor state for their future existence (Valsiner 1997).

For these reasons our investigation sets out with a historical outline of the Danish pedagogical tradition. The purpose of such historical investigation is to create a ground from where recent changes within the Danish child-care service can be conceptualized and understood as meaningful in relation to present conditions. As will be argued, the traditional practice is changing due to the appearance of new discourses and practices at the managerial, political, and pedagogical level.

Examined through an empirical case, we attempt to elaborate on this transition and conceptualize how it reconfigures the developmental possibilities and constraints for the children as well as for the pedagogical practice. In this analysis we focus on an existential level of the field and search for pedagogues' and children's engagements and concerns. On this basis we discuss the theoretical and empirical rationalities behind these current trends and how they relate to different levels within the field. By relating our analysis to international research, we discuss the role of children's engagement and concerns in their development as persons and the relation to the pedagogical strategies aimed at supporting and facilitating this development.

Children's Life Course and the Institutional Life

Within the Danish society, the center-based child care occupies a comprehensive part of children's life course, and Danish children hold the world record in time spent in welfare institution during early childhood. The child-care centers are administered by the local municipalities under the legislation provided by the Danish parliament and under the supervision and guidance by the government. Families with newborns are offered 52 weeks parental leave with governmental financial support, and after this period children's life course commonly includes institutional life enrollment. Thus, a trajectory of an average Danish child begins at nursery around the age of one and continues throughout his or her early years with an average attendance of 7.5 hours per weekday (Dencik et al. 2008) until the child starts at school at the year of his or her sixth birthday. Approximately 90 % of children from 1 to 3 years of age are enrolled in a nursery home or in a day-care "zero-to-six" (years). About 95 % of children from 3 to 5 years of age attend the child-care

centers. Thus, children's everyday life and development is profoundly embedded in the child-care institutions and their cultural arrangement (Dreier 2009).

This central position of the institutional life within Danish children's life course has a long history and is related to the labor market, which today is made up of an almost equal number of women and men.

The Danish Child-Care Tradition and Its Historical Roots

The Danish child-care system is running back 200 years. Here we set out to identify significant features of this tradition in a historical perspective. However, as Andersen (2012) makes clear, such an account of "the" history of Danish pedagogy cannot be done comprehensively due to the variability of the field.

The particular analytical focus in our historical review centers on understanding historical continuity as well as discontinuity with regard to a fundamental figure in pedagogical practice: how the dialogue (in the broadest sense of the word) and interaction between pedagogues and children are thought of and used by the pedagogues to regulate and promote the life and development of the children. Our focus is thus constrained to the inter-psychological processes between the psychological and collective level. This means that we exclude information of purely material conditions such as square meter per child or staff-child ratio, although these "factors" of course are related to and dealt with when meaning-making in daily pedagogical practice. We have chosen the concept of child care as the frame of our historical outline since this concept integrates a wide range of care areas in the early childhood (such as nursery, kindergarten, and age-integrated day-care institutions).

Early History: The Alternative to Home and Mother

The pedagogical tradition of early childhood has emerged from preventive child care of asylums in the early nineteenth century, half-day care arrangements for children of the upper classes, and later from the kindergartens and nurseries in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century. Where the asylums were based on strict disciplines, routines, and regularities, the child-care arrangement of the upper classes primarily had "the proper home" as its ideal. The first kindergartens were inspired by the philosophy of Friedrich Fröbel and signified a first genuine attempt to create a pedagogical practice that went beyond technical care and monitoring of children (Enoksen et al. 2003; Schwede 1997). Presuming the child's inborn potential to gain an understanding of his/her environment through involvement with others, Fröbel's pedagogy placed emphasis upon children's self-organized activities and conceptualized play as one of the most important contexts of development (Andersen 2004; Schwede 1997). Following this, the pedagogical task in particular consisted of engaging dialogues with the child and supporting his or her

conceptualization of the world and in the child's sharing it with others (Schwede 1997). Anchored to these pedagogical principles, the concept of people's kindergarten [Folkebørnehave] developed as philanthropically financed institutions in which vulnerable children could receive care and upbringing.

Later in the twentieth century, a focus on education started to appear in the Danish pedagogical landscape. Maria Montessori's focus on children's learning in relation to structured activities had an appeal (Andersen 2004; Rifbjerg 1966). Montessori built her pedagogical philosophy on systematic observations of children in and outside educational settings (Andersen 2004) and based on such the pedagogy sought to optimize the children's development through didactical tools that matched the children's interest and their particular developmental situation. In this perspective play was not considered as a developmental activity in itself, but rather as informative preconditions for any configuration of the educational activities. Optimal educational initiatives were those that matched the child's engagements and his or her developmental situation. "In a varied and comprehensive milieu," Mortensen explained, "every child will choose the toy that it needs" (Mortensen 1942, p. 322). In spite of considerable differences, both pedagogies paid interest to the engagements of children and incorporated these dimensions of subjectified life into the pedagogical setting, to promote the children's future life and development and to form the society of tomorrow.

The two pedagogical inspirations from Fröbel and Montessori existed historically in parallel and created a fundamental debate and concern among the professionals concerning the life and development of the children. This was promoted by the establishment of education and authorization of the staff, which also was offered in the shape of the two concurrent inspirations. The development of the Danish child-care tradition was thus not a linear process moving toward an integrated tradition, but more precisely expressed a tradition built on many waves of ideas, which like other waves interfere with each other over time (Schwede 1997). It is probably for these reasons that the educational attention that followed Montessori did not suspend basic care and concern for the children, but added to the idea of what was already "concern and care for children" and in that perspective education became important.

It is noteworthy that the institutionalization of pedagogical practices was done with relatively little involvement from the central administration. The generative debates within and between the different pedagogical schools were primarily done by local stakeholders. A *decentralized debate on content and organization* of the pedagogical practice has consequently been one of the most prominent qualities of the Danish pedagogical tradition, by the same token promoting institutional self-organization and autonomy in establishing the institution and its pedagogical content (Andersen 2012; Schwede 1997). In this local context, children and parents were perceived as important participants, and across the different pedagogical schools, the concrete life of the children and their experiences, concerns, and engagement were recognized and considered relevant in the pedagogical organizations.

The Creation of the Welfare State and the Danish Child Care

Even though the state already in 1919 provided kindergartens with operating grants, it was not until the 1960s that child care was established as public welfare service. In post-wartime Denmark, like other Nordic countries, began building the Scandinavian welfare model (Dencik et al. 2008). The expansion of child care in the 1950s and the 1960s aimed specifically at supporting vulnerable children and more generally creating a supplement to the families' upbringing of children. During the late 1960s and the 1970s, the child care expanded from being a preventing service to general service, including both nursery and kindergarten (children from 0 to 6 years). This transformation and expansion happened primarily due to radical changes in the labor market where women came to occupy a more central role. This is related to the movement of women's liberation that appeared as a parallel confrontation with the idea of the traditional family and up till now an almost sacred institution in fulfilling the needs of a child and the mother to enact that task. The number of children being enrolled in child-care institution increased drastically from approximately 20 % in the 1950s to 50 % in the 1960s and 90 % in the 1990s.

In 1976 the municipalities took over the operational administration of the child-care centers (Retsinformation 1976) in order to meet the demands as a public matter, and formal educations for pedagogues were authorized. The trusted and central role in a major societal rupture promoted the recognition of pedagogues (and their trade union); the welfare state of the 1970s and the 1980s counted on professionalism in sustaining progress and preventing social problems, and thus, the voice of pedagogues was given authority and impact (Hansen et al. 2010).

Also in this period, the pedagogical content in the specific institutions remained an issue to be defined and discussed primarily by local actors. Hence, the local involvement and obligation of the pedagogical tradition from the early era was maintained during the transition to a public service. In this period a variety of pedagogical traditions and approaches started to flower and fill the pedagogical landscape. Russian and East European ideas inspired the "structured pedagogy" where guided group and collaborative activities were in focus (Brostrøm 1983), whereas Malaguzzi's (2004) pioneering pedagogical work with children's "100 languages" in Italy gave way to other practices, and "experience-centered pedagogy" took inspiration from Dewey's work (Dewey 1997). More profiles deserve to be mentioned, but most importantly all maintained children's subjectivity as a central dimension in each of their practices, either in the form of "motives," "engagements," "experiences," "autonomy," and "choices" or as "political actors."

Modernization of the Welfare State: Economy and Science Constrain Child Care

The idea behind the modernization of the welfare state was partly a consequence of economic crises and partly the result of a new view of the citizens of Denmark as active and responsible collaborators in public activities. As the economy was tight,

all welfare institutions were requested to streamline and rationalize their services (Andersen 2012). Parallel to these needs, the Western societies were in the middle of what has been called the process of globalization. Several researchers have characterized this period as a process of de-traditionalization of society (Giddens 1990) and erosion of traditional culture (Ziehe 1989) where traditional authorities, norms, and values were no longer taken for granted. Taken together this created a new situation for the child-care institutions – both in their relationship to the central administration and to citizens in the welfare system.

The need to improve efficiency and legitimize the services promoted practices of describing and evaluating the pedagogical practices. As such the traditional concern of the institution – the life of the concrete children – was replaced with a concern for the child-care institutions' overall role within the welfare state. An interesting aspect of these changes was that the citizen and "user" of the institution now formally were perceived as the parents, which is still the case (e.g., see Økonomi- og indenrigsministeriet (2014) for the latest evaluation of users' satisfaction within the welfare system).

Because of this particular emphasis on (parent) user perspectives, the focus of the dialogues changed from being about the *local concrete* child-care practice with children and families to deal with more *global abstract* values and outcomes for "some kinds of children." Hence local stakeholders such as pedagogues, parents, and children became constrained by a more global representation of child life at the municipal and state level.

In line with this concern, the "Social Service Act" replaced "Bistandsloven" and initiated the first movements toward the New Public Management (NPM). This movement expressed distrusts in the local self-sufficiency and decision-making with regard to the standards of the service in the singular public institution (Hjort 2000). The movement was partly based on the liberal idea that public institutions were ineffective and costly and partly on the idea that improvement could be achieved through external evaluations of the practices and public admission to the results. The new relation between the "producer of social service and the customer" radically changed the collaborative format between parents and pedagogues. The philosopher (and later rector of the first pedagogical university in Denmark, in 2000) Lars-Henrik Schmidt analyzed the pedagogical situation as the pedagogues' unwarranted retreat toward servility (Schmidt 1999).

A State Pedagogical Curriculum

In 2004 the government implemented the State Curriculum by passing the Educational Curricula Act as a supplement to the Social Service Act of 1998, which up till then had governed the field (Retsinformation 2004). In 2007 elements of the Social Service Act and the Curricula Act of 2004 were united and moderated in a single act: the Day-Care Facility Act (Retsinformation 2007). These reforms can be seen as part of the so-called quality reform concerning a wide range of public

domains that aimed at reducing the cost of the public sector and ensuring quality of the services provided under the parole of the New Public Management (NPM) (Hviid and Plotnikof 2012a, b).

The premise of NPM strategies is to a large extent based on an assumption that it is possible to manage implementation of central intentions all the way through the managerial levels, from the State Order of the curriculum to the singular municipality, administration, institution, and the singular activities between children and pedagogues (Hviid and Plotnikof 2012a, b) through guiding standardized material as well as documentation and standardized evaluation of the singular practices. This idea made it possible to imagine potential links between the governance of early education and socioeconomic desires. At the multinational level, such movements were explicated in 2000 with Lisbon Treaty's aim of making EU a competitive economy with full employment by 2010 (Jensen et al. 2010). The relation to the educational practice was reflected in the European Commission's communique to state members in 2006:

> Pre-primary education has the highest returns in terms of the achievement and social adaptation of children. Member States should invest more in pre-primary education as an effective means to establish the basis for further learning, preventing school drop-out, increasing equity of outcomes and overall skill levels. (Jensen et al. 2010, pp. 250)

By linking the premises of the NPM practices and its focus on ensuring quality with the desire to respond to educational and socio-economical perspectives, the jump from a question of quality to a question of education, or the preparation for education, seemed to redeem the needs. However this movement created much agitated debate (see, e.g., Andersen 2004). In the years after the implementation, the critical discussion quieted, and only few studies have managed empirically to follow up on the discussions of the effects on children's quality of life and development.

The majority of these have had focus on other perspectives. Plum (2011; 2012) investigated the interrelationship between the implementation of curriculum and the pedagogical professionalism; Hviid and Plotnikof (2012a, b) investigated possibilities in establishing local alternatives to the New Public Management through action research in the child-care sector. What is learned from these and other investigations (e.g., Krejsler 2012; Jensen et al. 2010: Ministeriet for Familie- og Forbrugeranliggender 2008; Danmarks Evalueringsinstitut 2012) is that the pedagogical practice is strongly affected by the curriculum, more specifically that pedagogues today pay closer attention to the educational dimensions of their practice and tend to reflect on their practice from a standardized perspective. It is tempting to assume that children's engagements in the world receive less attention in a pedagogy that primarily navigate on the basis of external goals and standards. Nevertheless, the object of the reforms – the life and development of the children – is still relatively unexplored (Sommer 2015; Christoffersen et al. 2014). Having sketched the historical lines of the development of the child care, two current and interrelated trends stand out strongly: the first concerns how the external constraints and influence upon the institutional practices have changed and created a global

standard of institutional lives, and the second concerns how the engagements of the children living a life through history become superfluous in the everyday organization. From the historical perspective, these current constraints seem to be grounded in a desire to reestablish legitimacy and ensure quality of the pedagogical practice. But the central question of how this new form of institutional living guide the development of the children remains unexplored.

The Empirical Investigation and Its Methodology

In the following we will investigate the developmental constraints and possibilities of children in the child-care institutions. Based on the research mentioned above, which point to the educational perspective and curriculums as the defining characteristic of the pedagogical practices, we will focus our investigation on the institutional practice with children in relation to the pedagogical curriculum.

In line with general sociocultural theory (Bruner 1990; Vygotsky 1978; Valsiner 1997), we focus on the relation between the meaning-making of children and pedagogues as it unfolds in the institutional life. Based on an empirical analysis, we will attempt to relate these microgenetic events to life course of the children.

The theoretical perspective of the project,[1] which we draw upon, is developmental, focusing on the time-dependent phenomena of becoming and maintaining (Valsiner 1997). From this perspective personal ways of thinking, acting, and feeling develop in the life course. As human beings are goal oriented and goal generative, this implies that personal concerns and engagements, which develop in the life course, feed back into the developmental processes and affect the future development of the person (Valsiner 1996; Hviid and Villadsen 2014a). In other words, the ongoing formation of the person is a historical process, interdependent with the changing social conditions.

The methodological frame thus aims at synthesizing the personal and the social level of development, as they transform through the cultural life course. The empirical study runs for a period of two and a half year and the methods applied are primary qualitative and participatory. The research design can be described as an *embedded multiple case design*, where case material is comprised of interdependent units that form a larger entity (Hedegaard 2002). Through these "multiple cases," the analytical focus is relating the development of engagements, projects, and concerns of the children with the pedagogical projects and thereby conceptualizes how these multiple perspectives feed into each other and develop over time.

[1] The project is a PhD thesis conducted by Villadsen and supervised by Hviid.

The Pedagogical Arrangement of the Institutional Life

Looking at our data from this and other studies (Hviid and Plotnikof 2012a, b; Hviid and Lima 2011; Hviid and Villadsen in press) as well as research done by others (see above), the pedagogical tendency to focus on the educational dimensions of the practice and reflect it from a standardized (educational) perspective seems prominent.

We find such exemplary cases where pedagogues promote fantasy play with clay arguing "that it isn't silly to (play) cook with clay, if this is the play one want to play one can do it" only to correct the children minutes later when the pedagogues find popcorn and candy to be too silly as ingredients in a tortilla, or when pedagogues correct children in drawing and painting spring flowers black, or when pedagogues talk about colors (the color red) when children during their excursion observe (red) fire trucks rushing past them in the street. What is common in these cases is not just that pedagogues neglect the engagements and the perspectives of the involved children but also the lack of reflection on what meaning the children makes out of the activities: why do they put popcorns and candy in a tortilla or make black spring flowers – and this despite the fact that the individual pedagogue invested much energy in showing the "real" colors of the natural spring flower? What do they imagine witnessing the dramatic scenery of fire trucks? If one is interested in understanding what meaning children produces (and not produces), these questions seem central. However, the interaction seems constrained by predetermined understandings of the practices, which makes the questions irrelevant. In the following we will elaborate on such processes of interaction and co-construction of meaning-making through an exemplary case as it unfolds in the institutional life. The case is the "Dino class" and is exemplary in the sense that it highlights the interrelation between institutional organization, pedagogical practice, and children's life.

Making-Meaning in a Dino Class

The Dino program is a six-month training program, aimed at supporting the child's emotional, cognitive, and social development by focusing on problem solving and friendship skills (www.socialstyrelsen.dk). More generally the program aims at supporting children's identification of problems of practical and emotional kind and their development of solutions to overcome them. The program is a standardized and manualized group-based preventive program composed of seven themes and consisting of 60 sessions, two sessions a week. The theoretical background of the program draws on social learning theory (ICY, http://incredibleyears.com/).

Children are introduced to different emotions in varied problem situations and guided to come up with proper solutions. Emotional and practical problems are mostly presented to the children via doll play executed by the staff following the Dino manuscript. A basic premise of the program is that the children come to expe-

rience themselves as competent in the social context of the program, and this is amplified through the symbolic reinforcement of the scoring points given during each session; having sufficient points the children receive a present. The following example, stemming from the last part of the program, illustrates these processes:

The children sit in a circle on the floor. Ida (Dino-teacher) asks them to sing a song in order to make the dolls appear. They sing and Anton (male doll) appears: "Hello!". The children laugh. Anton states that he has something to tell: he has a PROBLEM in his child-care!

He asks if they remember that they talked about PROBLEMS in last session, and if they remember what a PROBLEM is. The children start talking at once about PROBLEMS from former Dino-sessions and Anton replies: "Yes, yes, I got this wrinkle in my forehead and became really upset and angry." Some children try to share experiences with Anton, but Anton doesn't pay attention to it. Instead, he says that his PROBLEM concerned Mette (female doll) and because of that he has brought Mette along today. The children and the staff call for Mette (instructed by Ida) and Mette appears.

Now Anton and Mette introduce their PROBLEM. It concerns some play-magnets that Mette wanted to play with by herself. But Anton wanted to play as well, but wasn't allowed to by Mette. The children pay attention to the story and seem very engaged in the plot.

A child interrupts and offers herself as Anton's playmate. But Anton replies he wants to play with magnets. Ida asks the children what Anton should do, since he has a PROBLEM. The same girl suggests that Anton could play with toy-cars instead. Ida replies that the girl is working well on SOLUTIONS, but they should try something different. She introduces the SOLUTION-BULB and the BRIGHT-IDEA of "sharing the magnets". Anton and Mette consider the idea very bright and accept it as a SOLUTION to their PROBLEM. The dolls says goodbye to the children.

Ida points to the pictogram and announces playtime where they can play TOGETHER in small groups with the magnets. A couple of boys show lack of attention to the instruction and they are guided back to their nametags on the floor and asked to turn on their LISTENING-EARS. The children play for a while with the magnets and return to their nametags in the big circle.

Ida says that the children in her group played very well together and asks if this was the case in all the groups. Staff and children shout "YEEEES!" and Ida asks if they did well in sharing and turn-taking. "Was it hard?" she asks. The children keep looking at Ida without replying; the staff takes over and says that it all went very fine. Following this the group sings a children's song and the children are asked to identify the PROBLEM in the song (a flat tire) and it's SOLUTION (patching the tire with chewing gum). Ida ends by doing this herself. She praises the children's participation and appoints a girl to help her in sticking scoring-points on the scoring sheet. Together they count the points and Ida says that they only need six more points. They finalize the call with a goodbye song and the children runs off to the playground.

The pedagogical intention reveals itself partly via the behavior of the dolls and partly via the play and the song. The pedagogue introduces a social process starting from (a) a problem from a first-(doll)-perspective, (b) work on finding a "bright" solution, (c) carrying out the solution, and (d) evaluating the solution. In order to reinforce the children's identification of the "problem-solution" relationship, the pedagogues reintroduce it in the context of a song. Another redundancy appears in the constraining (and enablement) of the play with magnets in the shape of "sharing" and "playing together." In a paradoxical sense, the program not only seeks to promote children's procedural thinking and creative solving of concrete problems; it also defines the solution to which the creative thinking must reach: share.

Since the program has been applied in order to facilitate (and/or prepare for) learning, it seems relevant to examine the activity from the perspective of the children by looking at the level of meaning-making. *Such an examination focuses on the relation between the personal and collective making of meaning and how the two levels generate each other.* As a *pedagogical* practice, it also seems relevant to investigate how the pedagogical/collective *guides* the meaning-making of the child. In other words: which meanings are being produced, how do the pedagogues promote these meaning-making processes, and how are the pedagogical intentions related to the intentionality in the children's meaning-making?

From this analytical perspective, the quality of the pedagogical activity cannot be defined in itself, but exists only in the relation between the pedagogical intentions and children's learning and experience of taking part in the activity (Sheridan 2009; Sheridan and Pramling Samuelsson 2013). Following this learning refers to a process where the individual or group produces, or reproduces, meanings that have duration (Sommer 2015) and appear meaningful to the subject or subjects (Hviid and Villadsen 2014b). Such learning makes it possible for the individual/group to apply these meanings in future situations. For these reasons it is crucial to investigate how the collective meaning-making in the educational activities relate to meaning-making of the individual child, since it is within this process the collective production becomes both functional and meaningful for the subject being.

Pedagogical Intentions and Children's Intentionality

From this perspective it becomes evident that children's engagements in the activity differ considerably from the engagements of the pedagogues. When the doll Anton appeared, the children strived to establish some kind of intersubjectivity through dialogues about something of interest. The children listened to him; they commented on his clothes and invited him into their lifeworlds by sharing former experiences. The pedagogues followed to some extent these lines, but closed off the process through ignoring the children's narratives from their being and living outside the puppet context. From a pedagogical perspective the doll, Anton, had the purpose of introducing the PROBLEM of the session. Anton was not present to promote dialogues about the children's being-in-the-world. To the pedagogues Anton was an object and had a function; to the children he "was" a subject. On the semantic level, the distinction is also evident when Anton pointed to the concept of a PROBLEM by a first-(doll)-perspective to which the children replied with the personal experience of concrete problems.

The difference in the two perspectives reflects the conceptual difference between the notions of intention and intentionality, where the former has a clear *goal* from the outset and the latter is an open-ended process which has a *purpose* of generating meaning, which becomes meaningful in relation to the outset (Engelsted 1994).

This difference in perspectives is even clearer in the process of making a SOLUTION to the presented problem. Here, one of the girls proposed different and

relevant solutions to the problem ("play with me" or "play with the toy cars"), but since the goal was predetermined (to learn to share), the solutions were only noticed, but not given attention – and overruled as not being "bright" enough. The same happened in the evaluation of the group play with the magnets; the children were very responsive when asked if they played well together, but when the evaluation was constrained to a matter of sharing and turn-taking, the children became audience to the pedagogical scene. Consequently, the children and the pedagogues engaged in meaning-making with very different concerns, and a dialogue between these two processes only appeared sporadically.

The pedagogical project of teaching children a problem-solving discipline was very far from the children's project of establishing a sense of intersubjectivity from where different problems and solutions emerged on the basis of existential concerns. In the pedagogical project, there existed only one meaningful solution (sharing), whereas the children's projects had both multiple problems and solutions. While the children engaged in the activity, they did not engage in the *educational project* and they did not perceive the meaningfulness in (re)production of its meaning. This is evident in a later session where the scoring sheet was full and they received a present for their accomplishment:

> *After a Dino-session a group of children gathers around the table where the researcher sits. They show the researcher the toys they just received having managed to come up with good solutions throughout the Dino-program. The researcher asks why they got these toys in Dino-class. Marie tells it is because "they like to play with it". Upon asking them why they get presents in the Dino-class, Jens says that it "is because it is fun" and Michael agrees and shows me how to play with it, while telling me that they are allowed to take the toy home. Marie explains that her name is written on the back of it and she shows this to the researcher.*

The children are not aware of the meaning-making that organizes receiving presents. They do not seem to know or pay attention to the pedagogical reasoning behind giving gifts that precisely accumulate every activity in the overall meaningfulness of the program. In the following we will investigate why such activities are considered relevant and meaningful to the pedagogues.

The Meaningfulness of the Dino Program in the Pedagogical Cultural History

The Dino program is not an obligatory part of the Danish preschool program; it is a program the singular municipality and/or the singular institution can choose as part of its practice. In the specific case, the decision to implement the program was partly arbitrary. Whereas some of the pedagogues recalled being promoted to do so by the municipal administration, others recalled the decision being based on their own choice, but based on very sporadic information, such as a parent's (who is also schoolteacher) positive evaluation of its effects on the children's attendance in school, and the experiences a colleague got from the child-care center of her own

children. The manager of the center recalled that they were by the municipality obliged to enroll in the program and that the staff accepted this partly because of its communicative properties:

> Manager: But we also said "Okay", we want this as well, since the program clearly emphasizes that we communicate what we want the children to do and not what we do not want them to do. Because the "don't" (do) is not a good word, for children of this age, they do not hear it…

In referring to the decision of "the municipality," pedagogues refer to the pedagogical counselors who function as intermediary agents between politicians and child-care centers. These counselors have become crucial in defining and organizing the pedagogical structured activities within the NPM system. Their counseling service involves promotion of "best practice" or, rather, promotion of pedagogical methods that have been proven effective (Jensen et al. 2010). The aim of this service is to ensure quality and comparability across centers, which implies some degree of standardization (Jensen et al. 2010). According to some researchers, this promotion of "best practice" has constrained an otherwise quite broad legislative frame for the pedagogical work to a much narrower and often mechanical practice, which is more in line with managerial ideals (being manageable) than with the pedagogical reason:

> This way, by claiming that it is both possible and reasonable to compare performance anywhere in the world, irrespective of context, best practice is a powerful tool for governing at a distance (Dahlberg et al. 2007), bringing what Jensen (2005) calls 'the discourse of manuals' into the day care and teaching professions. (Jensen et al. 2010, p. 247)

This tendency is seen in choosing the Dino program. The program is together with other evidence-based programs already part of the governmental initiative "Early Effort – Lifelong Effect," a meta-program aimed at strengthening the quality of different social services within the singular municipality (www.socialstyrelsen.dk).

Everyday and Evidence-Based Practices

The basic logic behind evidence-based practices is that pedagogical activities proven effective in one context will be just as efficient in another context. It thus operates as a standardization that follows the Aristotelian logic (Bowker and Star 2000). According to this logic, a characteristic behind any category is that it operates as mutually exclusive – meaning that the qualities are either present or not present. Thereby any evaluation of such pedagogical method is constrained to show either effectiveness or ineffectiveness. This way the evaluation fails to recognize the relation between the two categories and thereby the possible explanation of any given effect (Valsiner 2011). In such logic it is thus also presumed that the category of *a child* exists as an object (in itself) for any given pedagogical method and that

the effect of this method is a result of a mechanical causal chain between the child and method (Toomela 2009).

Standardization of pedagogical methods – transforming a proven effect of a concrete practice into an evidence-based practice – signifies a radical shift in the validity of the given method: from being considered effective in relation to concrete individuals in concrete situations it postulates being effective on "kinds of people" in "kinds of places." In the case of the Dino program, this transformation was far from simple and met resistance from the general pedagogical understanding in the institution. The rationalities behind "everyday practice" and "best practice" didn't match:

> There have been some challenges; somehow the Dino-program is very static compared with our way of working. It is a concept planned to the last detail about what one is to do. That can to a great extend be reasonable, but the group of children can jeopardize the program, since the group of children often cannot be formatted in a way that suits a schedule. (Pedagogue)

From the excerpt it shows that the pedagogues in general attempted to create some kind of dialogical modus between "the group of children" and the concrete pedagogical activities and thus that they considered the static format of the program as a pedagogical weakness. The standardization also had the effect that children didn't understand all of what went on, but here the pedagogues reasoned "they will come to hear this later in life, and thus we make a foundation" (for later learning). But the inflexibility of the program was only recognized as *a pedagogical problem* when a child began to exhibit fear of being part of the program. At this point the pedagogues actively chose to constrain the program rather than the other way around:

> We had a "midlife-crises-meeting" or something like that where some of these things got clear, and we were close to stop working with the program. (…) We had (in a session, ed.) talked about the feeling "frustrated", but he (the boy) didn't understand that it was a feeling, and he got scared of when "frustrated" came. "When does frustrated come?" he asked. That was not acceptable. So we discussed what we could use from the program and what we could not use. (Pedagogue)

There was thus a general awareness of the lack of fit between the intentions of the program and the meaning-making of the children, but in itself that didn't create any necessity to deviate from the program, due to an assumption of its long-term beneficial effect ("…it will be beneficial to later learning"). But a child's fear made them intervene in the program in order to preserve what they considered more important: the joyful (not harmful) institutional life. They started a process of reconfiguring the program in collaboration with the Dino pedagogue and also in places that were not only scary, but considered completely absurd:

> There were movies where they talked in English. At the beginning we took off the sound (…) but it all ended being completely absurd; the dino-pedagogue asked one thing while the children replied to another. There were no connections that made sense to them (pedagogue)

The reconfiguration was in no way a straightforward process to the Dino pedagogue, precisely because any changes of the program would challenge the meaning of the activities by questioning their evidence. In other words, *she was worried that the program would lose its positive effect when it was made* to work meaningfully for the concrete children. What is particularly interesting in this process is neither the re-configurations of the program to the life of the children and the meaning-making occurring in their lives nor that it became more meaningful to the children this way. That is almost a banality. What is of particular interest is that the program to the authorized program pedagogue lost its own meaning when adapted to the meaning-making of concrete human beings. Although hesitant the Dino pedagogue reasoned that the "principles of the program" was maintained after all which saved "some degree of evidence" for the practice.

We are confronted with a paradox in which the pedagogical practice seems to lose its sensitivity to the concrete singular child and the life he/she lives, while the practices at the same time show an intensive interest in individual children as an object for preestablished educational goals. For the evidence-based programs, this is precisely the point of it. But to assume that this situation only occurs in manualized activities like the Dino class would be a too simplistic restriction of the discourse of manuals to only manualized activities.

In this case as well as in the other already mentioned examples (of tortillas, colors of flowers, and experiences of fire trucks), the potential of generating and sharing meanings seems to collapse, since the dialoging parties fail to relate: the children engaged in the situations based on broad, yet very concrete concerns of their lives while the pedagogues acted on the basis of concerns related to the appointed learning goals of the abstract child.

Danish Pedagogy into the Future

Through the historical presentation, we have attempted to illustrate the recent appearance of external standards and goals in the institutional practice and in children's lives. A common standpoint is that the major novelty that emerged on the basis of the governmental curriculum for child care was "learning." We happen to disagree. There have always been ideas of learning in Danish pedagogy, but often conceptualized differently: as creativity, sociality, solidarity, curiosity, motivation, or engagement. Behind all these practices, pedagogues aimed to support and guide children to new experiences, insights, and practices. What was common across these approaches was that they were conducted on the basis of some knowledge of the concrete children's lives and their engagements and that they were organized in an attempt to make them meaningful in their engaged lives – and thus not to be left to be coped with by the children alone. They were oriented toward the future of the children's life as members of a society, and in that sense early childhood pedagogy has always been interested in the lifelong learning and development.

But the way learning is understood and promoted today is completely different. It is to our understanding the first time in history that institutions operate with global and predefined efforts and goals that prescribe a complete disregard to the specificity of the context and the subjectivity of the persons involved. In that sense the novelty that the governmental changes have brought forward is rather that child-care institutions make use of teaching technologies that *perceive and transform the child subject into a learning object*; an object of predetermined pedagogical intentions. This is of course not a new practice in the societal arrangement of childhood, and it could be argued that the school system to a large extent is built on this principle, but for early childhood life, it is a new epoch. The governmental initiative "Early Effort – Lifelong Effect" signifies this shift in paradigms and expresses its basic logic.

We notice that the process isn't smooth and furthermore resists pedagogues' fundamental understandings of their practice. They are ambivalent, and we consider this to be an opportunity in the development of future Danish pedagogy. It's an uneven wrestling match and will hopefully develop into a new format, rather than its present appearance where early morning hours are spent on teaching programs and afternoon hours are left to children's uninterrupted play.

Concluding Remarks

We are well aware of the regime of the New Public Management and that the discourses of manuals are general trends within the welfare system that do not vanish overnight. Nevertheless, since the quality reform of the child-care service was launched as an attempt to ensure the quality of a service and the promotion of well-being, development, and (in recent time) learning of children, it seems relevant to include the research already existing in the field.

As mentioned, the empirical knowledge concerning the developmental consequences of the Curriculum Act is modest, but from a theoretical standpoint, it can be assumed that such consequences exist. Based on Elders' (1998) notion of variations in impact of different events, depending on the timing in the person's life course, it seems fair to hypothesize that an introduction of standardized educational activities in child care will have an impact on children's development – not only concerning the learned skills and acquired competences – but also on their longitudinal development as persons.

These theoretical assumptions are supported by international research which has investigated what impact center-based child care of different quality has on children's development and concludes that child care has a prolonged effect on the development (Belsky et al. 2007; Vandell et al. 2010; Belsky 2009: Christoffersen et al. 2014; Sommer 2015) – albeit the impact is minor compared to family life impact. As such, the parole of "Early Effort – Lifelong Effect" is supported by empirical knowledge, but without saying anything about the relations between efforts and effects.

Drawing on international research that compares prestructured and goal-oriented pedagogical strategies with strategies that are sensitive to and supporting children's engagement, Sommer (2015) investigates the relation between effort and effect in three developmental areas: mathematics, language development, and self-control.

The last area is of particular interest in relation to the presented empirical case since the program's objective implies a proven effect in facilitating the development of *problem solving in social situations* in children. Sommer's conclusion is unequivocal: children who attended the objectifying programs experienced significantly more stress, anger, and aggression and were less capable of self-control. Moreover, the longitudinal studies indicate that children from child-care environments building on the objectifying strategies exhibited emotional problems seven times more frequently than the group of children coming from the play-oriented environment. The conclusions in relation to mathematics and language development point in the same direction. Sommer's overall conclusion is that the efforts, building on a pedagogy sensitive toward and supporting children's concerns and engagements through shared exploration of the sociocultural environment, generate a long-term *positive* effect for the children's development, whereas objectifying efforts clearly indicate long-term *negative* effects for their development.

Of course one should be cautious in transferring international results to a Danish context since the ecology of child care is markedly different (Belsky and Steinberg 1978). Proven effects are never proof of a context-free practice. Nevertheless, the studies indicate that children's learning do not happen in a vacuum, but in the life they are caring for, concerned with, and engaged in – in the company of others. It is within this context that learning becomes meaningful and functional for the child.

As such, learning is a process that transcends the immediate context. Where the notion of everyday life traditionally emphasizes the importance of the sociocultural environment and the child's progressive adaptations to this environment through participation in cultural organized activities, the notion of cultural life course emphasizes that it must mean something to be a living and participating being, and this meaning, as it is experienced by the intentional agent, becomes the basis of participation in the institutional life.

The main question within the cultural life course perspective is how different collective spheres of meaning production in the person's everyday life become meaningful parts of the personal cultural life. This question points at the becoming of children as persons, and it focuses on how these processes manifest themselves through children's engagements with others and the environment. Unfortunately (or rather quite fortunately) the general process of living is always uniquely configured and thus no standardized method exists for which to approach this question, but only an idiographic methodology building on the teleogenetic processes emerging from shared intentions between dialoging parties (Hviid and Villadsen in press). The central pedagogical question remains: are these processes for the children to manage by themselves or does the pedagogical practice wants to be part of this vital evolvement?

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Chapter 4
Opportunities and Challenges in Icelandic Early Childhood Education

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Abstract The chapter examines early childhood education and care in Iceland within the framework of Nordic ideology. Values evident in the Icelandic national curriculum are analyzed, and the results of studies on the views of children, parents, and playschool teachers regarding the aims and practices of Icelandic playschools are presented. The findings illustrate democracy, well-being, care, and interpersonal relationships as the main emphases. Children are regarded as active participants, and an emphasis is placed on lived democracy in the playschool as well as on educating children to become democratic citizens. Playschool is considered an important space for practicing interaction with other people, and the responsibility of adults is to create caring relationships and to provide support. Several challenges face Icelandic early childhood education and care today. In an era of increasing globalization, Iceland is faced with academic pushes and pressures to increase accountability. In addition, the society is moving from a homogeneous one to becoming multicultural. Furthermore, there is a shortage of educated playschool teachers and a gap between the parental leave and the time when children may start playschool. These challenges have the potential to become a threat to the Nordic tradition in early childhood education and care in Iceland.

Introduction

In the Nordic countries, social welfare and educational policies in regard to childhood and early education stand out, including parental leave and access to full-day preschool for all children. Early childhood education is considered a national responsibility, and accordingly, children are the responsibility of not only the family but also the society. The idea of universal early childhood education and care (ECEC) services is embedded in Nordic educational policies. Children have the right to attend full-day ECEC programs during the years before they begin school, regardless of their family's income or parental employment (Wagner, 2006). In

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Iceland, for instance, if parents want their child to attend an ECEC program, the local municipality is obligated to provide the child with a space in either a municipal kindergarten or a private child-care program.

This chapter focuses on early childhood education in Iceland within the framework of Nordic ideology. Following an introduction to the Icelandic ECEC context, values manifested in Icelandic policy documents will be examined. Next, the views of children, parents, and preschool teachers regarding the aims and practices of preschools will be presented. Finally, opportunities and challenges in early childhood education in Iceland today will be discussed.

The Icelandic Context

The reasoning behind early childhood education and care in Iceland and the Nordic countries over the decades reflects the spirits of times, the needs of the society, and the scientific evidence available. The rationale behind the very first Icelandic ECEC centers was to assist parents who, for various reasons, were unable to provide adequate care for their children. The first child-care centers were established in the 1920s for this purpose. The second rationale was the rapid urbanization taking place, which demanded a more protected environment for children. In 1940, a part-time program called playschool, which all children were eligible to attend, was established in Iceland.

The third rationale, calling for more early childhood centers, was the increasing rate of parental employment in the latter part of the twentieth century. In the Nordic countries, the growth of ECEC took off in the 1970s when women were needed in the labor market. In 1973, both child-care centers and playschools were taken over by the Icelandic Ministry of Education. Thus, early childhood programs became part of the nation's educational system and policies. In 1994, playschool was officially defined as the first level of education. The fourth rationale for increasing early childhood programs, which became stronger as time passed, revolved around the children: their education, development, and social upbringing. The new Icelandic national curriculum that was published in 2011 reflects this view (Jónasson 2006).

Today, the term playschool (leikskóli) is used to refer to all group-care services for children from the age of 18 months to six years old in Iceland. Generally, almost all children between two and five years of age spend their days in playschool. The term playschool emphasizes the central role of play in Iceland's early childhood philosophy and practice. Accountability for playschools is divided between the Ministry of Education and the municipal authorities. The ministry formulates an educational policy for the playschools and publishes the *Playschool National Curriculum Guidelines*, while local authorities supervise the building and operation of most playschools and bear the expenses involved. The percentage of children of all age groups enrolled in ECEC has increased significantly during the past two decades, especially the number of two-year-olds, from 50 % in 1990 to 94 % in 2011.

According to the legislation from 2008 that took effect on July 1, 2011, all teacher preparation education in Iceland now comprises five years of university education. Hence, only those who have a master's degree from an accredited university may use the occupational title "playschool teacher."

Values Manifested in the National Curriculum Guidelines

A recent Nordic study investigated how the values of democracy, care, and competence are constructed in the Nordic early childhood policy documents (Einarsdottir et al. 2015). The findings indicate an emphasis on democracy as a fundamental value. The child is considered a *democratic being*, and an emphasis is placed on not only allowing children to experience democracy in the present context but also on educating children to become democratic citizens. The Icelandic curriculum states:

> Democratic preschool practices are based on equality, diversity, shared responsibility, solidarity, and acceptance of different views. At preschool, children are to feel that they are part of a group and a community where justice and respect characterize relations. Children are considered active citizens and participants and everyone gets an opportunity to contribute to and influence the preschool environment. (Ministry of Education: Science and Culture 2011, p. 35)

Another dimension of democracy that appears in the national curriculum guidelines concerns the relationship between the individual and the collective. From the individual's perspective, democracy refers to children's personal rights and opportunities to make their own choices, to participate, and to influence everyday practice, while the collective is connected to the preschool community, cooperation, and diversity. The Icelandic curriculum states: "Preschool should be a democratic forum and learning community where personnel, parents and children are active participants and influence decisions concerning the preschool" (p. 33), and "Preschool practices should encourage children to show respect and concern for other people, develop feelings of solidarity, consideration and friendship" (p. 33).

All the Nordic curriculum guidelines highlight the responsibility of adults to create caring relationships. The Icelandic guidelines state that the main objectives of upbringing and education in preschool shall be: "To provide children with mental, intellectual and physical care to the needs of each individual, so that they may enjoy their childhood" (p. 30). However, dimensions of care in the Nordic curricula are connected not only to the fulfillment of children's basic needs but also to an ethical and emotional relationship between individuals. Both basic care and caring relationships are viewed as prerequisites for children's well-being and development. Additionally, care is stressed as an important value for children's learning, emphasizing that preschool activity is based not only on child care but also on learning. Thus, the concepts of care and education are intertwined, as stated in the Icelandic curriculum: "In preschool operations, the concepts of upbringing, caring and education are united. Children are shown respect and concern, encouraged, and given tasks that are appropriate for them" (p. 32).

Competence values are highly prioritized and are the most frequently emerging values found in all Nordic curriculum guidelines. Competence values involve both an aspect of how and an aspect of what in regard to children's learning and development. The *how aspect* appears to be open and flexible in all the documents. The educational process is based on the view of children as active and competent as well as developing and learning in a lifelong perspective. While children are seen as not yet competent enough to deal with the world on their own, they are viewed as active co-constructors in their everyday lives. The Icelandic curriculum states that the emphasis "is to be on the children's strengths and competence and on their need for adult protection and guidance" (p. 32). The "what" aspect, or the content areas, appears to be quite similar in the documents. Instead of focusing on academic skills, the Nordic curricula bring to the forefront values related to children's evolving social competencies and self-concepts. The Icelandic guidelines state as one of their aims "to cultivate children's expressive and creative abilities with the aim of strengthening their self-esteem, health awareness, confidence, and communication skills" (p. 30).

Children's Views

Children are the most important stakeholders in early childhood education and care. They spend most of their days in playschool. Therefore, it is important to listen to them if we truly wish to know what it is like to be a child in an early childhood program, as childhood researchers have emphasized (Clark and Moss 2001; James 2007; Jenks 2004). Several studies have been conducted with Icelandic children in order to elicit how they view their playschool experiences (Einarsdottir 2005, 2007, 2014). One study was conducted with groups of first graders and had the aim of exploring how they remembered and reconstructed their playschool experience (Einarsdottir 2011, 2012). Informal interviews were conducted with the children in groups of two or three; they were asked to recollect and talk about their playschool experiences, for example, what they found to be most memorable, most fun, and most boring; when they felt safe, happy, or excited; and when they were unhappy or sad. They were also asked what they had learned in playschool and what had been useful to them when they started primary school. Following the interviews, the children were invited to draw pictures about what they liked and did not like about playschool. The children's former playschool teachers conducted the interviews; they knew the children and thus were able to reflect on and participate in the children's discussions.

The findings of the study indicate that the children saw playschool as an important social space for participation and practicing interaction with other children. The children remembered being happy in playschool when they were interacting and playing with other children. Negative experiences involved conflicts or problems in interpersonal relationships with other children, such as when they did not have friends to play with or were left out of play. The study offers evidence that social

relationships are an important factor in children's thinking about their early childhood settings.

The children frequently mentioned places and times when they could choose what to do and with whom to play. The outdoor area and a spacious indoor hall where the children played together and were able to choose from various activities were often recollected as happy places. The outdoor space was the most memorable; of the 55 pictures of enjoyable things that children drew, 28 of them illustrated playground scenes. The children drew pictures of themselves playing with their peers outside or pictures of playground equipment such as swings, castles, or slides.

The children did not talk much about what they had learned in playschool, but when they were asked what had been useful for them to know when they started primary school, many of them mentioned that they had learned manners and rules in playschool. For instance, one of the girls said that she had been practicing raising her hand and waiting her turn, and another girl said that she had prepared for primary school by learning how to sit still. Many children mentioned the letters of the alphabet and reading when they talked about how they were prepared for primary school.

The children in the study did not talk much about the adults in the playschool, although there were exceptions. In the minds of these children, when they were looking back to playschool, friends seemed to be more important than adults in the setting. However, many of the children mentioned the adults when they were asked about when they felt safe in playschool. They answered that they felt safe when they were close to the pedagogues. Hence, care and adult support appeared to be an integral and important part of the playschool.

Parents' Views

Several studies in the Nordic countries indicate that parents see child-care centers as a complement to the home and expect children to learn to play and practice social skills there (Sandberg and Vuorinen 2008; Østrem et al. 2009). In an Icelandic study, semi-structured interviews were conducted with parents of 43 children in three playschools. The parents were interviewed in groups of four or five, and an emphasis was placed upon the parents' views of the playschool, its pedagogy, and its curriculum, as well as their children's daily lives in playschool. The parents were asked about what activities and experiences they found most important and what they were most and least satisfied about in the playschool (Einarsdottir 2010a, b).

The findings reveal that the participating parents regarded playschool as a natural right of the child and the family. Many of them mentioned that not only did their child need a safe place to stay while they were working but also playschool as the first educational level, a significant factor in their children's education. The findings indicate that the parents' primary expectation of the playschool is that they will focus on their children's social skills and teach children how to interact, respect, and

show empathy toward others. Thus, parents expressed that playschools should promote social development and provide children with opportunities to play and work in a group with their peers, teach them to respect the rights of others, and help them learn to resolve disputes peacefully.

The promotion of children's self-reliance and independence was also an important aim of playschool from the perspective of parents. They wanted the children to believe in themselves, to be able to care for their personal needs, and to learn how to manage situations independently. For the participating parents, it was most important that their children had the opportunity to enjoy themselves as individuals in playschool, to be happy, to get along well with others, and to be valued as individuals. The way in which the playschool day was organized and the content of the curriculum seemed to be of less importance.

The results of the study show that, from the perspective of parents, play is a central part of the playschool curriculum, although there were several differences of opinion about how much time should be devoted to free play. Some of the parents complained if the schedule was too strict and did not allow enough time for play, while a minority of parents in one of the preschools wanted more planned activities and structured learning in playschool.

Playschool Teachers

The views of Icelandic parents and children are consistent with the Nordic social pedagogy approach (OECD 2001, 2006) and with studies in other Nordic countries where early childhood programs are seen as a complement to the home where children are expected to learn to play and to exercise social competency. In alignment with the social pedagogic approach, preschool is seen as a life space in which children learn to be, to know, to do, and to live together (Bennett 2005).

Recent research in Icelandic playschools demonstrates that, although playschool teachers emphasize social skills, informal teaching through play, and creative activities, there are also several different perspectives and practices among them. Playschool teachers in Iceland have been divided into three groups according to their views on the role of playschool (Einarsdottir 2006) as follows:

1. Playschool years are the golden age of free play and development; the role of playschool is to provide care as well as emotional and social support.
2. Playschool is the first level of formal education where the adults who care for children are teachers who make sure that children learn what they need to learn.
3. Caregiving and teaching are inclusive concepts that are not only compatible but also necessary in order to ensure high-quality experiences and outcomes for Icelandic children prior to their entrance into formal academic settings.

Challenges and Tensions

The findings from the studies conducted with Icelandic parents and children that have been reviewed above and the analysis of the national curriculum guidelines for playschools show a clear emphasis on democracy, well-being, care, and interpersonal relationships. The views of the children and most of the parents are consistent with Icelandic legislation and the Nordic social pedagogical approach (OECD 2001, 2006). Although Icelandic playschools have been under the auspices of the Ministry of Education since the 1970s and have been designated as the first level of the educational system since the early 1990s, an emphasis on care, social issues, play, and child-initiated activities has always been the priority. Children are seen as participants influencing and planning their education.

During the last decade, this emphasis has been challenged, and warnings have been raised concerning the international academic push. In this era of accountability and increasing globalization, Icelandic early childhood education faces challenges similar to those of other Western countries. In 2002, the author of this paper stressed the importance of maintaining the playschool pedagogy and objected to economic and political discussion at the time arguing for moving five-year-olds into the compulsory schools. Today this has become a reality in some municipalities. Preserving the playschool discourse and the use of playschool terms such as child instead of pupil, playschool instead of school, playschool teacher instead of teacher, and play materials and toys instead of teaching materials has also been debated. Tensions between, on the one hand, children's views as active participants, influencing decisions and taking part in planning and evaluating their education, and, on the other hand, forces emphasizing standardized assessment to determine whether or not children have met particular learning objectives are the reality of early childhood education today (Einarsdottir et al. 2015). In Iceland, this tension can be noted in academia, among parents, and not least at the political and policy level.

Another threat to early childhood education and care in Iceland today is the shortage of qualified playschool teachers. Icelandic playschool teachers are highly educated, with five years of university education, but they number too few. In 2014, only around 30 % of the educational staff in playschools were qualified as playschool teachers. Approximately 15 % had other types of university educations, but the majority consisted of unskilled and, often, inexperienced young people (Statistics Iceland 2015). As a result, playschool teachers must take on management positions and devote time to administrative duties and to leadership and staff guidance and training. Research has shown that playschool teachers who are in the minority in the playschool setting experience professional isolation and find that they are unable to use their knowledge and education when they have no colleagues with whom to share reflections and discussions (Pálmadóttir and Thórðardóttir 2005). Unskilled playschool assistants, by contrast, have low status and profiles in the playschool, and for many, this work represents a temporary job rather than long-term employment. As a result, playschools experience frequent staff turnover. This situation is a significant and serious threat to early childhood education in Iceland as research has

shown that quality in early childhood education is closely linked to the competence and professionalism of staff (Pramling Samuelsson et al. 2006).

Another challenge facing early childhood education in Iceland today is the gap between the parental leave and the age for starting playschool. This is a highly political issue. Parental leave ends when infants reach the age of nine months. Legislation does not stipulate a specific age for children's transition to playschool, but public playschool is usually not available until a child has reached 18 to 24 months; thus, there exists an obvious gap in public services. Almost all Icelandic parents work outside the home, so parents must either take a longer period of leave from work and exist on half their salary or utilize private playschools or family child care. Although politicians have expressed willingness to extend parental leave up to 12 months, this has not yet been agreed upon or put into practice. There is also interest in Icelandic society in reducing the age for children to attend playschool to under two years in order to achieve the nation's welfare and educational goals and fulfill the role of playschool as a foundational and sustaining part of a democratic society (Pálmadóttir 2015).

Icelandic society has changed enormously during a relatively short period. Up until 15 or 20 years ago, Iceland was more or less homogeneous, but a rapid growth in immigration has changed Icelandic society from a homogeneous to a multicultural one in a short amount of time. Since 1996, the population of people born in other countries grew from only 1.6 to 6 % in 2006 and 12 % in 2014. Subsequently, the number of playschool children speaking first languages other than Icelandic is increasing. In 1998, 3.7 % of playschool children had a foreign mother tongue, but in 2006, 7.7 % spoke a foreign language, and in 2014, 11 % of playschool children had a mother tongue other than Icelandic (Statistics Iceland 2015). These changes in the society's infrastructure provide challenges as well as opportunities and call for reflections regarding pedagogical practices in order to encourage the participation of all children and their families. The ideology of inclusion celebrating diversity among playschool children is currently a much-discussed topic in Iceland.

Conclusion

Early childhood education and care in Iceland have emphasized services that aim at giving all children a good start in life. This is built on a long tradition and a shared view that playschools should be the responsibility of the society and should focus on children's play, participation, socialization, and well-being. Societal changes, increasing immigration, and globalization in recent decades have resulted in new challenges as well as opportunities. Accountability, standardized testing, evidence-based teaching methods, and inclusion versus segregation are issues that are crucibles in the discussions taking place about early childhood education today, and the Nordic early childhood tradition may find itself in a tight corner.

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Chapter 5
Comparative Perspectives on Early Childhood: Choices and Values

Charlotte Ringsmose and Sigrid Brogaard-Clausen

Abstract The now comprehensive research across countries evidencing correlation between quality learning environments and young children's development both short term and long term has brought in higher political interests in young children's learning.

Policy documents have become important sites where values and ideologies reflect national views of early childhood.

This chapter presents an example in early childhood education and care (ECEC) policy developments in Denmark and England examining key differences as well as similar movements in the development of the early year's curricula and provision in the first 15 years of the twenty-first century. By contrasting and comparing key discourse, similarities, and differences in the Danish and the English ECEC, we aim to elucidate the impact from governmental policies on reshaping early childhood. The countries represent different traditions: the Nordic tradition represented by the Danish tradition is a "social pedagogical approach," while the French-English tradition is an "early education" approach represented by the English approach.

This chapter addresses the importance of considering the (political) aims and values we have for ECEC and how quality assurance, parental involvement, professional positions, and children's lives are framed by these.

Introduction

In 2008, UNICEF points to the great changes that have taken place in early childhood especially in the richest countries in the world and highlights "some of the longer-term opportunities and risks inherent in changing, on such a scale, the way in which a majority of our children are being cared for in their most formative

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years." The UNICEF report points to the evidence especially from neuroscience pointing to the importance of early childhood (UNICEF 2008) with reference to Article 3 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child – that in all actions concerning children "the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration."

Also the OECD report "Starting Strong" (2006) registered the growing political interest in early childhood education and care (ECEC). "Starting Strong II shows that more countries are making early childhood education and care a priority, with greater attention paid to service quality. Increasingly, it shows, the early years are viewed as the first step in lifelong learning and a key to successful social, family and education policies."[1]

Quality in ECEC was further reiterated in 2012, however, this time in the contest of a "neo-liberal investment" discourse, where investing in early years "pays off" (OECD 2012 p. 9).

There is a general agreement that quality [in ECEC] matters to gain significant pay-offs. In recent years, a growing number of OECD countries have made considerable efforts to encourage quality in ECEC; countries are at different stages of policy development and implementation.

Along with increased interest in the quality of early year's provision, international comparison and competition focus on (academic) performance has resulted in heightened political interests in young children's learning. Consequently, political involvement in ECEC curriculum, goals, and quality assurance has increased and is sometimes based on the assumption that centralized control and involvement ensure efficient ways of preparing children for school and therefore provide good return on the state's investment in a future workforce (Brogaard-Clausen 2015; Brehony 2000; Moss 2013).

Policy documents have become important sites where values and ideologies reflect national views of early childhood. National views are strongly influenced by increased internationalization and providing opportunities to exchange and engage in critical debates about quality in ECEC.

The international community can learn from each other, but paradoxically countries and/or organizations that publish the most research internationally also influence the most, and alternative practice might not be explored, creating an imbalance in the exchange of knowledge. Children's development and opportunities for learning can look very different depending on nation, culture, and local context, where the role and position of different stakeholders are defined and negotiated. Within the ecology of human development, when decisions are made internationally or by the state or the local municipalities, it has consequences on children's lives and development and thus on the individual child's opportunities for development and quality of life. ECEC is not just a methodological/theoretical area but an engagement with diverse communities of cultural expressions, interactions, and negotiations – on many different levels – and it is necessary to explore and exchange alternative as well as dominant ECEC practices.

[1] http://www.oecd.org/edu/school/moreoecdcountriesfocusingonearlychildhoodaskeytoeducationsuccess.htm

Children live and learn and become ready for school and life in multiple ways and in a range of settings across the world. Therefore it is important to consider the (political) aims and values for ECEC; what a society thinks is important for young children to live and learn, and how such aims reflect childhood is valued – and what values are connected to childhood. In order to illustrate how children can live and learn and become ready for school and life in multiple ways and in a range of settings across the world, we compare the two countries Denmark and England representing two different approaches to early years. The two countries are interesting to compare since aims and values in early childhood represent comparable emphasis in some ECEC comparative studies nevertheless based on very different contexts of provision, policy formation, and quality assurance.

In this chapter, we therefore want to discuss the ideologies and values that are reflected in the ECEC curriculum policies and how they contribute positively or negatively to the position of stakeholders, such as children, parents, and early year's professionals, and their role in constituting, reproducing, and changing relations and environments. We examine how ECEC policies in Denmark and England affect the position of children, parents, and professionals and thus the platform on which children's lives, learning, and development take place. We examine key differences as well as similar movements in policy development and provision in the first 15 years of the twenty-first century. By this we aim to elucidate the impact from governmental policies on reshaping early childhood by contrasting and comparing key discourse, similarities, and differences in the Danish and the English ECEC.

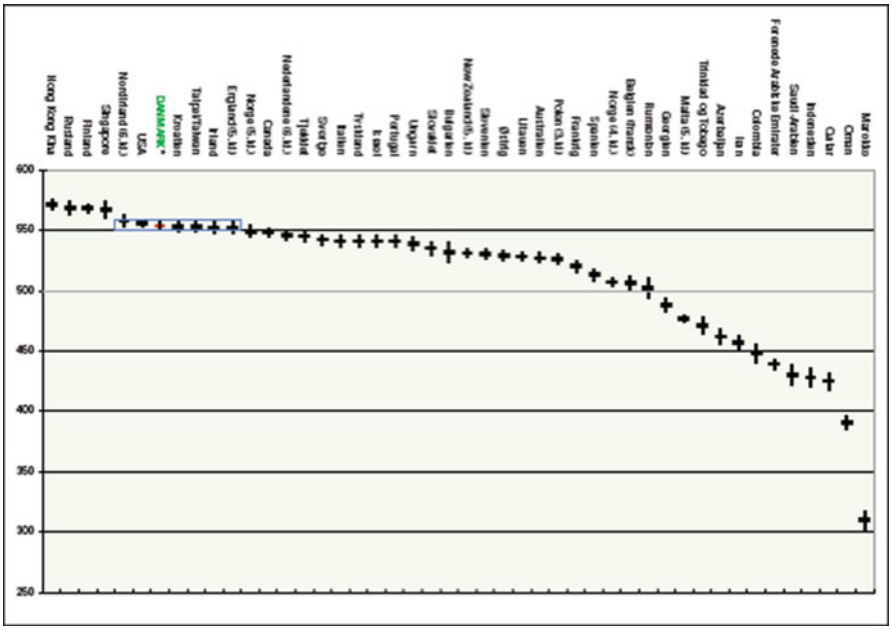
Understanding Values Through Comparison

Denmark and England have been presented as comparable in ECEC on a macro level in the study "Starting Well: Benchmarking Early Education Across the World" (The Economist Intelligence Unit 2012) ranking 45 countries according to the quality of their childcare facilities. Out of 45 countries, the UK ranked fourth in the overall score, whereas Denmark ranked sixth. The ranking is based on comparison of overall ECEC provision and quality in the different countries. Several high-income countries rank poorly in the study, since the focus is not the wealth but rather evaluation of the learning that is presumed to take place through children's participation in ECEC. Broad comparative studies of ECEC quality are somewhat problematic, as acknowledged in the UNICEF (2007). "On the question of how 'quality child care' should be defined, there is broad but vague agreement. The OECD's own review of childcare services has described the essence of quality care as "a stimulating close, warm and supportive interaction with children." A similar review in the USA has concluded that "warm, sensitive and responsive interaction between caregiver and child is considered the cornerstone of quality" – a characteristic that is as difficult to define and measure as it is to deliver." (UNICEF 2007:21). While acknowledging the limitations in such broad comparative studies, the characteristics can provide a starting point for a more in-depth approach to considering

differences and similarities in the two particular countries. The countries that rank well in the study have the following characteristics:

- A comprehensive early childhood development and promotion strategy, backed up with a legal right to such education.
- Universal enrolment of children in at least a year of preschool at ages five or six, with nearly universal enrolment between the ages of three and five.
- Subsidies to ensure access for underprivileged families.
- Where provision is privatized, the cost of such care is affordable relative to average wages.
- A high bar for preschool educators, with specific qualification requirements. This is often backed up with commensurate wages, as well as low student-to-teacher ratios.
- A well-defined preschool curriculum, along with clear health and safety standards.
- Clear parental involvement and outreach.
- A broad socioeconomic environment that ensures that children are healthy and well nourished when they enter preschool.

The two countries are also interpreted as compatible in regard to children's level of reading. In the international comparative study Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS), the two countries show similar national average scores. On the graph below, * indicates those countries that show no significant difference to the Danish score, and no significant difference between the Danish and the English children's reading development is recorded when they reach the age of 10 (Mejding and Rønberg 2011).



However, the following more detailed consideration of Danish and English ECEC policies reveals how the two welfare states direct, value, provide for, and prioritize early years differently.

Funding and Access

The two countries Denmark and England are both welfare states. Esping-Andersen's (1990, et al. 2003) distinction between welfare state models enables a clearer overview of key differences in funding and access to early year's provision. The Danish social democratic welfare state guarantees and provides highly subsidized state childcare in contrast to the English neoliberal welfare state that depends on a large private childcare sector and high parental contribution for childcare.

Universal day care is available for all children in Denmark, from the age of one, and subsequently 86.1 % of 1–2-year-olds, 94.1 % of 2–3-year-olds, and 97 % of 3–5-year-olds access full-time state day care (Danish Statistics 2011). A maximum of 25 % of the cost is to be paid by the parents, and less than 5 % of nurseries are privately run (Pedersen 2011). The childcare guarantee is a parental right, for which the local municipalities are required to provide.

In Denmark, children are required to begin in kindergarten class in the term after their sixth birthday. Up until 2009, the kindergarten class was optional; however, 98 % of parents chose to take up the offer (http://pub.uvm.dk/2002/folkeskolen/3.htm). Gradually the kindergarten class has been integrated in the school and is now a compulsory school start, though the aim remains to create a transition phase between kindergarten and school through play and other developmental activities, and it is led by pedagogues and not teachers.

As included in the "Benchmarking of Early Years" (The Economist Intelligence Unit 2012), universal care for 3- and 4-year-olds is also provided for in England. An important difference to the Danish system is that children start school earlier, from the term after a child's fifth birthday. This means that most children begin school in a "reception class" in the year that they turn five, some only a few weeks after their fourth birthday.

A large privatized early year's sector exemplifies the economic drive within a neoliberal welfare state market that is dominant in England (Department for Education (DfE), 2014; Childcare and Early Years Survey of Parents 2012–2013, London: DfE). The Child Care Act obliges the local authority to ensure sufficient spaces for childcare; however it specifies that state or local authority childcare provision may only be provided as a last resort (DfES 2006). Relying on a private market in accordance with the act, 57 % of local authorities have reported that they lacked childcare spaces overall (Rutter 2012). Further to this, the English government is looking to schools to provide spaces for children down to the age of two (DfE 2013). These factors are significant in influencing children's school start, where despite having a compulsory school start at age five, free schooling for

4-year-olds means that a majority of children commence school when they are 4 years old (98 % benefit from "free early education" (DfE 2014).

The universal care for 3-year-olds is 15 h fully funded per week, and 79 % benefit from "free early education" (DfE 2014), though the government intends to increase this to 30 h per week (The Queen's Speech, May 27, 2015). However, not only do ECEC settings struggle to accommodate the number of children entitled to a nursery place, but they also struggle financially as the existing scheme is underfunded; with the budget for free childcare falling 20 % short of the cost of provision, many are being forced to increase the cost of paid-for hours [those hours above and beyond the free entitlement], resulting in higher childcare costs for parents.[2] Childcare outside the provided 15 h has already been established as too high a cost for parents, preventing real choice (Lloyd and Hallet 2010). The report by Rutter (2012) reiterates the concern, showing a 32.8 % increase in nursery fees for children under two from 2011 to 2015, while real wages growth has remained static within the same period. Although development is taking place, the costing and accesses to high provision representing an area of English ECEC conflict with the benchmark of affordable care relative to average wages (The Economist Intelligence Unit 2012).

The analysis of the two welfare contexts presents a very different picture to the "compatibility in the benchmarking of early education" with ECEC privatization and high costs in England versus affordable state-run provision in Denmark. The age of school start displays another deep contrast, and the above context leads to a further consideration of the early year's curriculum positioning of young children life, well-being, development, and learning in ECEC.

Curriculum Aim, Assessment, and Plans for Learning

The first early year's curriculum was introduced in England in 1996 and in Denmark in 2004.

Up until 2004, Danish early year's curriculum was based on a set of broad-based regulations stating the values of ECEC. In 2004, the pedagogical learning plan was introduced with six overall aims and included six learning themes: language, social competences, personal competences, nature and nature's phenomena, cultural expressions and values, and body and movement. The individual ECEC setting had to, while incorporating the overall aims and learning themes set in the law, produce a plan for 6-month- to 2.5-year-olds and a plan for 3-year-olds to school-aged children. Local decision making was maintained, and the curriculum remained a more broad-based regulation based on social-democratic values.

The curriculum has been adjusted a number of times; however, the local development of aims and methods remains. The Danish curriculum does not in itself imply structured school preparatory activities, and it does not detail method or specify

[2] http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-32896284

goals or assessment of the individual child. After an interim period of 3 years, from 2007 to 2010, with language assessment of all 3-year-old children, the requirement was changed to a language assessment of solely the children perceived in need of special language support. The local authority had the overall responsibility for this, through delegating responsibility to the leader and the pedagogues for the children within their setting.

The law on childcare in Denmark (Ministry of Welfare 2015[3]) emphasizes that ECEC must provide a physical, psychological, and esthetic environment for the children that promotes their well-being, health, development, and learning (The Child Environmental Law § 7, stk. 1). The following aims are required to be reflected in the locally developed learning plans:

> The setting must, in collaboration with the parents, give children care and support the individual child's all-round/holistic development and self-esteem as well as contribute to the child's experience of a good and safe upbringing.
>
> The child care setting must promote children's learning and development of competence through experiences, play, and pedagogical planned activities that provide opportunity for engrossment, exploration, and experience.
>
> The child care setting must give the child the co-decision, co-responsibility, and understanding of democracy. As a part of this, the child care setting must contribute to develop children's independence and abilities to commit themselves in the community and solidarity with and integrate in the Danish society.
>
> The setting must, in collaboration with the parents, ensure a good transition to school, by developing and supporting fundamental competences and the inclination to learn. The setting shall, in collaboration with the schools, create a coherent transition to school and afterschool provision.

It is evident how children's participation, well-being, social development, and "academic" learning are equally valued and how they are perceived as a part of supporting character formation, which is positioned as the main aim for children's lives in the early year's settings. The law draws on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN 1989), where children's right to be heard and to influence their own lives is stipulated. The child environmental law is required to be an integrated part of the pedagogical work and must include the children's evaluations, experiences, and perspectives of the environment (Ministry of Welfare 2015 § 7, stk. 1). These evaluations are the only required evaluation that needs to be publically available for existing and future parents to see, evidencing a strong position of children's rights and voices in the curriculum.

In England, the current curriculum, the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) (DfE 2012/2014), has, as the Danish curriculum, gone through several modifications since the initial curriculum implementation in 1996. The curriculum now covers from birth to 5 years, overlapping the early years and the beginning of primary school. Significant in the curriculum is the focus on assessment of the individual

[3] Ministry of Welfare, LBK nr 167 af 20/02/2015.

child. Currently 2-year-olds' developmental progress is assessed (DfE 2012), and the early learning goals (ELGs) (DfE 2012) form a statutory end of curriculum assessment of 5-year-olds. The ELG assessment will however from 2016 no longer be statutory and will be replaced by a baseline assessment of children upon entry to reception.

The influence of the UNCRC is also present in the English early year's curriculum, especially from 2008, when the amalgamation of previous separated policies of Birth to Three Matters (2003) and Every Child Matters (Department for Education and Skills 2003) and the curriculum guidance for early years (2000) emphasized a more holistic curriculum. The Every Child Matters framework's five aims, being healthy, staying safe, enjoying and achieving, making a positive contribution, and economic well-being (DfES 2003;7), pre-formed a principled approach to the development of the Early Years Foundation Stage curriculum (2008).

The EYFS principles which guide the work of all practitioners are grouped into four distinct but complementary themes:

> "A Unique Child" recognizes that every child is a competent learner from birth who can be resilient, capable, confident, and self-assured. The commitments are focused around development, inclusion, safety, and health and well-being.
>
> "Positive Relationships" describes how children learn to be strong and independent from a base of loving and secure relationships with parents and/or a key person. The commitments are focused around respect, partnership with parents, supporting learning, and the role of the key person.
>
> "Enabling Environments" explains that the environment plays a key role in supporting and extending children's development and learning. The commitments are focused around observation, assessment, and planning, support for every child, the learning environment, and the wider context of transitions, continuity, and multiagency working.
>
> "Learning and Development" recognizes that children develop and learn in different ways and at different rates and that all areas of learning and development are equally important and interconnected.

This approach ensures that the EYFS meets the overarching aim of improving outcomes and reflects that it is every child's right to grow up safe, healthy, enjoying and achieving, making a positive contribution, and with economic well-being (DfES 2008).

The curriculum was however changed in 2012, emphasizing a more learning-focused ideology introduced with the liberal-conservative government. The 2008 framework was no longer seen as reflecting current policy; however, Development Matters 2012 was readapted and remained as overarching principles:

- Every child is a unique child who is constantly learning and can be resilient, capable, confident, and self-assured.
- Children learn to be strong and independent through positive relationships.
- Children learn and develop well in enabling environments, in which their experiences respond to their individual needs and there is a strong partnership between practitioners and parents and/or carers.
- Children develop and learn in different ways and at different rates.

The curriculum was set within an educational discourse, with wordings like "Educational programmes must involve activities and experiences" (DFE 2012/2014 p. 5).

The EYFS learning and development requirements comprise:

- The seven areas of learning and development and the educational programs (described below)
- The early learning goals, which summarize the knowledge, skills, and understanding that all young children should have gained by the end of the reception year
- The assessment requirements (when and how practitioners must assess children's achievements and when and how they should discuss children's progress with parents and/or carers)

There are seven areas of learning and development that must shape educational programs in early year's settings. All areas of learning and development are important and interconnected. Three areas are particularly crucial for igniting children's curiosity and enthusiasm for learning and for building their capacity to learn, form relationships, and thrive. These three areas, the *prime* areas, are as follows:

- Communication and language
- Physical development
- Personal, social, and emotional development

Providers must also support children in four *specific* areas, through which the three prime areas are strengthened and applied. The specific areas are as follows:

- Literacy
- Mathematics
- Understanding the world
- Expressive arts and design

The framework covers the education and care of all children in early year's provision, including children with special educational needs and disabilities (DfE 2012/2014).

The 2008 holistic approach to the curriculum brought learning, well-being, and development together. However, as can be seen above, in the 2012 rewriting of the curriculum, the curriculum moved to an emphasis on "the individual child's learning." This was a reiteration of the school readiness agenda, where focus on specific learning objectives had been visible from 2002 in the individual profiling and assessment of 5-year-olds. There seems to be a clash in the curriculum where the holistic and more play-based curriculum has to lead into specific measured outcomes, assessed on the individual child, and the latest development has led to a decrease in the recognition of the holistic and play-based approach.

Since the implementation of the first curriculum for early years, the focus on outcomes had been a central steering tool for the policy development in early years in England. In 1998, a baseline test was introduced to measure children on entry to reception. This baseline test was however unsuccessful and replaced by the Early

Years Foundation Stage in 2000 (DfE/QCA 2000) which emphasized learning opportunities rather than particular outcomes or goals. Nevertheless a formalized system of assessment of early learning goals was introduced in 2002 to measure the individual child by the end of reception, in a "preschool" assessment (DfE/QCA 2002). In 2007, centrally prescribed learning outcomes measured 69 goals that needed to be assessed for each 5-year-old (DfES 2007).

In 2011, the learning goals were reduced to 17, where the liberal-conservative government argued that this would enable a better transition from the early curriculum to the national curriculum (DfE & DfH 2011a). Following a strengthened focus on early schooling and school accountability, a reintroduction of baseline assessment, replacing early learning goals, is going to take place from 2016, measuring not only specific outcomes but also determining that these need to be presented as "a single, objective, decision to be made by the scorer, as a binary score" (DfE 2014). Further to this, a progress assessment of all 2-year-olds has been introduced. Outcomes and assessment continue to define the early years in England with prescriptive normative sequential and predetermined outcomes.

When reading the English and Danish early year's curriculum, there is a significant difference in focus on supporting and assessing the individual child in comparison to how the environment provides the best conditions for children's well-being, development, and learning. This environmental focus is a tradition that characterizes the Nordic countries' ECEC (Dansk Clearinghouse for Uddannelsesforskning, 2014). Children in these countries start school at the age of six or seven, and school readiness is a less used concept.

Since the introduction of a performance assessing framework in early years in England, there has been continued concern and critique of validity from researchers within England. Solar and Miller (2003) revealed how the assessment was based on an instrumentalist approach that was economically driven. The assessment framework embeds itself in a neoliberal competition society restraining ECEC as well as being antiegalitarian and antidemocratic (Solar and Miller 2003; Moss 2007, 2010, 2013). The comparative assessment of learning goals suggests a positivistic tradition of evaluating visible and measurable outcomes (Brehony 2000; Bradbury 2012).

Furthermore, external control and hierarchical structures are evident in the English approach to the individually accessed child, which is based on a strong positivistic and liberal tradition (Brehony 2000; Esping-Andersen 1990; Esping-Andersen et al. 2003). As such the Danish and English early year's curricula aims, although having similar movements in the mid-2000s, are representing a split between a Danish social pedagogical focus versus an English early year's education/pre(p)-schooling focus. The traditions of external control versus more local autonomy become evident when we look at the differences in quality assurance within the two nations.

Quality Assurance in Early Years in England and Denmark

In England, the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services, and Skills (Ofsted) has the responsibility of ensuring quality in early year's institutions. The government has delegated them the sole responsibility for quality assurance, arguing that Ofsted provides an excellent inspection system (DfE 2013). However, this conflicts with the critique of Ofsted, where a governmental review has identified how experiences of inspections were inconsistent and the role of the inspectors lacked in clarity (DfE & DfH 2011a). The tradition of external central inspection has further been critiqued for the lack of knowledge of the specific institutions and its children, revealing issues with the conceptions of quality as something externally imposed (Baldock 2001; Solar and Miller 2003; Alexander and Cottle 2012). Despite this, the role of Ofsted has been strengthened during the last parliament, while the local authority (municipality) inspections (and support) have been devalued and removed as the government perceived these as a mere duplication of inspection (DfE 2013). The previous local authority inspection and support have therefore been limited, placing further emphasis on the centralized inspection system.

In Denmark, the curriculum law initially positioned quality assurance with the parent board that governs each institution and the local municipality. Stakeholders were significantly more involved here than in England, where the central curriculum was externally imposed with limited consultation of children and parents. However, the law in 2007 moved the responsibility to a more municipal-led quality assurance process. The local municipality has to approve the plan and evaluate them biannually, and development and evaluation must happen in collaboration with the pedagogues, parents, and children. A centralized evaluative and advisory body (EVA) was established in Denmark in 2008 representing an international trend of external quality assurance and comparison. But in contrast to the English Ofsted, the EVA evaluations cannot include any ranking and direct comparisons. All municipalities are required to publish information on the quality in the ECEC settings; however, there are no national set expectations in regard to content, extent, or form. The only stipulation in the quality assurance is that the assessment includes the children's perspectives about their experience of the ECEC setting's environment.

The local authority framework for quality has predominantly been in the role of supervisory visits including evaluation of the early year's institution's documentation and evaluations (NIRAS 2008). By 2007, 54 % of local authorities had introduced systematic quality assurance, and 27 % expressed the intention of introducing such an assurance (NIRAS 2008). Despite this, a 2009 survey revealed that less than 50 % of local authorities collected an annual evaluation, and few of these resulted in any pedagogical development set by the local authority. As the evaluations often consisted of contextualized narratives from pedagogical practice, it was perceived difficult to set overall (decontextualized) goals (EVA 2009).

The main discussion in Denmark has centered around the bureaucracy that followed the curriculum implementation, where the request for documentation and evaluation removed time and resources spent with children. From 2007 to 2010, the

law stipulated language assessment of all children; however, critique of increased focus on external control, assessment, and documentation influenced the government to reconsider the requested documentation in ECEC. It had not been evident that the increased documentation was beneficial in improving quality and supporting children's well-being, development, and learning (Kragh-Müller 2014; Glavind and Pade 2010). Consequently, the language assessment for all children was removed from the law, and curriculum evaluations reduced from annually to biannually. The redistribution of resources was intended to lead to more freedom within the local municipalities and to free up time and resources (Glavind and Pade 2010).

Following a period of centralization, there is, in contrast to England, currently a move toward more decentralization in ECEC in Denmark. However, as discussed below, the role of the parent board as quality assurer has been changed, potentially reducing the power of the parents in the early year's democracy.

Parental Involvement and Position in ECEC

In Denmark, the requirement of collaboration between parents and professionals is stipulated in the law § 8. stk. 2 (see where previously quoted). The parental board co-establishes principles for the setting's work and for the financial running of the setting, within the aims and structures set in the law and by the local municipality. The board takes part in employing the leader of the setting and represents the setting in regard to local policies on ECEC. The aim of the regulation is to secure real parental influence over their children's ECEC setting (BUPL 2006). The members of the parental board hold the responsibility of representing the children and other parents and are required to work in the best interest of the whole setting. This law represents a strong tradition of parental involvement, both formally and informally, based on trust between parents and professionals (NIRAS 2008; Tuft 2012). The Ministry of Social Affairs concluded in 2003 "that collaboration with parents is a required pre-requisite to develop high quality in ECEC. The parents are taken serious and their expectations to the quality equally respected" (Bjørg Kjær 2003, s. 704).

As a consequence, one of the main aims of the Danish early year's curriculum (2004) was to make early year's practice more visible to parents and thereby involve them more. Parents have confirmed that the documentation following the learning plans had made practice more visible to them (NIRAS 2008). Nevertheless, since 2007, the leader of each setting has held the responsibility to develop the pedagogical learning plans, a responsibility removed from the parent board (Dagtilbudsloven 2015).

In the English curriculum, there is a comparatively strong emphasis on working in partnership with parents, where the curriculum stipulates that "Good parenting and high quality early learning together provide the foundation children need to make the most of their abilities and talents as they grow up" (DfE 2013/2014; 5). A government-initiated review emphasized the need to involve the parents more in the

settings, by encouraging "more mothers and fathers to become involved in their child's development, helping them understand how to enable their children to make good progress" (Tickell 2011 p. 99). The curriculum guidance reiterates this, where it stipulates that "the key person must seek to engage and support parents and/or cares in guiding their child's development at home" (EYFS;2014;10). As the quotes reflect, the parents are being positioned in need of education and needing to know what effective parenting means, echoing evidence from research (Cottle and Alexander 2014; Butcher and Andrews 2009).

An emphasis on supporting parental ability to engage with their child's development and learning is strong in the English curriculum where real parental influence is presented as main value in the Danish curriculum context. Following this, the position of the professional becomes the next point of consideration to establish how the workforce is positioned within ECEC policy and provision within the two countries.

The ECEC Workforce Role and Value: Democratic Professionals or Technical Experts

In Chap. 14, we go into more depth concerning the identity of the "Danish pedagogue" and the following comparison works in conjunction with that chapter. The workforce in early years in Denmark and England differs significantly in level of qualification and education. In Denmark, 60 % of workers in early year's settings, such as crèches and kindergarten, or integrated settings with 0–6-year-olds are qualified at degree level.

All childminders follow a municipal set plan incorporating the governmentally set aims and themes. The local municipalities set up their "childminding" structure, generally with groups of four to five childminders belonging to a "compulsory play group" and with pedagogical leadership. The pedagogical leader supervises the childminders, with frequent visits for supervision and quality assurance.

In England, only 8 % of the ECEC workforce holds a degree, and research identifies how low training characterizes the workforce (Nutbrown/DfE 2012, Henehan and Cooke IPPR 2012 Care). Bradbury (2012) explains how the introduction of the English early year's curriculum made the professionals feel incompetent, unsure, and under pressure. This concurs with a number of studies establishing how prescriptive government policies limit professional autonomy, freedom, and confidence (Osgood 2006; Miller 2008, Lloyd and Hallet 2010, Moss 2010; Bradbury 2012; Cottle and Alexander 2012).

With the recent policy shift following the government's More Great Childcare (2013), childminders are becoming less directly regulated. A push for childminding agencies has increased where the agencies will have a role in monitoring quality, replacing direct quality assurance of childminders by Ofsted, without any requirement for specific qualification within the agencies.

The education of the early year's workforce influences whether professionals see themselves as interpreters or implementers of curricular frameworks and goals, and research indicates that quality development requires a strong professional workforce (Oberheumer 2005; Pirard 2012, Sylva and Pugh 2005). A tradition of professional autonomy and democracy is still evident within the introduction of the early year's curriculum in Denmark, with methods and aims developed locally where the Danish early year's workforce holds a strong professional position. Value is placed on the pedagogues' reciprocal relationships with colleagues, children, families, and communities (Brogaard-Clausen 2015). The limitation of power and emancipation of the English early year's workforce on the other hand prescribes conditions for a "technical expert" with focus on prescribed routes and accessed standards (Oberheumer and Scheryer 2008; Osgood 2010; Moss 2010). Additionally the external inspection system disempowers professionals and potentially hinders early year's democracy and emancipation (Moss 2013).

Following the examination of the context of quality assurance and parental and professional positions, we will, in the final section of this chapter, look at the position of the child within the curricula context.

The Danish and English Child Within a Curriculum Context

The Danish curriculum law stipulates how local curricula development has to be based on the settings of children and focus on an enabling environment and early year's democracy. In comparison, the English curriculum's overarching principle is focused on the individual child's learning with an emphasis on individual achievement the individual gains through positive relationships (Brogaard-Clausen 2015).

The Danish curriculum law did not stipulate individual assessment of the child, and quality assessment is of the pedagogical opportunities and environments and the children's experiences thereof (EVA 2009, NIRAS 2008). Nevertheless bringing in learning plan in early year's institutions is seen by some as "early schooling" and hindering a "good life" for children (Socialudvalget 2004; Jensen 2009; Jensen et al. 2010; Kragh-Müller 2014). Despite not being a requirement in the current law, 95 % of settings use an evaluation tool to systematically assess children in 2014, where language tests are predominant (Danmarks Evalueringsinstitut, Olsen 2009).

The popularity of the language evaluation might be a result of the local municipalities' decision to continue the language assessment stipulated in the law from 2007 to 2010; however, it may also reflect how language has gained higher priority in ECEC, as a part of a performative discourse. The evaluation tools are predominantly focused on the child rather than pedagogical practice, according to 83 % of leaders who took part in the study, where 76 % also saw the evaluation as a means to prepare children for school. However, 42 % of pedagogues also used the evaluation to inform their general practice and planning. This is a noteworthy change in practice within a policy where the specific expectations for language awareness are placed in an "appendix"; the government guidance is limited to language (vocabu-

lary, pronunciation, knowledge of the written language, rhymes and proverbs, the existence of numbers and letters and what they are used for, IT/media and communication) (MfSA 2004, 2007, 2010).

In the 2012 development of the English curriculum, the goals for children's literacy in the early year's curriculum, alongside those of numeracy, were significantly raised (DfE 2012). The changes in assessment repositioned the 5-year-old children from being assessed as "engaged learners" in their early beginnings of literacy (DfEs 2007) to being assessed in "technical performance," where they were to display literacy under strengthened instrumental and technical language (more detailed analysis to be found in Brogaard-Clausen 2015).

These changes meant that the previous recognition of the creative, (playful) social, and emotional aspects of language and literacy was replaced with a hierarchical and technical discourse where children were expected to "answer appropriately," "follow instructions," "express themselves accurately and effectively," and "answer questions" (DfE 2012; Brogaard-Clausen 2015). This exemplifies a curriculum increasingly directed toward valuing measurable achievements. When prescriptive, normative measurements are directing, it restricts the understanding of and approach to children's holistic learning. This is despite English research establishing that an excessively formal curriculum in early years can discourage children from learning, make them lose pleasure in reading, and make some children feel that they are failing even before they have started year one in school (Sylva and Pugh 2005; Anning 2005; Alexander 2010).

As the overarching aim of the changes was to enable a better transition from early years to school, the curriculum changes represent a top-down pressure with alignment of the new learning goals with the national curriculum (Baldock et al. 2013). This alignment seems to reinforce the hierarchical discourse that has been reintroduced in the curriculum, undermining children's creativity, curiosity, and voice. Alongside this, a new Ofsted common assessment (inspection) framework (2015) will be included under two provisions in schools in their school inspections. A baseline assessment aligned with the national curriculum rather than the EYFS holistic learning goals has raised concerns in regard to increased pressure on young children (TACTYC 2014; Brogaard-Clausen et al. 2015; Guimaraes et al. 2016). Reducing a child to a technical performer, who has to meet centrally set prescriptive, normative goals, removes the control of the learning process from the child, discourages democratic practice, and puts pressure on young children and practitioners without (necessarily) improving learning (Blenkin and Whitehead 1988; Amrein and Berliner 2003; Nichols and Berliner 2007; Alexander 2010; Rose and Rogers 2012; Brogaard-Clausen et al. 2015; Guimaraes et al. 2016).

Children's well-being, development, and learning are the essence of all our efforts and endeavors. We wish that the ECEC offered to (all) children and families provide high quality in their support for children's well-being, development, and learning. The question is whether early school start and expected measurable outcomes (such as in tests) lead to the best-quality early care and education. Focusing on and testing a single child do not in itself lead to improved pedagogical practice in early year's care and education.

Concerns for Childhood

Several studies show that quality in early childhood environments is a very important investment for society as a whole, reducing social problems and health problems and securing the sustainability of the society. This is obviously a benefit for society, as well as for the children who through higher-quality ECEC are provided opportunities to live a better life.

Children live, learn, and become ready for school and future life, in settings that represent societal traditions and values. We continue to learn from research, informing us what represents good quality in ECEC; however societies are complex and comparisons and adaptation of different (national) practices equally challenging. Each culture has to develop their quality and value framework, taking the starting point in the challenges and strengths within their local (and national) community and culture. Nevertheless, across countries, we can learn from each other's values and policies in early childhood education and care.

All countries want to provide good opportunities for their children to live good lives, both in the present and in the future, to become good learners, and to grow and develop competences that will help them to thrive and do well in society. As this chapter has evidenced, we are concerned that the increased focus on young children's lives and learning is translated into a push for starting school younger, high control of curriculum, individual assessments, focus on prescribed and narrow learning goals, and increased "teaching" of young children. When countries are to make decisions concerning the ECEC policies, high centralized control over curriculum and children's learning may not be the most efficient way of securing success and good returns on the state's investment.

Based on sociocultural developmental psychology and learning theory, children learn and develop through participation in cultural contexts. When countries invest in young children's lives, the consideration of all stakeholders' values and choices, including children, parents, and professionals, needs to be taken into account. The chapter points to how the political initiatives are based on certain values and how these values have to be considered in light of the risk of doing more harm than good, for the children and families as well as the involved professionals and society in general.

International comparisons of children's educational achievements have led to competition as well as increased investments in early years, often promoted as investment in knowledge capital. However, nations/societies provide different contexts for children to get ready for school and life, and the presented examples in this chapter show how ECEC settings, both in England and in Denmark, navigate in a complex time, where introducing schooling at a still younger age is in conflict with valuing young children's lived lives. The move toward the learning-based rhetoric raises concerns among researchers in regard to how this affects the children (Krejsler et al. 2014a, b; Kampmann 2013; Kragh-Müller 2014). Raised targets of normative and prescriptive learning goals and a so-called schoolification can increasingly restrict democratic ECEC communities and thereby restrict children's opportunities for experiencing a good child life (Dahlberg 2007; Brogaard-Clausen 2015).

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Part II
Key Characteristics in Nordic Child Care Unfolded

Chapter 6
The Role of Play in Danish Child Care

Ditte Alexandra Winther-Lindqvist

Abstract Children's play is an immensely central part of child care in Scandinavia. This chapter describes how children's play with peers and friends is supported by the pedagogical environment of Danish child care. It is argued that play is an existential project for children and that opportunities to play freely teach children to become part of the social order, to become good friends, and to solve differences through negotiation. Throughout the chapter the environment facilitating children's play is illustrated with reference to typical Danish child-care practices and research results on the quality of child care. To illustrate how play is a developmental activity for children, an example of a social fantasy play episode is analyzed in order to substantiate the claim: that children's self-organized play activities propel social development, authenticity, and democratic values.

Introduction

Child care in Denmark dates back to the beginning of the last century, where the first centers were established by the church and by the philanthropist pioneers. Child care was play based from the onset, inspired by a German educationist Friedrich Froebel, who named these places kindergartens (children's gardens). According to Froebel's views, play is seen as the child's spontaneous expression of its inner being and as the highest achievement of child development (Smith 2010: 23). In the 1960s, child care became part of the political agenda with voiced ideals on gender equality, driven by sociopolitical developments where men and women both joined the workforce full time. Only sometime later was this societal condition followed by a distinct approach to socialization as a process, not only rooted in the family setting but equally shared between home and child-care environment (Dencik 1989; Andenæs 2011; Gulløv 2012). However, already in the 1970s, the influential book called the *0-3-Year-Old Citizen* (which appeared in the latest eighth edition in 1984) argued

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from a feminist and socialist viewpoint that attending child care ought to be viewed as a children's *right* (Diderichsen 1976). During the 1970s and closely connected to the growing welfare state model of Danish society, the organization of child-care facilities for the most part came under the administration of municipalities. The system was still only sparsely regulated and legislations passed under the Ministry of Social Affairs – reflecting that providing child care for preschoolers was regarded a social rather than an educational issue. Today, child care has high political priority and accounts for a considerable part of municipality budgets – as only one fifth of the total cost are financed by parent fees (Gulløv 2011). The system is vested with increasingly high expectations: prevention of social problems, breaking cycles of disadvantage, providing care, providing upbringing and learning opportunities for all children on each child's individual terms, etc. (see more on the practice of child care in Denmark in a recent review on research and tradition within this area (Winther-Lindqvist 2012)).

This text argues in favor for the play-based and child-based approach to child care in Denmark. I think the way forward is to improve and develop this approach in line with recent empirical and theoretical research on the merits of play on children's well-being, development, and learning. Providing care for children in child care involves working for and increasing their opportunities for self-organized play with peers. This is not at least so in societies, which favor democratic values and negotiation via dialogue as the way to solve conflicts. I will argue along the lines of an increasing evidence base showing quite striking longitudinal benefits on play-based child care. A play-based curriculum not only serves the children best in a long-term perspective; it also serves children best in a here-and-now perspective, focusing on quality of life (Hviid 2000; Kragh-Müller 2015). The play-based curriculum is strongly connected to a particular value system which in Scandinavian societies includes virtues such as dialogical negotiation, solidarity, and autonomy as educational goals which are again fundamentally connected to political goals and societal values (Hedegaard 2012). I will describe some of the typical structures of the day in Danish child care and provide an example on how play is typically unfolding in child care. Although pedagogues in Denmark often partake in children's play and work pedagogically with supporting children in their play, children are for a large part given opportunities to play by themselves and choose the topic of the play on their own. In this sense we can call the practice in Danish child care one that allows for and supports children's "free" play. However, it is a fundamental premise that children's abilities for playing and opportunities to engage in playing are formed through a supportive cultural environment and therefore is to be regarded as a pedagogical achievement rather than a mere functioning of nature unfolding. In the forthcoming analysis of a play example, it becomes apparent that children's social fantasy play, as it typically unfolds in the pedagogical environment of Danish child care, is an excellent arena for doing democracy, autonomy, and solidarity – values that are highly cherished in Scandinavian societies.

Play or Formal Learning Activities as the Base of Child Care

A national curriculum of six learning themes became effective in 2004 and has been implemented into a play-based practice tradition in Danish child care. Until 2004 it was regarded as an unquestioned fact in the Danish context that children's play with peers and participation in meaningful activities with adults was the best way to ensure preschool children's development, formation process, and well-being. Introducing learning into the purpose of child care – and defining particular themes of learning – was thus new to the practice tradition of child care in Denmark. In many ways we are at a crossroad in Denmark today, with regard to the status of children's play. Politicians are eager to see children perform better on education in general and in primary education in particular. In the current political climate, providing high-quality care and optimal learning conditions for children is at the center of debates, following the underlying assumption that education is key to future financial growth in a world of intensified global competition. In this climate the layman association related to playing (as a joyful waste of time) and to learning (as something necessarily useful and beneficial) makes it a challenge to argue in favor of a play-based rather than a formal learning-based curriculum. However, along with many fellow researchers, I agree that there are no contradictions or in-build opposition between play and learning. Whenever we learn something about the world, we also learn something about ourselves in that world (Bang 2009). In that sense learning is always a personal matter – just like play is – and children gain valuable experiences from playing that are very similar to the learning they acquire from other explorative encounters with the world (Singer et al. 2008; Samuelsson and Carlsson 2008). This said, there are contradictions between traditional didactic teaching practices and children's play. One can disguise a didactic activity as a form of play by tapping into a typical play format, but if the activity has a narrowly defined end goal decided upon beforehand by the adults, it loses a central characteristic of what play is: open ended (without specific goals) and spontaneously generated.

The Benefits of Providing Children Opportunities for Free Play

It is one of the finest virtues of scientific research to point out connections and facts that are not necessarily straightforwardly observable and maybe are even counterintuitive to a layman's perspective. Play may seem like a joyful "waste of time" compared to a formal training in literacy and math, not least in times of increased competition between and within states – there is a political drive to enhance children's likelihood of becoming good learners. This is a legitimate goal, especially when taking into account that despite the resources invested, a vast number of children still leave primary school as illiterates – and despite explicit goals of social

mobility, it has proven difficult to break cycles of disadvantage in Danish society (Ringsmose et al. 2014). In order to try to prevent children from falling behind already in preschool (and thus leave them in higher risk of entering into a life track outside the educational system), opportunities to play and time provided for free play may be replaced with more adult-structured teaching like didactic sessions. It may seem counterintuitive, but there is sufficient scientific knowledge to argue that an efficient way of making children good learners in school is to let them play in child care (Pellegrini 2011; Zigler 2005; Hirsch-Pasek et al. 2009; Fischer et al. 2011). Scholar Dion Sommer recently reviewed evidence on the effects of a play-based curriculum compared to more instruction-based or teaching-based/academic approaches. He finds that the play-based curriculum serves the children best and that an early start (with schooling) results in later loss (of academic skills) (Sommer 2015: 75). *"It is deeply ironic, that the type of early intervention, believed to ensure a better start in school, lead to the complete opposite result: by starting early with adult-instructed academic teaching, we hinder future competencies in mathematics, science and language. Rather we see more performance anxiety, lower self-regulation, higher hyper-activity, aggression, and uneasy/unsettled behavior"* (Sommer 2015: 75–76, my translation).

A Wholeness Approach

The question of why children play has occupied theorists for more than a century, and different psychological theories of human development provide different (and sometimes overlapping) answers to why children benefit from playing. However, the translation from theory to evidence (what kinds of playing serve which functions for development) proves difficult. The specific functions of play are hard to isolate and decipher scientifically: some functions are immediate, some are deferred, and some are accelerated – and also the many different forms of play are likely to serve different functions in child development (Pellegrini 2009). Scholar Peter Smith warns against exaggerating the benefits of children's play for development, and (like Pellegrini) he calls attention to the phenomenon of equifinality in development (2010, p. 68). Equifinality expresses the idea that the same developmental outcome can be achieved through a vast number of ways and in endless combinations of those. So children may very well be developing creativity, concept formation, social skills, emotional regulation, etc. through playing, but – it is argued – they would and will also develop these skills through other activities. Ergo, play is not a necessary condition for developing those skills. Rather than seeking out specific linear causal functions of any one activity (i.e., play with rules, reading aloud) to any one developmental outcome (i.e., logical abstract thinking, concept formation, etc.), I advocate for a view on learning and development from a wholeness approach (Hedegaard 2012; Hedegaard and Fleer 2009). Development, in this way of understanding it, is a complex cultural and personal process. Play is a cultural activity, through which children are engaged in a concrete historical and material space of everyday life. Accounting for the child's own engagements and motives with his/her play and analyzing how

these relate to the demands, tasks, and support offered by the cultural environment provide answers to the role of play in children's life and development.

A Child-Centered Pedagogical Practice as a Question of Values

Preschool children have a limited concentration span and an increased desire for physical-motor action/moving about (compared to older children and adults) – further, they have difficulties in following instructions and to comprehending ordinary clock time – all these skills are required for attending typical school-like formal teaching sessions. However, even very young children can be disciplined to control their bodily restlessness, taught to follow adult instructions, and trained in concentrating for longer periods of time. Therefore, the question is more one that addresses values: Does a life with discipline bring about happy and healthy children? Is this, in our view, a great life for preschool children? What is essential to the practiced tradition in Scandinavia is that the pedagogical environment is *child centered*, meaning that it is sensitive to the children's concerns and perspectives, an approach also highly endorsed by Scandinavian scholars within the field (Hedegaard et al. 2012; Schousboe and Winther-Lindqvist 2013; Cecchin 1999, 2013; Broström et al. 2014; Andenæs 2011; Kragh-Müller and Isbell 2011; Svinth 2013; Sommer et al. 2010). When following in the footsteps of children's concerns and allowing for their engaged projects to unfold, play becomes a part of everyday life, because children will use their freedom to endorse in playing. Why is this a fruitful way forward when wishing to promote high-quality upbringing environments for children? Children find playing intrinsically meaningful, and being able to pursue with activities that are experienced as important is recognized as the ability to strengthen and promote self-determination. Autonomy and self-determination are particularly valued virtues in Danish society. When given plenty of opportunities to pursue projects that are self-generated and self-defined, the child is brought on a path to authentic participation as a person among others. This, I suggest, is a constructive formation process which fosters self-worth in various ways that also encourage children to become good learners. Although children partake in various other beneficial activities than playing, including adult-initiated activities – reading aloud, conversations, artwork, collaborative projects of creation, excursions, etc. – they are given opportunities to play as well. Why should this practice continue? What is it about play that is beneficial?

Why Play Propels Development of Higher Mental Functions

Vygotsky considers play to be a leading activity for the preschool child, in the sense that playing propels development (Schousboe and Winther-Lindqvist 2013, Hedegaard 2015; Bodrova 2008). It is especially with regard to higher mental

functions (self-regulation, planning, abstract thinking) that pretend or fantasy play seems to be particularly stimulating. In play, Vygotsky argues, the child is always ahead of its normal daily activity. In play, children can imagine what they cannot yet achieve and perform, and they can adhere to regulations, which they find difficult to implement in daily life (Hedegaard 2015). A central explanation for this is the interconnection between the imagined situation and the rules a particular play/game generates. Vygotsky calls it the paradox of following both the greatest and the least resistance in play (Vygotsky 1933:12). The child follows the least resistance when he/she plays because the play content is chosen by the child and reflects the child's desires, i.e., something that matters to the child and therefore effortlessly is center of attention for him/her. As already argued, this aspect is key when assessing the quality of learning activities for children. Young children are most likely to participate in activities in a persevering and captivated way, when these activities are directly meaningful to them. However, central to the particular phenomenon of social fantasy play is that the child also challenges him/herself because the imaginary scenario needs to be created – and created within the constraints of the particular rules that it generates. When enacting a play role, the child adheres to the cultural norms for how that role is meaningfully carried out, and if the child defers too much from these norms, this is sanctioned by the others or a role change or change of play theme is more likely (Winther-Lindqvist 2013). The rules in social fantasy play are to be recognized as societal norms of relevance to the roles connected to the imagined scenario (the mommy/the baby/the robber) cannot act in any way possible, but need to act in ways corresponding to the role enacted so that the child's cultural knowledge and creativity is put into play in challenging and engaging ways. This is a central aspect of creative activities in general – that there is a delicate balancing of novelty and innovation with the conventional which renders it relevant (Hammershøj 2013). When children play, items and equipment are subsumed to the imaginary content, and thus the meaning dominates over the thing in itself (a pillow on the floor can become a ship on the sea) (Vygotsky 1966, p. 13). The enactment of the play- theme and its creative transformations is a transitional and creative act requiring hypothetical "what-if thinking" (Bretherton 1984).

Play as an Existential Project of Being Becoming

I regard children's shared play as a group activity around a shared project (inspired by Bauer and Gaskell's (1999) definition of a project as constitutive for a group (Schousboe and Winther-Lindqvist 2013)). Over the years I have come to think of children's play in child care not just as a shared project around the exploration of actual and potential social identities, but as an existential project. Meaning one with deep significance to the child as a person among others and thus also with deep

implications for personal development. I shall provide the argument in this text that children explore and experience themselves as persons when they play and that play is an activity elementary to children's existence as beings in the world of self and others. This is so because through play the child identifies with his/her own potentiality in a past-present-future sense with others, on issues that matter to him/her as a person. Joined play is full of anticipations (what'll happen next? what if?), resoluteness (this is what we'll do and how we'll do it), and being in the situation absorbed with the project and its concrete worldliness (Braver 2014: 100). When enacting their roles and positions within the group, they explore their actual and potential positions in life, which necessarily involves imagination, all of which points back into some of the central existential structures of living.

On this basis – highlighting some of the central benefits and functions of playing – we turn to the particularities of the Danish child care, as a playing environment.

A Typical Day in Danish Child Care

Most child cares in Denmark are open between 6:30 and 17:30 Monday–Friday. Each child care varies in size (tend to grow in size in recent years) and also varies in terms of organization. Most are still unit based where each child care child belongs to a particular unit with the same group of peers and the same group of adults, usually/ideally two professional pedagogues and a play worker. In effect pedagogue to child ratios vary between municipalities, but as a rule of thumb, there are two professional pedagogues and one play worker for app. 22 children and the same for 12 nursery children (8 months–2.8 years). But all staff are not present throughout all day, and especially at opening and closing hours, there are less adults available. In recent years, and especially when building new child cares, a more workshop-based approach is favored. In workshop-based child cares, there may be a small unit room; however, most space is used in a big common room and diverse creative workshops (for painting, role-play, music/dance, construction play, etc.) (Glavind 2012). Typically children spent 3–4 h of the day outside in the open-air playground. Except for lunch, snack, and circle time, children take part in adult-arranged and adult-initiated activities for app. 30 min. a day (Ibid). Otherwise they are free to choose for themselves what to play, often also where to play, and who to play with, in a child-centered pedagogical environment. There is a tendency in unit-based child cares to favor care, predictability, and stability, whereas in unit-based child cares, the role of self-determination and choosing for oneself is given priority (Ringsmose et al. 2014).

Activity Settings on a Typical Day

6:30–8:00	Arrival and breakfast in the unit or the common room (sporadic ad hoc play)
8:00–9:30	The first unit or workshop opens and the children start playing, drawing, or playing games
9:30–10:30	All staff (ideally) is present, and all units/workshops are open. If there are planned pedagogical activities, they will typically occur in this time slot
11:00–11:15	Circle time and washing hands for lunch
11:30–12:00	Lunch
12:00–14:00	Play outside in the playground. The pedagogues have their break and the first staff is off for the day
14:00–14:30	Snack time typically inside during winter and served outside during the summer
14:30–15:30	Free time for playing
15:30–17:00	Units/workshops close down (leaving one open), and most staff and children are off for the day

Although each child care is in principle free to organize their everyday activities differently, most child cares arrange themselves around these activity settings in the structure mentioned above. Although the daily routine seems to be very similar in terms of the time that the staff arrive, have breaks, meals are served, and outdoor and indoor play times, there are nevertheless important differences in how the management and pedagogues reflect upon and value this structure and how it is practiced (Ringsmose et al. 2014). In addition, the amount of autonomy the children are given varies in how the routine is enforced and how the day's activities are carried out. Some places put high priority on particular activities and excursions, e.g., weekly expeditions out of the house for each unit or group of children (to the local park, library, etc.). This indicates that there is a great degree of variation when it comes to how much the pedagogical staff considers the children's needs and opportunities for learning, when planning the day. For a large part, however, time spent on the playground is unstructured and does not include planned pedagogical activities. There is a conviction that children benefit from being outside and are given opportunities to handle the natural environment and taking in the natural environment in their play activities. The children play or run around and there are a couple of adults outside, who are available to comfort or assist them. Thus, based on the "typical day," we can conclude that 1 to 1 1/2 h are spent eating and gathering together during the day, and if there is a planned adult-initiated activity, it will typically take place at the hour before lunch. All in all there is typically around four to five hours where play is most likely to occur and where the children are expected to and encouraged to play, mostly together, but also sometimes on their own. In other words, a substantial part of the day: 50 % or more is reserved for play in the typical Danish day care institution.

Supporting Children's Self-Organized Activities and Social Life with Peers

On the Danish national scene, sociological and anthropological scholars have described children's peer and play culture as indicative for the formation process of children as cultural agents (Andersen and Kampmann 1998). In these approaches, a particular child perspective and value system regarding the child as a being with a life worth living and respecting in its own right is present. Respecting children's rights to be children as well as individual persons is also part of the ethos of the tradition of recognition, which is a pedagogical ethos that is very widely applied in Danish child care (Bae 2010). This approach implies a respect for the child as a person, i.e., someone who may be interested in issues that are uninteresting from an adult perspective or in ways that (most) adults do not find appealing. I think that this fundamental respect and recognition is the reason why children's social life with peers is valued in Danish child care. Children are fundamentally occupied with one another – and highly concerned with joining a social life with their peers – this concern is nourished as a special opportunity in child care. Danish pedagogues believe that children learn more when engaged with their peers than when engaged with adults in activities (Broström et al. 2014). There is a strong emphasis on the value of children's friendships (Sigsgaard 2008). That friendships and peer-group life is given high priority also fits nicely with a play-based ethos, as the day is structured with the anticipation that the children will play with their peers and friends, when given the opportunity for doing so. A focus on socio-emotional competencies and relational work is thus a central aim of pedagogical practice in Danish child care. However, this also renders a particular group of children vulnerable, namely, those who are often excluded by their peers. How to ensure all children have a decent place within the social arena among the peers in friendship groupings is thus a serious concern – and a daily challenge – among professionals in Danish child care.

Supporting Children's Play

Environment

Children play differently in different environments and with different toys, tools, and equipment available to them (Møller 2015). In the *ecological* tradition, exploring children's activities, e.g., play, the focus of attention is the interaction between the child and the physical environment and how features of each afford particular acts and activities (Kyttä 2004). Although a general outline of an environment affording play is hard to make, because affordances are reciprocally defined and respondent dependent, some affordances are canonical, i.e., for a particular use (Costall and Richards 2013). When picking up a baby doll, it is possible to use it for

a number of things – but its canonical affordance is to play some form of caregiver with it. When analyzing the actual unfolding of children's play – equipment, physical surroundings, and the atmosphere – seems to play a crucial role in directing the activity toward or away from particular themes and actions. From my observations of children's play, for instance, sexual content in children's play exclusively takes place in rooms where there is a private feel/a physical distance to others – and some place nice to lie down or lie next to each other (like a bunk bed or mattresses in a pillow room). This observation suggests that children only to some extent plan their play or enter the activity with particular ideas about how they wish it to unfold (I want to be the mommy – where is the doll?). For a large part, the play activity starts in a joint moment when approaching the doll (or other equipment) so that the surroundings serve as a stage of improvising together in an open-ended manner (with no fixed plan, or not one that cannot be skipped for another more interesting one). The transformative act in playing also reflects child development in general; younger children will profit from toys that look very much like real things (they play cooking or eating, when their toy items show high resemblance with real food). Older child-care children seem to play more creatively with toys and equipment that are ambiguous and have more than one, or many associative qualities (Bodrova and Leong 2004).

The interconnection between physical environment, equipment, and the activities taking place is evident in the theory of loose parts. This theory predicts that children in environments rich on items/things to move around and combine will play more creatively than children placed in environments where equipment is sparse and fixed (Taylor 2008). This is generally supported by findings exploring children's play in natural environments as contrasted to their play in cultivated/designed environments. The point in this theoretical and practical take on providing children rich playing environments also point back to the general ethos of supporting children in taking control of themselves and following their own creative impulses (Taylor 2008: 46). In that sense, providing exciting environments is more a matter of a particular aesthetic staging, rather than just a physical one (Lester 2008: 57). A wonderfully equipped play environment with a strict and forbidden ethos on how children are allowed to play with things will not foster dramatic improvisation and creative transformations. A child-friendly environment is thus one with particular physical as well as culturally and socially characteristics, allowing for actualization of positive affordances (Kyttä 2004).

Socialization and Adult-Initiated Activities

In the research literature on the quality of child care, it has been found that there is a need to balance activities between children playing in self-organized ways and children participating in adult-initiated activities (Sylva et al. 2004). To argue in favor of a play-based curriculum in preschool is not the same as letting the children decide for themselves what to do for the whole day – or to diminish the importance of the adults in terms of what they can offer children in relation to mirroring,

support, translation, and cultural scaffolding. Children play on the basis of knowledge from everyday life, cultural tradition, and practice (van Oers 2013). Adults are crucial sources of knowledge and inspiration for the children, also in a play-based curriculum. The adults' own passions, concerns, and favorite areas of expertise inspire the children's curiosity. My favorite example of such scaffolding is a child-care center in Copenhagen with a pedagogue, who has a passion for history and storytelling. Everyday at circle time, he tells a story and encourages the children to tell stories themselves and/or express their opinions, views, and thinking on the topic he introduces (and often he picks up on a topic which he knows is central to the children's preoccupations). Twice a year, the adults decide on a particular theme that they work with in-depth for a couple of months – and which they explore in various ways (through excursions, literature, storytelling, and drama). For instance, the adults decided to explore the theme of baroque times (app. 1630–1750). They went on excursions to visit a castle built in that architectural fashion; they went to a classical chamber music concert and were told stories about Tordenskjold/Thunder Shield (a Danish-Norwegian patriot soldier and a national hero, who fought against the Swedes and later died in a duel only 30 years of age). They finally ritualized the end of the project by throwing a ball with self-decorated masks, as it was the favorite kind of party among the royals of that time. All this historical knowledge filters into the lifeworld and horizon of the children, as a base of their formation process, but also as material to play with. Ideally there is an integration and alignment between children's and adult's engagements in shared activities where the pedagogues are sensitive to the children's perspectives and at the same time contribute to expanding their lifeworlds (Cecchin 2013; van Oers 2013; Svinth 2013; Broström et al. 2014).

The Pedagogues' Role

How to ensure children the best playing environment is a dispute among scholars working in this field, especially with regard to the participatory role of the pedagogue. In the *interventionist* approach, the adult takes active part in and guides children's play, and in the *noninterventionist* approach, the adult provides rich environments and opportunities for play (time, props, toys, and encouragement) but stays out of the play itself. Just to highlight how the two intervention strategies are competing within the cultural-historical school of thought, we have the system of "Tools of the Mind" on the one hand – a system which suggests that the children are assisted in making play plans and also assisted in sticking to that plan when enacting their role-play (Bodrova and Leong 2006). This is a system based on Vygotsky's and Elkonin's theories highlighting that children develop when they are engaged in deep committed play scenarios where they enact their roles reciprocally and follow a shared plan and the rules that arise from the imaginary scenario. However, a different approach with a less adult-interventionist approach is suggested by scholars like Gunilla Lindqvist (1998), Marilyn Fleer (2010), Bert van Oers (2013), and

others, i.e., scholars who are rooted in the same cultural-historical tradition but tend to emphasize the creative and explorative aspects of social fantasy or role-play, where children themselves become recognized as cultural participants (rather than only cultural novices). In the Danish context, the way favored by most practitioners is the noninterventionist strategy. Children are for a large part given the opportunity to play among themselves, and only in case of conflicts or particular children being excluded in various ways will the adults actively intervene with the children's play or indirectly intervene by solidifying and working with a particular child's relationship with other children. However, to me it is clear that both approaches (noninterventionist and interventionist) are in effect interventions (not interfering is also intervention), and the role of the pedagogues in terms of how engaged and how active with regard to taking the lead and staying within the play must rely on the needs of the particular group of children in a given situation – rather than refer to an abstract principle. Some children are in need of adult guidance in order to achieve joined play that unfolds in time – whereas others only need a rich physical and socio-emotional environment in order to succeed with playing together for extended periods of time.

Walking Behind, Along, and in Front of Children Playing

Danish scholars working in close collaboration with pedagogical practice have suggested to think of the pedagogues participatory role in three metaphors: walking behind, along, or in front of the child (Socialministeriet 2005). These metaphors were introduced in order to qualify the role of the pedagogues in adult-initiated activities. I find these metaphors more useful than the terms of interventionist or noninterventionist approaches, and I am suggesting that this terminology is helpful, also when it comes to accounting for the pedagogue's participation in children's play.

1. *Walking behind* the children requires the pedagogue to provide for a rich physical, aesthetical, and socio-emotional environment for children to enjoy. This is also reflected in the way routines and structures of the day are organized and how children's playfulness is appreciated/encouraged by the pedagogues. This position toward children's play resembles the noninterventionist position – however, clearly the adults play a crucial indirect interventionist role in providing facilitating environments for children's playing. This regards both the beforementioned physical environment and the general socialization environment illustrated, for instance, in adult-initiated activities, like the storytelling at circle time and subsequent baroque theme).
2. *Walking along* the children requires the pedagogue to be readily available and the adult to be observing the play group in order to take preventive steps that can

avoid conflicts or take other steps that prevent the play to dissolve. The pedagogue directly intervenes with suggestions, practical help, and inspiration in order to make sure that the play activity continues and remains stimulating for a longer time.

3. *Walking in front* of the children requires the pedagogue to directly take part in the play by starting it, setting the scene, and/or enacting a particular role in it. This position resembles the interventionist strategy where the adult takes a leading role in orchestrating the activity, taking the lead in making sure that the play starts and unfolds in time (together with the children) and even make sure to end it in an organized manner.

When to choose to walk along or in front is a delicate and difficult pedagogical task which requires sensitivity toward the particular group of children and particular children within the group. Spotting needs for assistance in enacting entrance strategies, and interfering to the right degree in the right way requires a practice, based on careful observation of the children, their norms, strategies, and relationships. There is often also a developmental consideration. The younger the children, the more likely they are in need of adults, who are willing to walk in front of them – as resource persons who inspire for and expand their play-scripts, their patterns of interaction, and the possible areas for imagining.

Illustrating Potentials for Learning and Development in a Play Example

I have chosen what I find to be an illustrative example of a play unfolding in a Danish child care. In analyzing the episode presented below, I am inspired by the scholar Jytte Bang's analytical framework based on cultural-historical, ecological, and existential perspectives on children's development (2009). I have argued so far that play is an activity that propels development, learning, and quality of life for children – but showing concretely how that works serves as a powerful way of supporting this argument. In the play example, all these aspects are evident. Development is only possible to trace across time (through micro-genetic accounts during a longer ontogenetic interval); however, even in one play episode, developmental potentialities, direction, and formation processes are detectable. To evaluate a situation's significance, from a wholeness approach to development, we must regard how the persons relate to and experience the situation, which is an existential matter of being a person among others in a particular environment (Bang 2009). This environment affords itself for the children's creative initiatives and interaction, and all these aspects are important to account for when analyzing children's play.

The Example

The examples is taken from a Danish child care for children aged 2.8–6 years placed in Copenhagen. The child care consists of four units with around 20 children in each. The observation provided is made in the afternoon, indoors, and takes place in the pillow room (full of mattresses, pillows, blankets, and big fluffy blocks to build with). The play group is the three friends, Carl, Cathy, and Martin, who are all 5 years of age. They have just gained access to the big mattress and the pillows there (from another group who has just left the room).

The play acts	Comments: learning and developmental potentials
Carl, Cathy, and Martin (chorus): Thanks/yes/yeahh! They throw themselves over all the pillows in the area. Cathy and Carl lay themselves on top of Martin and laugh	The play group sets off in a triumphing mood enjoying their access to all the pillows. The equipment affords building something and moving about. The atmosphere is thus one of luck and joy
Martin: Why don't we split and share them? No – why don't we build a shed?	Rough-and-tumble element of grabbing each other and throwing themselves around in the pillows and on top of one another
Carl: I have an idea…. I know (he and Cathy start building a shed).	Martin suggests a theme for their play – building a shed – which Carl picks up and they start building the shed. The children are in the process of creating a shared project – where they tune in on one another and express their own wishes. They are actively forming ideas (what would I like?), and they are showing social sensitivity (what you would like?) and are thus learning to cooperate
Cathy: I'd like to play mum-dad and baby. Bu bi da da di du bu (Martin looks at her with open mouth and eyes – listens attentively)	Cathy builds on, supplements the play theme of building a shed, with a suggestion of playing mom-dad, and immediately enacts the play script with herself in the role of the baby. Cathy enacts her role as baby – and Martin shows his interest in her performance and he encourages her enactment by his positive attention
Cathy: Carl, now you realised that I was sailing away on this boat (she pushes her way into the mid floor on a pillow)	Cathy introduces a drama – that she is drifting away on a boat at sea – Martin enacts the position of spectator enjoying the scene and Cathy's way of enacting the baby through sounds and action
Carl: Ok	Carl enacts the role of father – sustains and builds on the drama Cathy initiated and drags her back with parodic scolding
Cathy: Baba, bu da. Babadu bi. (Martin looks at her and follows her sounds.)	Showing physical care/affection with one another and developing relationships
Carl: You are a bad baby. Don't sail away like that! (scolding voice). Then you went to your room. (He drags her to the front of the shed.)	Cathy has picked up Martin's doll (it is his private possession that he occasionally brings to child care; it is a Christmas boy elf (app. 25 cm)

(continued)

The play acts	Comments: learning and developmental potentials
Cathy: Then you would have to tickle me to go inside (they tickle her and she laughs – when they are done, she is holding Martin's doll in her hand. Carl continues tickling her on the belly. She laughs and moves into the shed as a flight from the tickling.)	Cathy reenacts her role as baby, by making babbling sounds – which lead to a renaming now of the elf doll – she introduces it to Martin who finds it overly amusing and funny, which she embraces by continuing with what she is doing
Cathy: Babuda (from inside the shed).	Cathy becomes a person who is funny and makes her friend laugh
Cathy: Its name is *"Babuda."* (She sticks out her head from the shed and points at the doll. Martin laughs out loud, and she continues baby-babbling. Martin looks astonished at her.)	
Martin (to me): It is my doll; I am taking it back home when I am picked up (pause).	Martin feels excluded. He hopes that he is still special and important to the others. Martin is doing self-care by speaking about his discomfort
Martin: Am I to sleep out here? Where am I to sleep? Is this maybe a special shed?	
Carl: Yeah (He is also inside the shed now and there is no room for more inside – he looks out.)	
Carl: Yeah, it is a special shed you have. (He spreads out a blanket which also covers Martin. Martin looks happy again and they lay down.)	Martin learns that he can show faith in his friends. Carl and Cathy practice generosity and being good friends to Martin. Martin learns that he is a person valued by others
Cathy: Babidadubada, mi baba…. Baby hurry up. Babuda needs to sleep now. (They lay the doll under the blanket) Now we all sleep.	Cathy brings attention back to their shared theme of play – the family in the shed. There is a smooth role shift as she now enacts the mother who put's Babuda to sleep and they all go to sleep
Martin: I was snoring (snores loudly).	
Cathy: Stop snoring, you are waking up Babuda! (Martin cries with laughter….)	
Martin (looks at me): Cathy, she can play with my doll Jules from at home (big eyes). She calls it "Babuda" (looks amazed and red cheeked).	Martin is carried away by Cathy. Cathy represents novelty and is surprising in the way she gives new life to Martin's doll, now in the persona of Babuda
I say: Yes, and she makes funny sounds.	Martin finds it astonishing that Cathy has given his elf a new identity as Babuda. He doesn't usually share his elf – but Cathy can play with it, because he likes her, and likes what she is doing with it. Martin becomes a person generous to Cathy and ready to endorse what she has to offer him in terms of her creative enlargement of his doll
Martin: YES! She can play with it, even though it's mine from home. "Babuda" (He says to himself then laughs again.)	They are developing and building their relationship as friends and enlarge each other's space of relevance for one another

Play as an Existential Arena for Development

In this play example, there is a lot of laughter, we-ness, harmony, and sharing. What the children learn about themselves in this example is cooperativeness and that they can create something together that expands how they look at themselves, objects, and others. I have come across many play episodes characterized by other moods of disharmony and conflicts. These play episodes are less appealing and also less funny; however, their significance, learning experience, and existential potential may not be less important for development. I have come to think of children's play as a primary activity for exploring what it is to be(come) a person among others – which sometimes involve painful or hurtful experiences. Children, while playing, practice identities and make identifications of self and others all the time – sometimes in ways endorsed by others and sometimes not (Winther-Lindqvist 2013; Schousboe 1993). The play theme in this example is open for creative enactment, and the atmosphere is playful – there are *as-if* elements and *what-if* elements in the play. (As if I was the baby, what will happen next? Is she going to make that funny sound again?) And yet, the children are moving themselves within the shared frame of reference (in the above case, a family in a shed). This is the intimate relation between rules/norms and new transformations of content, characteristic of all creative activity (Vygotsky 1933; Elkonin 2005). The reason play is so full of potential for creative exploration is that it is also always rule bound – however to rules that are open for creative transgression on terms that are self-determined and self-generated. Through enactment of their roles, children explore who they are (I am someone who is generous, I am someone who can build a shed, I am someone who is funny, I am someone who can be trusted, etc.) and also who they can become and are becoming (I can be a caring mommy; I can be a friend who lets others play with my toy) when they take their enactment of the role to new places – or build on each other's new suggestions.

Play as a Cradle for Agency, Democracy, and Resilience

I hope to have shown that in just one ordinary example of a play episode – on an ordinary day – children are in the process of formation and that they gain important experiences with being persons through playing. They learn to act on their impulses in socially accepted ways, and they are encouraged (by one another) to partake in ways that are socially sensitive. They are also all the time challenged on what it is that they want, compared to what other's want – and with what is possible and allowed in this particular place. Sometimes it all meets in harmony, at other times not. Sometimes a play can take the players further apart when desires cannot meet or one can meet resistance on his/her ways of enacting a role. This is why I am hesitant to define play in terms of its fun value (as many scholars on play do) because it

is not always fun – however, it is often a matter of great importance to the child, as it is a matter of who you are, what you care about, and what you can do together in this space/place at this time (Frankfurt 1982). By providing children supportive environments for playing – and encourage them to play – we ensure (as adults) that they gain many experiences with themselves as social actors with agency to affect the direction of activities in ways which they find meaningful. They not only gain general experiences with how social life works – which are transferable to other activities and domains than playing – they also get to know themselves as social actors, who can participate in meaningful ways with the present opportunities for doing so. This is so far from a waste of time as it can get. No matter the direction and particularities of one play episode, it spills into a life that children are otherwise thrown into and very powerless in regard to changing (their parents' relationship, working hours, where they live, when they are to be in different places, etc.) However, in play they are in charge together – in making things happen and forming things in the way they desire. This is one of the few occasions in children's life where they can practice autonomy and self-determination through creative self-other transformation. When regarding development as a culturally mediated process that takes place through engagement in activities, autonomy and self-determination develop not as a result of a natural maturation/unfolding but through everyday practices – like playing. That these experiences from playing provide a good base for later being someone who can take instruction from a teacher and perform in synchrony with a larger group (the classroom) I think is a logical conseqence. That it also provides resilience to alienation and lack of self-worth in a society based on competition and narrow criteria for success is – in my view – just as important. And this resilience is much needed now in our society.

From Welfare Society to Competition Society

In a recent report based on a representative sample of schoolchildren in Denmark, there is an increase in self-reported stress, lack of self-worth, and anxiety, especially among pupils in secondary school (Rasmussen et al. 2015). We can only speculate why this has happened during the last 5 years. However, exactly within these five years, leading politicians in Denmark have renamed our welfare society a "competition society" and this reflects a neoliberal ethos with implications for education. As education is seen as our main resource towards success in the global competition, the effort of making schools and pupils perform better is the main goal. This is measured by tests and by comparing results from tests between schools, and today the score of each school in Denmark is made public for parents and politicians to assess. This creates a pressure on schools, teachers, and pupils to perform better. When children take the test, they are provided feedback on their performance according to the national average standard (calculated with reference to international standards), i.e., they are given the message that their performance was below, over, or on the

level of other same agers (Kousholt and Hamre 2016). Being assessed as a pupil in school is a personal learning experience, like any other. What children are most likely to learn through this testing-practice is that they are competitors in a global competition where they can be winners or losers and where they are ambassadors for their school. Such an educational ethos leaves children in a place where they are in urgent need of high self-esteem, strong relational networks, and confidence in their self-worth as persons. I suggest that a play-based curriculum and practice in child care seems fit for providing a platform from where children are likely to develop democratic values, authenticity, as well as the resilience they need to cope with standardized assessment of their personal performance in a globalized society.

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Chapter 7
Outdoor Education in the Nordic Region

Ellen Beate Hansen Sandseter and Olav Bjarne Lysklett

Abstract The aim of this chapter is to give an insight into outdoor education in the Nordic region. Some important factors that form the base of the Nordic view of nature as an arena for outdoor education are discussed. The curricula of the different Nordic countries' early childhood education and care (ECEC) institutions are shortly presented, and outdoor play in the curricula is highlighted. Nordic ECEC practitioners often look upon nature as an important place for play and learning, and children in Nordic ECEC settings normally spend a large part of their day outdoors. Nature preschools are those who spend most of their time in nature, and some of their characteristics and routines are described. Current research and future research needs are presented in the end of the chapter.

The authors are both Norwegian, and even though there are many similarities between the Nordic countries, our view will be based on our Norwegian thoughts and ideas. In that way some of our examples might not be representable for all the Nordic countries

Background

The labour force of the Nordic countries is characterized by a high rate of female labour force participation; it is further defined by the fact that 30 % of labourers work in the public sector. Universal day care for children makes it possible for both parents to work full time (Economist 2013). Most of the labour force has a 5-week mandatory vacation and a 7.5-h work day. This results in significant leisure time. Combined with a high living standard and a view of nature as an arena for recreation and well-being, most people in the Nordic countries spend an extensive amount of their spare time outdoors. Historically, fishing, hunting, and gathering berries and mushrooms were part of daily life for Nordic rural families. Since the seventeenth century, the use of nature has evolved from mainly supporting families with food

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and materials to serving economic, leisure, social, and inspirational functions (Hytonen 1995 in Borge et al. 2003). Only centuries later, due to an increased living standard, people in most of the Nordic countries (except Iceland) started to think of old forest activities as recreation and of forests as natural lands for joy and harmony. Since the end of the nineteenth century, a small upper class spent their summer holidays in cabins, cottages, and summerhouses. There, families practised simple activities such as cutting wood, building fires, and cooking in old-fashioned ways (Borge et al. 2003). After the Second World War, economic growth, regulated working hours, and increased leisure time made nature accessible for recreational purposes to the middle and working classes. In most of the Nordic societies, outdoor life and recreation are an important part of the national cultural heritage. Across generations, the tradition of visiting nature areas and hiking in the mountains or forest areas has been kept as a natural part of daily life (Borge et al. 2003; Ejbye-Ernst 2012; Ärlemalm-Hagsér 2008; Aasen et al. 2009). This cultural heritage is also integrated into the education system as part of the basis on which the content and practices of early childhood education and care (ECEC) institutions are formed.

The Law of Common Access to Nature Areas

A law providing common access to nature areas in the Nordic countries (FME 1996; IMENR 1999; NME 1957; SME 1998) enables activities, hikes, and recreation in nature for all, including in the ECEC settings. Iceland was first among the Nordic countries to establish this law in 1956. Finland, Sweden, and Norway have a similar law, while Denmark has the similar *Nature Protection Act* (DME 2009). These laws give people free access to uncultivated land and the right to walk and stay in privately owned nature areas, such as woodland, mountain areas, by the seashore, by rivers, etc.

In defining the scope of access rights, Norway's Outdoor Recreation Act distinguishes between uncultivated land and cultivated land. Cultivated land includes tilled fields, meadows, and pastures, but it also means private plots around houses and holiday cabins, farmyards, plantations, and other areas where public access could cause damage or be a nuisance for the owner or user. Uncultivated land includes all areas that are not farmed or otherwise classified as cultivated land. In practice, this means most beaches and rocky shorelines, lakes, bogs, heaths, forest, and mountain areas throughout Norway.

Due to the law of common access to nature, ECEC institutions are free to make small trips in the forest and the natural surroundings around the institution. The freedom to take hikes and trips in nature whenever they want allows the Nordic ECEC institutions to use nature as much as they do. In those cases where the institutions often visit a specific area, they should be in contact with the owner to make an agreement about the use.

Nordic Climate

The Nordic countries lie in the north tempered and the polar zones. Denmark and the southern part of Norway, Sweden, and Finland are in the north tempered zone, and Iceland and the northern parts of Norway, Sweden, and Finland are in the polar zone. The climate varies a lot during the different seasons, and there are also major geographical variations. For example, the coastal lowlands of Iceland have average January temperatures of about 0 °C (32 °F), while the highlands of central Iceland generally stay below −10 °C (14 °F). In Norway, the coastal regions have mild winters, while further inland winter is much colder. The average January temperature in Norway is somewhere between −6 °C (21 °F) and 3 °C (37 °F). Northern parts of Sweden and Finland have summer temperatures in the 8 °C (46 °F) to 16 °C (61 °F) range, while further south, the temperature is closer to 13 °C (55 °F) and 22 °C (72 °F). During midwinter, Denmark and the southern areas of Norway, Sweden, and Finland get only five to six hours of sunlight a day, while the north gets little to no sunlight. In June and July, there is almost no darkness in the northern part of Norway, Sweden, and Finland, and this is called midnight sun. The daily and seasonal pedagogical activity in Nordic ECEC institutions is both based on and influenced by these variations in climate and sunlight.

Political Aims of Nordic ECEC

The Nordic ECEC policy is based on the values of equality and democracy, and it emphasizes children's overall development and personal formation as a vital focus for the work of ECEC institutions. Each Nordic country has a law for ECEC (DMSI 2011; FMSAH 1973; IMESC 2008; NMER 2005; SMES 1985) that places it within the wider educational system and as a part of lifelong learning. Each country's law is somewhat different, but they all focus on facilitating children's well-being, health, development, and learning as the main aims of the ECEC provision.

Nordic ECEC Curricula

Based on the ECEC laws, each Nordic country has an ECEC curriculum that describes the content and tasks of the ECEC institutions. Similar to the Nordic curricula, the work in ECEC shall be based on values such as children's participation, democracy, human (and children's) rights, play, social relations, respect for nature, sustainability, and individual needs (DP 2004; IMESC 2011; NMER 2006/2011; SMES 2010; STAKES 2003). Children's well-being in ECEC in the Nordic countries is closely related to children's right to participation and is based on democratic values (Borge et al. 2003; Einarsdottir 2010; FMSAH 2004; Nilsen 2008; Sandberg

and Ärlemalm-Hagsér 2011; UNESCO-IBE 2010/11, Aasen et al. 2009). In practice this means that children are to be viewed as active meaning makers in their own lives. Therefore, children in Nordic ECEC institutions shall have the right to express their views on the day-to-day activities of the setting. They shall also regularly be given the opportunity to take active part in planning and assessing the activities of the setting. In the Norwegian curriculum, this is stated as "children's views shall be given due weight according to their age and maturity" (NMER 2006/2011, p. 8) and in the Finnish curriculum, "Giving due weight to the views of the child" is one of the overall principles of ECEC. Further, the curriculum states that "…children feel that they are appreciated and accepted as they are, and that they are heard and seen" (STAKES 2003, pp. 13 and 15). In practice this also means that children shall have a large degree of freedom in terms of choosing their activities and where they spend their time.

Play and Learning in ECEC

In the Nordic ECEC curricula, there is a strong emphasis on children's right to play and the necessity of giving children the opportunity for free play and self-initiated exploration. This policy is based on the notion that play and learning are closely connected and that play is children's primary approach to learning. According to the curricula, the professional approach to children's learning in ECEC practice should therefore be through play (Sandberg and Ärlemalm-Hagsér 2011; Aasen et al. 2009). In this view play has an intrinsic value and is part of a child's culture. Play is regarded as a phenomenon with instrumental value and as a means for learning and developing a complex set of skills involving both expressions and impressions. Socially, play serves an opportunity for developing social competence and gaining knowledge and insight in many areas (NMER 2006/2011). Generally, play as a phenomenon is looked upon as a way of learning in the different knowledge areas/orientations that are outlined in the curricula, such as physical activity, linguistics and language, mathematics, social skills, and nature and sustainability, among others. Even though the Nordic ECEC curricula speak about learning in several knowledge areas, the Nordic ECEC model is known for not having specific learning goals/outcomes that ECEC settings need to measure. Rather, the descriptions of what children shall learn in ECEC are formulated as broad aims focusing on more general development, understanding, and attitudes, e.g. from the Swedish curriculum (SMES 2010, p. 10): "The pre-school should try to ensure that children develop their motor skills, ability to co-ordinate, awareness of their own body, as well as an understanding of the importance of maintaining their own health and well-being". ECEC settings or local ECEC owners may develop more specific curricula or aims for their practice, but at a national level the learning and development goals are more general. This also applies for the outdoor play which is integrated as a means of learning in all the different knowledge areas.

Outdoor Play

Play and activities outdoors on playgrounds or in nature environments is a common part of daily life and pedagogical practice for most ECEC settings in the Nordic countries. As such, the Nordic countries in general have a tradition of giving children the freedom and opportunity to play and be active in diverse outdoor environments (Mårtensson 2010). This is also reflected in the ECEC curricula of the Nordic countries, where outdoor play and experiences in nature environments are emphasized as vital for children's well-being, development, and learning. The Icelandic preschool curriculum (IMESC 2011, p. 34) states: "At preschool children should have an opportunity for varied forms of movement and outdoor activities". The Finnish curriculum (STAKES 2003, p. 21) especially focuses on the importance of the outdoors for children's physical active play: "Children should […] be allowed to use the playground equipment in their spontaneous physical activity and play. Natural areas and sport facilities in the neighbourhood should be utilised".

In the Norwegian curriculum (NMER 2006/2011, p. 16), outdoor play is particularly emphasized: "Outdoor play and activities are important parts of the child culture and that must be retained regardless of the geography and climatic conditions", and similarly, the Swedish curriculum states that "Outdoor life should give [children] opportunities for play and activities both in designed environments and in natural environments…[and that]…ECEC institutions shall have a strong emphasis on environmental questions and sustainability of nature" (SMES 2010). In the Danish curriculum (the handbook) (Kjær and Olesen 2005), this is also very much emphasized by the statement that "Children in ECEC institutions shall have the opportunity to experience the joy of spending time in nature in different seasons and they shall develop a respect for nature and environment".

In the Nordic countries the time spent outdoors in ECEC is primarily a time for children's free play; they can make their own choices of what to play, with whom, and where (Bratterud et al. 2012; IMESC 2011; Aasen et al. 2009). In fact, a recent Norwegian study found that children's opportunities to participate and have an influence on their daily life in ECEC were significantly higher outdoors than indoors (Bratterud et al. 2012). Indoor time is more often filled with adult-organized and adult-structured activities than outdoor time where activities are more often based on children's own initiative and curiosity.

Still, outdoor activities in the Nordic countries are seen as a means of fulfilling the aims of children's development and learning in the ECEC curricula. Outdoor play has a long tradition in Nordic childcare. The *Lyseth committee* that made the first public report addressing Norwegian childcare in 1961 stated that children should not play indoors for more than two hours at time. This emphasis on outdoor play is a statement that symbolizes the Norwegian childcare tradition, with its great focus on outdoor play in different seasons (Korsvold 1997, s 95).

Organizational and Practical Implications

Due to the seasonal variation in climate, children need to have clothes that are suitable for varying conditions. Proper clothes and boots for rain, snow, and cold and hot weather are needed. It is required that parents clothe children according to the variable conditions. The staff inform parents if the children miss something or if some gear or clothes are ruined and need to be changed or repaired (Lysklett 2013).

The ECECs have different gears for outdoor use, i.e. tricycles, balls, small shovels, and buckets. During wintertime children use sliding boards or mattresses to slide down small hills. In some institutions they also use skies and skates. Normally the children use their own skies and skates, but a few institutions buy skies and skates to lend the children.

Food is normally served in all the ECECs in the Nordic countries. Iceland, Sweden, and Finland have long traditions of serving a hot meal for lunch. In Norway and Denmark it is more common to bring a food box containing food that is eaten for lunch. Fruit is normally served each day in all ECECs. Meals are an important routine in the ECECs and make the frame of the day. Depending on whether the food is eaten indoors or outdoors, meals will affect the activity in different ways. If the children need to take off most of their clothes to eat indoors, they have to stop the play and change focus. It could then be difficult to return to the play or activity after the meal. Eating outdoors might give the children the opportunity to get back to their play more easily because they won't need to undress and dress again.

Outdoor Areas/Physical Environment

As previously mentioned, the tradition of outdoor play is long. Based on the understanding that it is beneficial for children's well-being (Borge et al. 2003; Ejbye-Ernst 2012; FMSAH 2004; Nilsen 2008; Ärlemalm-Hagsér 2008; Aasen et al. 2009), playing outdoors is one of the core elements characterizing Nordic ECEC. The normal practice is that children in Nordic ECEC settings spend a large part of their day outdoors, often between 30 and 70 % (2–4 h) of their time (Ejbye-Ernst 2012; Haataja et al. 2000–2003; Moser and Martinsen 2010; Mårtensson 2004).

People in the Nordic countries maintain a habit of travelling to parks, playgrounds, and nature areas for hiking and recreation in their spare time with family and friends (Borge et al. 2003; Jensen 2012; Metla 2010; Nilsen 2008; Sandell 2009). The strong tradition of outdoor life in the Nordic countries could be one of the reasons why this also holds a strong tradition in ECEC and why the practitioners make use of the outdoor environment when working with children. Another reason is that most children in these countries also have access to diverse outdoor environments near the ECEC settings (see section about the law of common access).

Outdoor playgrounds in Nordic ECEC settings are usually designed with standardized equipment, similar to playgrounds in many other Western countries. There are swings, slides, sandpits, walls for climbing, boats for playing, and other items designed for children's play. Even though the standardized playgrounds might resemble ECEC playgrounds in England, Australia, America, and other countries, there are indications that the Nordic ECEC playgrounds are to some extent larger, more varied, and include more nature features (Little et al. 2012). Having larger and more stimulating outdoor playgrounds in ECEC would make it easier and more attractive for both children and practitioners to spend more time outdoors for play and learning. It also affords the children more opportunities for varied play, activities, and experiences.

In addition to spending a lot of time outdoors in the ECEC setting's playground, Nordic ECEC practitioners also look upon nature as an important place for play and learning. Many ECEC settings in Nordic countries spend a great amount of time outdoors, and they often make their own campsites in local nature areas for regular visits. Children usually have access to the wild landscape in the neighbouring areas, which provides multiple opportunities for free play and learning situations. Children's ability to move around freely, the *independent mobility licence*, is also an important factor for enabling children's free action and their urge to escape the control of adults, and it is thus closely linked to the ability to optimally utilize their play environment (Kyttä 2004). In the Nordic countries the ECEC practitioners are more liberal in regard to risk in children's play and activities, and the children are offered a great deal of freedom to move around and use their play environment as they like (Guldberg 2009; New et al. 2005; Sandseter 2009).

Nature Preschools

Even though there is a common focus on outdoor education in Nordic ECEC, there is a trend in the Scandinavian countries (Norway, Denmark, and Sweden) of a growing outdoor ECEC provision through institutions that have a particularly strong focus on outdoor play and learning in nature (Lysklett 2013). We define a nature preschool as an ECEC institution that uses nature as a pedagogical fundament for the activity and that spends most of the daily hours outdoors in natural environments. Nature preschools are one of the arenas where the Scandinavian ideas of childcare are developed and represented. This is the reason this particular type of ECEC setting will be described in more detail in this chapter. In Scandinavian countries about 5–10 % of all ECEC institutions have nature and outdoor settings, although there could be even more due to the difficulties of defining this type of ECEC and the fact that the settings are autonomous in their pedagogical profile and what they choose to call themselves. Because of the different national terms used to describe this type of ECEC institution, the term *nature preschool* will be used.

This phenomenon is mostly found in the Scandinavian countries, but Germany also has a relatively high number of so-called *Waldkindergarten* (Lysklett 2013). Finland has few preschools that have a strong focus on outdoor play and learning in natural surroundings. Finnish preschools mostly focus on outdoor activities on the ECEC playgrounds. Iceland doesn't have any nature preschools that are entirely outdoors. Some preschools have one outdoor classroom (department) where children stay outside almost all day, and many preschools have a neighbourhood forest that they visit regularly.

Denmark was the first Scandinavian country to establish ECEC institutions that focused on outdoor life and hiking. These first provisions emerged as early as around 1950, although the first Danish nature preschool, as we now know them, was established in 1985 (Ejbye-Ernst 2012). Today, Denmark has more than 500 ECEC settings of this kind, and they are called *Skovbørnehave* (forest kindergartens). In Denmark the nature preschools were developed with a mixed argument of outdoor provision being beneficial for children's development and learning but also as a consequence of a need for offering more Danish children a place in ECEC in the 1980s (Eilers 2005).

In Norway there were also some early versions of nature preschools in the late 1940s, where the motto was to get the children "up in the heights and out in the nature" (Lysklett 2013). Still, the modern nature preschool appeared for the first time around the late 1980s. It was somewhat inspired by the Danish *Skovbørnehave* but also strongly based on Norwegian culture and tradition, which encouraged a close relationship with nature and outdoor life and believed that being outdoors and in close contact with nature was beneficial for children's development and well-being (Borge et al. 2003). The real number of nature preschools in Norway is not certain due to difficulties of counting them (there is no governmental definition or register of such settings). Still, calculations show that in 2005/2006, there were more than 400, and one might presume that today there are even more (Ejbye-Ernst 2012).

Sweden's first nature preschool was also established in 1985, and in Sweden these settings are called *I Ur och Skur-førskola* (outdoor preschool) (Drougge et al. 2007; Änggård 2012). Today there are more than 200 outdoor settings in Sweden (Ejbye-Ernst 2012; Änggård 2012). The development of the Swedish nature preschool was based on the idea that children's desire for knowledge, physical activity, and social relations is better provided in nature environments than in indoor environments (Änggård 2012). Sweden has also had a strong focus on children's development of the understanding of nature, knowledge about nature, and sustainable development as a part of ECEC and particularly in nature and outdoor settings (Drougge et al. 2007; Änggård 2012; Ärlemalm-Hagsér 2008). Swedish nature preschools are mostly members of the Swedish Outdoor Association (Friluftsfrämjandet), and *I Ur och Skur* is Friluftsfrämjandet's pedagogical activity for children within preschool and school, childminding groups, and after-school recreation centres (Drougge et al. 2007). The activity is, to some extent, regulated by formal rules and pedagogical guidelines from *I Ur och Skur*. Examples of this are different figures

that live in certain habitats, such as *Mulle* who lives in the forest and *Laxe* who lives in water. *I Ur och Skur* has developed pedagogical programmes based on these figures that the nature preschools use in their work.

Nature preschools typically emphasize nature environments as a space for their pedagogical practice and work, and they focus on actively making use of the diverse and changing features of nature, across seasons and climate, throughout the year (Drougge et al. 2007; Ejbye-Ernst 2012; Lysklett et al. 2003). Nature preschools usually spend most of the daily hours outdoors in diverse environments (Borge et al. 2003). The pedagogical practice, as such, is very much based on the environments to which the preschools have access, the season, the climate, and both the children's and the practitioners' interests and initiative. The pedagogical arguments for these practices are that children gain knowledge and understanding from close contact with nature and activities in diverse nature environments and that knowledge about the local natural and cultural environment is an important factor in preserving cultural heritage. There is also a strong belief that children develop motor and physical skills through encountering challenges in natural environments (Fiskum 2004; Fjørtoft 2000; Grahn et al. 1997).

The Norwegian white paper about outdoor life (friluftsliv) (NME 2000–2001) places a great responsibility upon ECEC and schools to secure outdoor life as an important part of the upbringing of Norwegian children. Nilsen (2008) discusses how this might be a way that policy is used to ensure that these old Norwegian traditions are reproduced in the younger generations in a time when there is a worry that these traditions will decline because of new activities and sports for young people. Another discussion in Norway is that nature preschools are just a modern form of Fröbel's original concept of Kindergarten – gardens *for* children, where children learn and develop by being in the centre of things and acting out in the physical world – such as a garden (Borge et al. 2003). Still, the Nordic nature preschools are solidly rooted in the populations' (politicians', practitioners', and parents') belief that children are happy playing outside (Borge et al. 2003; Ejbye-Ernst 2012; Ärlemalm-Hagsér 2008).

The nature preschools spend time outdoors relatively frequently throughout the year. In wintertime most of the nature preschools in Norway (69 %) spend more than 4 h outdoors. Norwegian nature preschools all spend more than 4 h outdoors during spring and summer, while almost all (87 %) spend more than 6 h outdoors during summer (Lysklett 2005). More than 6 h would mean from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., which is nearly all day. Thus many parents deliver and retrieve their children outdoors. The nature preschools usually make trips or take walks away from the day-care centre. They visit areas that are outside of the centre's boundaries, such as regular destinations. These areas are called *reference areas*, and nature preschools often give these areas specific names. Nature preschools in Norway might have tens of names of such places, like the *eagle's nest* or *moose marsh* (Lysklett 2013).

To be outside or in the forest most of the day requires well-established routines and organization. The Norwegian nature preschools have developed many routines to make the time spent in the forest as good as possible for children and employees.

We have seen similar routines practised in Sweden and Denmark, too (Lysklett 2013).

In nature preschools the parents are told that children's clothes are essential. Often the parents get a list of what kinds of clothes are required, for example, raingear, winter suit, and woollen underwear and sweaters. Clothing is usually a subject in the first meeting between staff and parents.

In Norway and Denmark many of the nature preschools don't have fences around their buildings, and the children are allowed to walk away, but only to the invisible border. The invisible border surrounds the building and is seldom marked. Every fall, when new children attend the nature preschool, the adults focus on these borders. The rule is that the children can go to the invisible border, and if some children cross the border, the other children should tell them not to or tell the adults. If some children exceed the border, they will be mildly sanctioned, for example, stay close to one of the adults for a period. These rules are based on confidence, and the employees work a lot with this when children are introduced to the nature preschool. Trust and confidence are also the basis of other rules in the nature preschools, and this is a major subject (Lysklett 2013).

When the nature preschools make trips to one of the reference areas (Lysklett 2005), they usually walk along known paths, and the children can walk by themselves to the first waiting place. These places are not marked, but the children know where the waiting places are, just like the invisible borders. When the first group of children reaches the waiting place, they have to wait for the rest of the group. They could climb in trees, play, or just relax. At the time when the whole group has arrived at the waiting place, the children can continue on to the next waiting place. Very often the oldest children run away to be the first ones to arrive. The adults often walk with the last children. Trust and confidence are the basis of this rule, too, and if there are some children that don't respect the waiting place, they have to walk together with the adults (Lysklett 2013).

Most children carry a backpack with some extra clothes and their food (in Norway and Denmark). The staff often bring a backpack, trolley, or a pulk (small sled) when there is snow. In the backpack they have a first aid kit, drinks for the children, toilet gear, diapers, gear that is needed because of the pedagogical aim of the day, etc. (Lysklett 2013). At the time the children have reached their destination, they take off their backpacks. Now it is time for play or some organized activity. If the destination is known, the nature preschool normally has invisible borders. If not, the children usually need to be able to see one of the adults. If the group needs to be gathered, the nature preschool often has a bell or a whistle that they use. When the bell rings the children have to go to the adults. During the day the adults count the children, and if they are not able to see the whole group they normally ask the other children. Thus the adults often get a good overview, and they don't need to have each individual child in sight (Lysklett 2013).

Current Research and Future Research Needs

There has been a growing academic interest in the use of outdoor spaces for children's play and learning during the last decades, and outdoor play is seen as a significant part of a child's development as well as a connection to the natural world. However, there is limited scientific evidence of how children may benefit from their outdoor experiences. Even though there is a lack of a systematic research and evaluation on outdoor education, we will present some of the existing research on the topic in the following section.

Democracy, Equality, and Creativity

Outdoor play is considered important for children to develop democratic values and practices. This is achieved through social interaction, by learning how to create and recreate the features in their environment, and through actively participating and being part of decisions concerning their daily life and environment (Aasen et al. 2009). The child's self-worth and independence are also strengthened through learning how to manage the environment and nature where they live, play, and explore (Nilsen 2008). Research has also shown that there is more creative play among children in nature playgrounds (Lee 1999) and that children playing in nature are significantly more attentive and inventive than children playing on structured playgrounds (Vigsø and Nielsen 2006).

Research indicate that an outdoor environment gives potential for more equal play and that materials in nature are less associated with being girlish or boyish, which is the case with the toys inside the ECEC setting (Sandberg and Ärlemalm-Hagsér 2011). This means that there might be more equal opportunities for play, development, and learning for both boys and girls in outdoor play. Still, studies have shown that even though practitioners seem to interpret the outdoors as a gender-neutral zone, the practices of both practitioners and children are still gender stereotyped (Änggård 2009; Ärlemalm-Hagsér 2010). Research has also found that male practitioners are more playful and engage more in, e.g. physical active play (Sandberg and Pramling-Samuelsson 2005) and also are more liberal to risky forms of outdoor play (Sandseter 2013) than female practitioners.

Risky Play

The aforementioned culture in the Nordic countries for acknowledging and emphasizing outdoor life, with a strong heritage and tradition of visiting nature areas, hiking, and exploring in the mountains or forest areas, is assumed to be vital for the more liberal approach to children's risk-taking that these countries hold. For

instance, according to Guldberg (2009, p. 60), "the Norwegians have a special love for outdoor pursuits and are reluctant to restrict children's freedom to roam outdoors – without adults watching them – to the same extent that other nations do". Similarly, New et al. (2005) point out that Norwegian, Swedish, Danish, and, to some extent, Italian preschool teachers have fewer concerns about children's risk-taking than do American preschool teachers. Research on requirements for playground safety in Australia (Little 2006), New Zealand (Chalmers 2003; Greenfield 2003), Britain (Ball 2002, 2004), and the USA (Caesar 2001; Sawyers 1994; Swartz 1992; Wardle 1997; Zeece and Graul 1993) indicates that the efforts to regulate and strictly monitor the children are stronger in these countries than in Nordic countries, where the benefits of mastering risks, experiencing various weather conditions, and exploring the national landscape are widely acknowledged and encouraged (New et al. 2005). The large and diverse outdoor playgrounds in Nordic ECEC institutions and the frequent use of nature as a play environment also enable ECEC practitioners to offer children more challenging play environments than they would have been able to by staying on the standardized playground. The opportunity for children to meet physical challenges and risks is particularly good in nature preschools (Sandseter 2009). The children spend most of their time in challenging nature areas, and they play in a wide range of stimulating and challenging environments.

Physical Activity

The outdoor environment's effect on children's play has been studied and discussed by several researchers. In a Norwegian study of children's play in nature vs. standardized playgrounds, Fjørtoft (2000) found that functional play such as gross-motor activities and basic skills (running, jumping, throwing, climbing, crawling, rolling, swinging, and sliding) was predominant when children played in nature as opposed to playing on a traditional preschool play area and that landscape structures such as steep slopes, rough cliffs, and trees afforded play such as climbing and sliding. According to Fjørtoft, preschool children consider traditional playgrounds to be more boring than natural playscapes, and children develop better motor abilities when playing in nature as opposed to traditional playgrounds. In accordance with this notion, Kaarby (2004) found, in a study of Norwegian children's play in a nature preschool (playing in nature areas), that physical activity play such as climbing up very steep hillsides and sliding down again, climbing up and jumping down from big rocks or small cliffs, climbing on trees, throwing javelins or cones, shooting with bows and arrows, rolling on the ground, balancing on stones, fallen trees, etc., and fencing with sticks was prominent most of the time. Similarly, Mårtensson (2010) demonstrates how preschools with green, spacious, and well-integrated outdoor environments afford a higher play mood, more physically active play such as running and climbing, and swift sensory interaction.

Motor Skills and Risk Assessment

Within this view of learning and development, the Nordic approach of outdoor play and learning rests on arguments that this is beneficial for children's physical, motor, psychological, and social development. For instance, it is argued that the benefits of children's play in nature environments may be getting to know ecology, exploring the environment (Bjorklund and Pellegrini 2002), and practising and enhancing different motor skills (Fjørtoft 2000; Grahn et al. 1997; Vigsø and Nielsen 2006) and physical skills for developing muscle strength, endurance, skeletal quality, etc. (Bekoff and Byers 1981; Bjorklund and Pellegrini 2000; Byers and Walker 1995; Pellegrini et al. 1998; Pellegrini and Smith 1998). All physical practice and training might be relevant for the developing child. Play in nature also involves training on perceptual competencies such as depth, form, shape, size, and movement perception (Fiskum 2004; Rakison 2005) and general spatial orientation abilities (Bjorklund and Pellegrini 2002). Research also indicates that through challenging play, especially play in wild nature areas, children show improved risk assessment and learn how to master risk situations; their subjective perception of the risk becomes more realistic (Ball 2002; Boyesen 1997; Sandseter 2010, 2012; Smith 1998; Stutz 1999). In this way, through risky play children prepare for handling real risks and dangers (Adams 2001).

Future Research Needs

There is limited scientific evidence of how children may benefit from their outdoor experiences. Young children's well-being in outdoor spaces and the general health benefits of outdoor play have in some way been investigated, but studies of long-term effects of children's nature contact in ECECs are needed. Examples of areas that need to be explored are development of motor skills, children's relation to and knowledge of nature, the possible benefits of early environmental awareness, and how young children can participate towards a transformative education with significant emphasis on sustainability. Learning outcomes of outdoor experiences in early years are also examples of areas that need to be investigated. In addition, it seems that the potential for more gender-neutral play in outdoor environments is not yet fully utilized because both practitioners and children still fall into traditional gender roles in their practice. This is a theme that should be further explored in ECEC practice and research.

Summary

The aim of this chapter was to give an insight into outdoor education in the Nordic region, which lies in the northern part of Europe and consists of Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Finland, and Iceland. The Nordic countries have, despite their somewhat

cold climate, a strong cultural heritage and tradition for outdoor life, which is also brought into the education system and forms an important part of ECEC content and practices. In addition, the Nordic ECEC policy is strongly based on values such as children's participation, democracy, human (and children's) rights, play, social relations, respect for nature, sustainability, and individual needs. These values have contributed to the Nordic ECEC model where children's right to free play, with an emphasis on outdoor play and activities, is central. The normal practice in Nordic ECEC therefore includes extensive amounts of time spent by children outdoors for play and learning each day, yearlong. This is regarded as an important way of learning in the different knowledge areas/orientations that are outlined in the curricula, such as physical activity, linguistics and language, mathematics, social skills, and nature and sustainability, among others. This also provides a strong focus on children's outdoor environment and how the environment supports children's play and learning. Some of the Nordic countries also have a growing trend of establishing nature preschools: ECEC institutions that use nature as a pedagogical fundament for activities and spend most daily hours outdoors in natural environments. While we need more systematic scientific research and evidence on how children benefit from outdoor education, there are some studies indicating that this has a positive impact on children's development of democracy, creativity, physical development, motor skills, risk management, and gender equality in play.

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Chapter 8
Children's Perspectives on Their Everyday Lives in Child Care in Two Cultures: Denmark and the United States

Grethe Kragh-Müller and Rebecca Isbell

Abstract The purpose of this study is to investigate young children's perspectives related to their experiences in a child care program. Researchers used individual interviews and drawings in an early childhood program in Denmark and one in the United States as the basis for examining children's perspectives on their everyday lives in child care. Program observations documented the everyday cultural practices for the children in the two child care centers and provided a foundation for interpreting the interviews and the drawings. The information collected was analyzed to determine what aspects of child care young children like best and least, as well as their thoughts on the adults and peers in their center.

Introduction

A central part of Danish/Scandinavian child care tradition is the emphasis on children's rights to be listened to and given an influence on everyday life in child care. In this chapter of the book, we shall present a study, investigating children's perspectives on their everyday life in child care in two different cultures – Denmark and the United States. This is in order to investigate similarities and differences between the two cultures and the impact of this on children's everyday life in child care in the two cultures. Consistent with this book, the term pedagogue is used to refer to staff in Danish child care, and the term teacher is used to refer to staff in American child care.

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The United Nations adopted the Convention on the Rights of the Child on November 20, 1989. The document states that children should be given the right to be heard in all matters affecting them (UN Commission on Human Rights: 46th Session 1990). After its ratification, professionals in Denmark began interviewing children to determine their opinion of their experiences – such as parent's divorce and placement outside the home.

In Denmark, the law requires that children's views of everyday life in child care must be collected once a year. The information must be posted on the Internet for parents and future parents to see children's opinions and feelings about their daily activities, the adults, and other children (Dagtilbudsloven, LOV nr. 501; 06.06.07. Velfaerdsministeriet (Law on Child Care in Denmark, Ministry of Welfare, 06.06.07)). These required interviews provide children in Denmark the opportunity to discuss and influence their lives in child care and provide important information for parents in making decisions about child care.

In the United States, educators are beginning to study children's perceptions of their experiences and to question them about their thought processes. In the past, children were asked to tell about their artwork or describe their play, but were seldom questioned about their perceptions and feelings related to what was happening to them in child care. This study represents some of the early efforts to invite children to reflect their thoughts and feelings about child care experiences.

Studies on Children's Perspectives on Child Care

The legislation on children's rights has prompted a growing interest in researching children's perspectives, children's perspectives referring to the child's own phenomenology, representing the children's own perspectives, perceptions, and understanding in their lifeworld. Part of this research has studied children's views of child care and school.

In a study of quality in child care from the perspectives of the children, Einarssdottir (2005) found that the children in child care enjoyed playing with peers, whereas they found more structured activities, planned by the pedagogues, boring. Other studies indicate that children in child care preferred to play with peers but that they also liked activities planned by the pedagogue, provided they were planned according to the children's interests (Kragh-Müller 2010).

Several studies have been conducted that conclude that positive peer relationships are important for children in order to feel secure and be happy in child care (Gulloev 1999; Røn et al. 2007; Kousholdt 2006). These studies also reported that peers are an important part of their mutual conditions of development. However, it can be hard work for children to experience positive relationships with peers in child care.

The relationship between children and pedagogues in child care is another important variable influencing the child's perspective. Hviid (2001) reported from a

study on children's engagements in after school care that the children found it important to obtain good relationships with their peers. But, they also wanted more contact with the pedagogues, whom they found too busy often doing different things rather than being with the children. In a study of "scolding in child care," Sigsgaard (2002) reported that children found it very disturbing being scolded by the pedagogues in child care, stating that only parents should be allowed to scold children at home, where the child felt more secure. In a study of children's perceptions on child-rearing and discipline, Kragh-Müller (1997) found that the children in the study liked most of their pedagogues in child care, but disliked the ones who were easily upset and who often scolded the children or put them on a chair.

An Australian study by Sandberg (2002) on children's perceptions on the role of the adult in children's play revealed that the children thought that when teachers took part of the children's play, the teachers were too controlling and changed the play themes too much. Likewise the children found that the teachers did not know how to play fantasy play. They liked when the teachers helped to solve conflicts among the children and when the teacher played with the children who could not find anybody else with whom to play.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the present study was to investigate children's views of various aspects of child care, e.g., preferred activities and engagements, likes and dislikes, and the relationships to pedagogues/teachers and peers, in order to obtain a solid background from which to create good learning environments for engaging the children in play and in the learning process.

A second purpose of the study was to obtain children's perspectives in order to give them the possibility of having positive experiences in child care. It is certainly important to secure all children good opportunities for learning and development, but according to Walkerdine (2004) it is important to study children not only by looking at them from a perspective of what they are to become sometime in the future – from the point of view of "becoming." Walkerdine claims (ibid) that it is just as important to study children as "beings" – as little persons with engagements in life and a right to experience life quality in childhood here and now.

The UN convention on children's rights places children as active citizens in democratic society with a right to have an influence on matters concerning themselves. Investigating children's perspectives of child care not only provides a way of gaining understanding of young children but also provides an avenue for them to influence their lives in child care and thus, through participation, learn about democracy.

Theory of the Study

The theoretical approach of the study was framed within sociocultural theories on children's development. In this theoretical framework children are considered active participants of the society and culture in which they are born. Through participating in family traditions, daily routines, and rituals, the child gains knowledge and understanding and constructs meaning of the society (Dreier 2008). In this theoretical framework, the focus is on looking at the child as a subject in his own life, listening to the children's meaning making and perspectives on life, and giving this an influence according to the child's age and development. This view is also supported by the ecological perspective of Bronfenbrenner (1994).

Based on Vygotsky's theory (Vygotsky, in Lindquist 2004) and developed further by Holzkamp (Holzkamp 2005) and Dreier (2008), children's development is intertwined with society and culture at a given time in history. The society of today – the informational society – is very different from society 50 years ago, and children need to develop different competences in order to succeed in life. The number of children that spend some of their time in child care outside the home has increased significantly over recent years. Today many children experience not only their parents as primary caregivers but also the staff in child care play an important role in the development of the children. These significant adults as well of the other children, cultural values, discourses, cultural artifacts, and ways of thinking influence both every day practices in child care and in families (Kragh-Müller 2010).

In the study, Loevlie Schibbye's theory on dialectical relationships (Loevlie Schibbye 2002) was used as a further background on which to understand the relationships between the children and staff in child care. Loevlie Schibbye (Ibid) describes that acknowledging relationships, a relationship where the adult listens to the child in order to understand from the child's perspective, lays the foundation of the child's development of self, feeling of self-worth, and social competences.

According to Vygotsky's theory (Vygotsky, in Lindquist 2004), development takes place as the child learns about society and culture. Children's learning and development are two different – but interconnected – processes. When the child learns something new, it is possible for him to move toward new steps of development. Yet learning is only possible if it is adjusted to the present developmental level of the child (Vygotsky, in Lindquist 2004).

In a developmental perspective, engagement can be seen as situated zones of potential development. In engaged situations human beings experience a sense of loosing themselves and being absorbed in the situation (Hviid 2008). In engaged situations the child becomes more than himself – at the same time being himself and the object for his engagement. This partial fusion optimizes the rise of something new. Obtaining the children's views on their everyday life thus creates a platform from which the teacher can develop engaging learning possibilities for the children.

Methodology of the Study

Qualitative methods were chosen for this study of young children as the purpose of the study was to obtain information on the children's ways of thinking, understanding, and feeling about child care. With qualitative methods the aim is to gather in-depth understanding of a given topic (Kruse 2001). This means that information is gathered from a smaller number of participants, opposed to quantitative methods, where you can get systematic information on larger groups.

Data Collection

The study was conducted in two different child care settings, one in Denmark and one in the United States. A cross-cultural study including Denmark and the United States was chosen as a method because of the opportunity this provides to reflect on the cultural ties that help explain and differentiate practices and beliefs related to child care.

The methods chosen for data collection were observation, drawing, and interviews in both the Danish and the American child care center. The observation data was collected in both countries by the Danish researcher. The data from the drawings and interviews in Denmark was collected by the Danish researcher. The drawings and the interviews in the United States were collected by the American and Danish researchers.

The observations took place five whole days in each center using an observation guide focused on the following areas: indoor and outdoor facilities, staff/children ratio, activities, the purpose of activities, children's engagement and influence in activities, relationships of pedagogues/teachers and the children, peer relationships, conflicts, and conflict solving.

In Denmark the children observed were between the ages of three and six years of age, as Danish children stay in child care until they are six years old. In the United States, the children were three to five years of age. The purpose of these observations was to describe the culture of child care in these two countries to gain insights into the social situation of their development. This information was used as a background from which to understand the interviews and drawings of the children in both settings.

A second method for the study was drawings, a method chosen because drawing is a way for children to express their feelings and opinions about their lives nonverbally (Oaklander 1978). A group of children – the four- to five-year-olds – in both centers were asked to create a drawing of what they like best in child care and anything they disliked about their experiences in child care. Drawings were collected from 14 children in the United States and 15 children in Denmark. As each child finished the drawing, he or she was asked about the artwork and the researchers

documented his or her explanation of the drawing. This method was used to accurately interpret the drawing in accordance with the intent of the child.

A third method used for the study was the semi-structured qualitative research interview (Kvale 1997), as the purpose of the study was to understand the children's first perspectives. Interview as a valid method for obtaining data in research has changed with dominant epistemological paradigms. In times of positivistic dominance, psychology did not rely on interviews as a method, whereas today, with the influence of the socio-constructivist paradigm, interview has regained status as a useful method in psychology and education (Hviid 2008).

Individual and group interviews were conducted with randomly selected children to keep the unsystematic variation as small as possible. In each child care center, four children – two boys and two girls – were interviewed individually. Likewise a group of three children were chosen in each center for participating in a focus group interview. Focus group interviews were conducted in order to give the children the opportunity to support each other in the interview.

During each interview, the children were asked questions that focused on their thoughts about participating in child care, daily activities, spending time with peers, and interactions with adults. The first questions were open-ended, "Tell me about your child care center." The child could share whatever he or she wished to say about child care. This method was expected to present responses that the researchers had not thought to ask and provide a means for following the child's lead. The interview also included questions like, "What is best about being in your child care center?" and "Is there anything that you do not like here?" Other questions were related to the child's view of their peers and pedagogues/teachers such as, "How do you like the other children?" "What do you think about the pedagogues/teachers?" "Is there a pedagogue/teacher you really like?" "Why?" "Are there any teachers that you do not like so much?" "Why?"

During the interviews the researchers utilized active listening methods, such as restating the child's words, to ensure that the data collected was an accurate representation of the child's perceptions. To ensure accuracy, interviews were recorded and written down by the researchers and summarized after the interview. The tapes were transcribed after the interview.

Data Analysis

Analysis of the observations was conducted according to the method "activity setting analysis" described by Farver (1999) – aiming to understand the cultural differences in children's everyday lives. Five components of the environment in child care were analyzed: Staff present and their interaction with the children, practices and activities and the children's level of engagement, the purpose of activities and practices, scripts guiding children's participation in activities, and cultural values. As the purpose of this chapter is to study the children's perspectives on child care, the observations are not described in full length in this chapter, but were used only as a background from which to understand the children's perspectives.

Table 8.1 Summary of the explanation of drawings by children in Denmark

Drawings explained by 14 children in Denmark	
Best in child care	Worst in child care
Play: 11	Not to have friends to play with: 4
Play	
Inside: 3	When you are excluded from play: 1
Outside: 8	When the others tease you: 3
Play outside on swings: 4	Angry pedagogues that scold you: 3
Play on slide, climb trees: 2	
Play with worms and ladybugs: 2	Climb trees: 1
Play with pirate ship: 1	Play with water: 1
Play with cars: 2	Spiders: 1
Play with water: 1	
Like looking out of the window: 1	Do not like child care: 1
Like when I can go home: 1	

Table 8.2 Summary of the explanations of drawings by the children in the United States

Drawings explained by 15 children in the United States	
Best in child care	Worst in child care
Play: 15	Not to have friends to play with: 7
Play with other children: 12	When you don't have friends: 3
Play	When they take your toys:1
Inside: 3	When somebody hits you/conflicts: 2
Outside: 6	When the others tease you: 1
Play on swings, slide: 1	
Play rough-and-tumble play: 2	"Getting into trouble": 1
Big blocks, small blocks, Lego: 1	
Play in dolls corner, baby: 1	That you cannot play videogames: 1
Play with cars: 2	Circle time: 1
Play with ball: 1	Nap time: 1
Write: 1	Tidy up: 1
Art center: 1	To make drawings: 1
Read books: 1	
Friends that sleep: 1	
Be with daddy: 1	

To analyze the drawings, the children's responses were summarized for each center. The results of the drawings are presented in Tables 8.1 and 8.2 and were compared by the country.

The interviews were first analyzed individually to identify each child's perspective, whereby the responses could be summarized under four categories: Best thing about child care, worst thing about child care, relationships with peers, and relationships with pedagogues/teachers. Interview data were then examined to determine similarities and differences between the children under the four categories. Finally,

children's identified perceptions were evaluated to determine similarities and differences between their views on child care in Denmark and the United States.

The drawings, used together with the interviews, and observations provided the researcher with the possibility of getting information in three ways – thus using triangulation to increase the validity of the study. Validity in qualitative research is also obtained by the use of the chosen theory in interpreting the data, this being the case in this study. The different approaches also allowed the researchers to compare, contrast, and strengthen their understanding of the child's perceptions.

Concerning reliability it is stated by Kvale and Brinckmann (2009) that by using qualitative methods, the aim is not to obtain reliability in the same way as in quantitative studies, as the topics in qualitative studies are dynamic issues that can change (Kruse 2001). Choosing, e.g., interviews as a method, a situation is set up, where the researcher and the person being interviewed share their views (inter – view). In this process both persons often gain a new understanding of the subject. This means that if a second interview was conducted with the same persons, some of their answers would be different. Soendergaard (2006) claims that as qualitative studies produce information on the particular case that is studied, the results of the study can be generalized to similar areas to the extent that they offer insight and understanding to similar practices, in this study child care in general.

Results of the Study

In this section the results of the study will be reported, beginning with the findings of the drawings in the two countries, followed by the results of the interviews. After this part a comparison of drawings and interviews among children from Denmark and the United States will follow, and finally the results will be discussed.

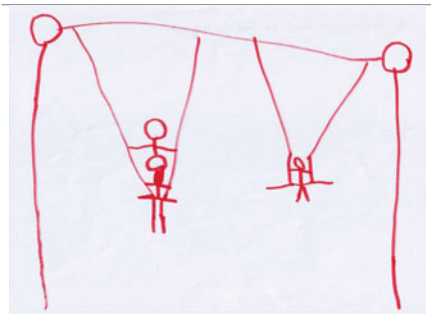
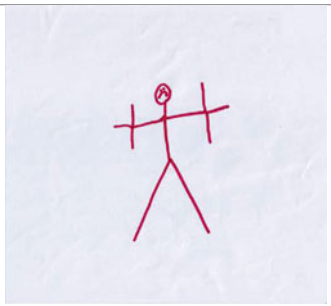
Results of the Drawings

Results from the Drawings by Children in Denmark

Four drawings by children in Denmark are presented in illustrations 1–4. Explanations of drawings by the 14 children in Denmark are summarized in Table 8.1. The majority of the Danish children agreed that being engaged in play was the very best thing in child care. Play with friends and play outside – especially on the swing or the slide – were reported as popular. Even though the Danish children agreed that play was the best in child care, there were quite big differences regarding the children's preferences regarding play – the boys typically preferring to play outside, climbing trees or playing with cars. Outside play was mentioned by many children as attractive, although some girls preferred playing inside. Most of the children liked the big new swing.

On the negative side the Danish children mentioned that the worst in child care was when they had no friends to play with, were excluded from play, or were teased by peers. The children reported that acceptance by peers was a very important aspect of child care and wanted to play with friends. Quality in child care for the children meant being engaged in play with friends in different self-initiated activities. One Danish child commented that as she did not have friends to play with, she did not like child care at all – only when she could go home.

Some Danish children drew pictures of angry pedagogues and made the comment that the worst in child care were angry pedagogues scolding them. The children seem different in that aspect – with some children obviously being scolded more than others. A scolding by the pedagogue is reported as very upsetting by the Danish children and something they put much emphasis on in their drawings.

Illustration 1:	Illustration 2:
	
"The worst in child care is being in child care. I like when I am going home."	"I like to go swimming in child care. When it is summer."
Illustration 03:	Illustration 04:
	
"He likes to swing with a friend."	"The worst is angry pedagogues."

Results from the Drawings by Children in the United States

Four drawings by children in the United States are presented in illustrations 5–8. Explanations of the drawings by the 15 children in the United States are summarized in Table 8.2. Drawings by the American children differed, with the majority

creating a drawing of children playing as "best in child care." Although there were individual differences, play was with friends, inside or outside, and in various learning centers, play was the preferred activity for the children. Many boys preferred playing outside, while the girls liked the play areas indoors. None of the children in the center made drawings of planned and structured activities like writing, math, or reading. It is important to note, however, that in the United States activities that related to these content areas often are embedded with learning centers.

The American children indicated that the worst thing in child care was having no friends to play with or conflicts between the children, as when a child teases or grabs your toy. Two children were concerned about "getting into trouble" and having to sit in the office and talk about it with the teachers. For them, this was the worst thing in child care – as one child said, "When you are small, everything looks so big and that is scary." Nap time and circle activities were identified as the worst in child care for some children, because it was difficult to sit or lie still for a long time.

Illustration 5:	Illustration 6:
	
"I'm drawing a picture of me playing."	"I'm sitting in Mrs. Sara's office. I'm drawing a picture of me getting into trouble."
Illustration 7:	Illustration 8:
	
"We are playing horses together. But mine doesn't see me because I'm little."	"Do not like when no one will play with me. Playing ball inside."

Results of the Interviews

When the interviews were studied, the findings were much like those identified in the children's drawings. The combination of drawings and interviews provided an expanded opportunity to identify the children's perspectives of child care and ensure the appropriate interpretations of his or her ideas.

Results from the Interviews with the Danish Children

In the interviews with Danish children, they said that the very best in child care was playing different things with the other children.

> *We play, have swings, eat, draw, and ask if we may go inside – sometimes it is ok. The Tarzan room is the best. (Boy age 4)*

This child talked about different things he liked to do and mentioned that he did not always like spending time outside. Danish children spend much time playing outside on the playgrounds, even when it is cold and raining. He said that a good thing about child care is when he could choose to be inside or outside. He also referred to the Tarzan room – a room with pillows where children are permitted to close the door for "rough-and-tumble" play. Boys talked about this room as a place they like – a room they considered as the boy's room – and said it was unfair when girls were allowed inside or when toddlers needed to sleep in there.

The Danish children voiced a variety of preferences related to play inside and outside. Inside one child preferred drawing, another wanted to play kitchen, and still another enjoyed to play with dolls and ponies. Outside, the swings were popular, just as sliding, football, and playing with toy guns were mentioned by the boys. The children described that they liked to engage in different roles and play activities. The children also mentioned that they would like more things to play with and more things to do. Observations showed that there were not many toys and many children needed to share the toys. Likewise paper, crayons, and pencils were placed so that the teachers had to get them for the children. No children mentioned planned activities, neither positively nor negatively.

The Danish children considered it important to have an influence on what they did and when. It was important for them to be given a choice to play inside or outside and a choice in what to play and with whom. As an example one of the 5-year-old girls says:

> *Peter and Mia are nice. They say that we can go outside even if we are not going outside. They make fun.*

As mentioned, the children interviewed all stated that the best in child care was playing with peers and having friends. Danish children spend much of their time in child care, where they develop friendships, and often go home to play with each

other on the weekends or after child care. When in child care, they choose with whom to play, and then they agree what to play.

> *Child care is nice, fun, really good. I have friends and play with them. And you can go home to somebody and watch Disney movies. That is really nice. (Boy, age five)*

The Danish children all said that the worst thing in child care was when they didn't have any friends to play with. Danish children in child care spend a lot of time on their own in child care – away from the pedagogues. As such, they become dependent on having friends they can spend time and play with. Danish pedagogues allow children their independence, partly because they consider it important that children have time alone – away from adults – where they can play without interference and partly because the pedagogues have many other tasks to accomplish, such as implementing plans for learning, documentation, talking to parents, and planning work hours. The interviews showed that children lacking social competence or who had not developed friendships had a difficult time in child care, like this little girl age four:

> *The best in child care is when I went to the nursery. There I could play with cars and there was a couch and a duvet. I don't like child care when the boys throw sand on you or hit you. (Girl, age 4)*

Some Danish children, like this girl, spoke about conflicts among the children – when children hit each other, took away toys, and threw sand on other children. The boys interviewed told of many conflicts they had experienced and how the pedagogues helped, so that they would play well together. Girls said they had a difficult time and were not able to solve their conflicts alone.

As self-initiated play takes up much time in child care in Denmark, the importance of friends can be easily understood. The children also expressed how it was difficult to solve the conflicts that took place among the children. Some children expressed a true need for help from the pedagogues – for example, to enter into play with a group of children or to obtain a position in the peer group.

Regarding the relationships between the children and the staff, Danish children found some of the pedagogues nice. They described a nice pedagogue as a person who played with the children, told stories, and made fun – like when Hanne splashed water on Peter (both pedagogues). A nice adult was likewise described as a person who was flexible with rules and allowed the children choices, such as whether they wanted to play inside or outside. Some of the Danish children said that they enjoyed doing things with the pedagogues like puzzles or playing soccer. The observations showed that much of the children's play were on their own. The children said they enjoyed playing with one another, but they also said they would like to spend more time doing things with the pedagogues.

Children in Danish child care did not like it when a pedagogue was angry and scolded them and stated that some pedagogues did that a lot, while other pedagogues were nice. Receiving a scolding, being sent inside to sit, and sitting on a chair were described as very unpleasant by all the children – mostly the boys. When this happened, some children mentioned that the pedagogue often was in the wrong,

because they did not see what happened. Accordingly the pedagogue did not act fairly; the children then did not accept the blame:

I don't like Stine and Sofie – they have a bad temper – they tell you off and grab your arm and put you inside to sit even when you did not do it. (Boy, age 5)

Results from the Interviews with the Children in the United States

The American children all believed that the very best in child care was playing, which could be with friends, inside or outside. Many of the boys talked about playing outside – driving cars, running, and going on the slide and mentioned that it would be nice to climb trees. The girls more frequently talked about playing inside, such as the housekeeping or dress-up center.

I like to play outside and inside with the doll's house and people. We play people who live in the house. They clean up. I do not like fighting – Nathan and Bill fight – they play "Power Rangers" (girl, age 5)

It was important for the children to have an influence on what they did and how they played in child care and also to be able to choose in what play area they wanted to play. Observations showed that the American children had many options as where to play, and during the interviews, they said that they were very happy with all the different play/learning areas where they could engage in play according to their different interests. One child said that he liked the big block corner, while another preferred the dress-up corner and some liked to play with the dollhouse.

When the children spoke of their dislikes in child care, differences were identified. The more active children talked much about being sent to the office and put in a chair for time-out – as they put it "when I have been bad."

I don't like to get into trouble. I do. It is "no jumping, no running back and forth". I don't like to sit down in Miss Sara's office, and we talk about it. And then I go back in the classroom. (Boy, 5 years)

When I am angry they will put me into the office. (Girl, age 5)

All child care centers have rules, but the interviews showed that some rules, such as rules about quiet behavior and self-control, were difficult for some of the more active children to follow, as was the rule about being quiet during circle time. The children that were not able to follow these rules disliked these conflicts and thought of themselves as bad and getting into trouble, like they also found it disturbing to talk about it afterward.

Most of the American children – especially the girls – disliked conflicts and fights among the children and mentioned that the boys were fighting and acting wild when they were playing. Most children talked about peers they disliked, possibly because, when they were permitted to choose play areas, the children could play

with other children rather than their immediate friends. Some of the children also mentioned nap time and cleanup as unpopular activities.

As the children liked playing with peers, it was difficult for the children when they were excluded from play. One of the children interviewed was sometimes rejected by other children, whereby she got very upset and talked about peers teasing her. Not being able to find a position among the peers was difficult for the children.

Regarding their relationships with teachers, the children were very clear and agreed on their likes and dislikes. They stated that they liked when teachers are nice and let the children make choices.

Miss Sandy is good to us. Miss Jane does nice things. Miss June is a little hard on us, she has a cross face and brings us into her office. (Girl, age 5)

I don't like when teachers say bad words. I like Miss Sara, she is nice. She says good things to you, says "who wants to play" – you have to raise your hand. (Boy, age 5)

The children said that a nice teacher "has a nice face and says nice things." They talked about teachers who were nice and some not as nice. The children were quite clear during their interviews about how important it was that teachers were – as they put it – kind to them. For small children, everything looks big, and how teachers act is important to them.

The teachers are.....big. They let us play in centers. (Girl, age four)

When you are small everything looks so big and that is scary. (Boy, age four)

A Comparison of Drawings and Interviews from Children in Denmark and the United States

A comparison of the Danish and the American children's drawings and interviews revealed various similarities and differences. The participants from both countries reported that play – inside and outside – was the best thing about being in child care. American children told about playing in play areas and how good it was to choose where to play. The Danish children talked about the importance of having good friends to play with and told that the worst thing about child care was when you had nobody to play with.

Observations in the two child care centers revealed various cultural differences. In Denmark, children set up their own play and choose with whom to play, thus having a large degree of influence. They also solved conflicts on their own most of the time – making them independent, while also emphasizing the importance of having a friend to rely on and play with. As they chose whom to play with and what to play, they could chose not to play with children they didn't like, which made it harder, though, for the less popular children. In the United States, the playroom setup included play areas and was well equipped with toys for the children. American children liked the play areas. When they chose these areas, they had to play with a

variety of children, which was likely the reason they said there were some children they did not like, as they could not choose to reject playing with them.

The study revealed that although the children expressed similar views on child care, they, in both countries, were also very different, both regarding engagements and interests and concerning their relationships to pedagogues/teachers and peers. In both countries some children told about their difficulties in finding a position in the peer group. They reported that they found it hard to find friends to play with and that the other children would tease them. They also reported of conflicts with the other children. Even with cultural differences the Danish and American children agreed on the importance of having an influence in their child care.

Danish and American children all emphasized the importance of having – what they called – nice pedagogues/teachers. Their definition of a nice pedagogue/teacher included one who was kind to the children, who said nice things, and who allowed them to make choices. The Danish children added that they liked pedagogues who made fun, were not strict with rules, and sometimes played with the children, reflecting a different and more equal relationship between pedagogues and children, while the American children did not mention this. Both the Danish and the American children mentioned that one of the worst things about child care was when the pedagogues/teachers were not nice and reported of pedagogues/teachers that they liked and pedagogues/teachers that they disliked.

Some of the children in both countries reported of conflicts with the adults, conflicts that they reported to be very unsettling. These children in the United States talked about teachers who were not nice as those who "put you into the office and then you have to talk about it," who put children on a chair, or who sent them to time-out. The children in Denmark spoke about being told off, being put inside to sit, or being put on a chair, although their reaction to this was different. The American children perceived the conflicts as, "me getting into trouble and I am bad." The Danish children perceived this as "bad-tempered pedagogues" and said that they were treated unfairly, thus reflecting a different view of themselves and the pedagogues. Basic variations are likely related to the different cultures in Denmark and the United States.

Observations in the two child care centers revealed different relationships between children and pedagogues/teachers in each country. In Denmark, relationships were informal, whereas in the United States, a more formal relationship existed between children and teachers. In Denmark, child care is considered the child's second home, as 96 % of Danish children spent much of their time in child care. As a result the pedagogues want the children in child care to feel like they do at home. So, children use the pedagogues' first name. The observations showed that the Danish children addressed their pedagogues as their equals, and the pedagogues stressed the importance of developing an acknowledging relationship with the children, based on listening to the children and allowing their views to influence their child care. Accordingly, in the child's eye, when experiencing a conflict, the adult may have been just as much in the wrong as the child.

In the United States observations showed that the teachers put more focus on children's learning possibilities, thus spending more time with the children, focusing on different activities, and guiding and elaborating their play.

Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to investigate children's perspectives on child care, their participation in activities and everyday practices, their relationships to peers, and their relationships to pedagogues/teachers in two different cultures. This investigation informs adults about what, in the eyes of the child, constitutes a positive experience in child care and how to create engaging learning environments for the children, thereby promoting development and learning. The study also informs us about cultural differences in children's everyday life in different cultures and how this affects the children's development.

The results of the study showed that the most important thing for the children's well-being in child care in both cultures was to obtain good peer relationships. Playing with friends made the children feel good, facilitating engagement in play and learning. When children spend a large part of the day in child care together with other children, it is important for them to find somebody to be with. The children thus stated that the worst thing in child care was not to have anybody to play with or being teased by the other children.

The study also showed that the children in both cultures were different, with some children not being able to find and keep a position in the peer group. Not having a friend to play with and turn to was mentioned as upsetting by some of the children who explained that they did not always like to be in child care. This also meant that these children were less engaged in play and other activities.

The American children were less dependent on finding friends, as they got to play with other children choosing the same play area. The Danish children, who chose with whom to play and then found out what to play, were very dependent on having friends. These findings are consistent with the research conducted by Røn et al. (2007) and Kousholdt (2006) who found that children were different to the extent to which they succeeded in establishing good peer relationships. The children who had friends had the opportunities for having a good time in child care and of developing social skills and independence, whereas the children who were not able to get a position in the peer group had a hard time in child care.

The implications of the study thus points to the importance of the staff in child care in any culture to focus on helping children to establish good relationships among the children in child care, especially helping the children who cannot gain a position in the peer group by themselves or who lack social competencies. Also it is important to help children solve conflicts among them.

Just as the relationships with peers were reported important by the children, children in both cultures also said that the relationships with the pedagogues/teachers were of great importance for their well-being in child care. In the interviews all

children said that they liked the nice pedagogues/teachers – pedagogues/teachers who were kind to the children, gave them choices, and were not easily upset. They also told that there were pedagogues/teachers that they did not like because they were too strict and scolded the children. Remarks from the children such as "when you are small, everything looks big and that is scary" or "the worst is pedagogues who become mad at you, scolds you, grabs your arm and pulls you inside to sit" offer pedagogues/teachers the opportunity to reflect and change their discipline practices.

Studying different cultures provides an opportunity for adults to reflect their own cultural practices in adult-child relationships, e.g., when American children described how they think of themselves as "being bad and getting into trouble," when compared to the Danish children's description that "my pedagogues has a bad temper and scolded me when I did not do anything."

Recent research in child care has shown (Kvistad and Soebstad 2005; Kragh-Müller 2010) that pedagogues as well as parents and children considered a caring relationship between pedagogues and children the most important indicator of quality in child care. In Denmark child care centers are established and run by the local communities. A survey to all local communities in Denmark (BUPL, webpage, 2010) revealed that in almost all local communities, the main purpose of child care was to develop acknowledging, respectful, and reciprocal relationships between children and pedagogues in order to support the children's development of self and social competencies. The recommendations of the present study are that a focus on and reflecting on how to develop growth-promoting adult-child relationships in all cultures stays an equal priority to learning in child care, both aspects being important for children's development and learning and for their possibility to enjoy a happy childhood when in child care.

Concerning activities in child care, play – outside or inside – was the children's preferred activity. The children varied in what they liked to play. Especially the boys preferred to be outside or to play with cars and blocks. The Danish boys mentioned rough-and-tumble play and playing with toy guns as popular activities. The girls preferred more quiet activities, e.g., playing with dolls, and the American girls also like to play in the dress-up corner and other play areas.

In play the children reported to be engaged. Engaged in play, children can gain new understandings related to their own perspectives. Play can lead to discoveries, develop creativity, and exceed boundaries. Play and learning are interconnected, and creating a variety of play/learning areas, as was seen in the American child care center, gives the children a possibility to learn more effectively. The Danish children expressed a need for more toys and material, and Danish child care would improve by pedagogues establishing play/learning areas for the children to engage more in play.

Some other studies have shown that children are engaged when participating in play (Hviid 2001 and Einarsdottir 2005). These studies also found that the children reported to be less engaged in activities structured by the pedagogue. As in this study some children pointed to circle time as an activity where it was difficult and boring to sit still for a long time. Another study (Kragh-Müller 2010), conducted in

child care in two different communities in Denmark, showed that children liked to spend time in activities guided by the pedagogue, provided that these activities were initiated by the children and elaborated by the pedagogue, adding new ideas and knowledge. The recommendations are that pedagogues/teachers discover more ways of planning activities that meet the needs of all children.

Listening to the children's perceptions, thoughts, and feelings about child care is important in Danish child care tradition. Also in other cultures this is underlined in order to combine the children's perspectives with the intentions of the pedagogues/teachers and their planning of everyday practices in child care. Through listening to the children's perspectives, the pedagogue/teacher will learn about the different interests and motivation of each child – knowledge that is vital both for children's well-being in child care and for effective curriculum planning, especially since motivation and engagement are important aspects of learning. Likewise, when children experience influence, they learn about democracy through participation.

Child care is closely connected to the culture of which it is a part. Therefore the practices of child care will be different in different cultures and provide the children with different opportunities. The study of child care in another cultural setting offers a great opportunity to reflect on the way child care is done in your own culture and to learn from other cultures.

Finally growing up is not only about what children are to become once in the future. It is also about having a good childhood in itself. Interviewing children provides us as adults with information of how it feels to be a small child here and now, in the present. Also the interviews help us giving the children we care for a happy childhood, so that they can grow up to become both well-educated and healthy adults.

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Chapter 9
Increasing Pedagogical Attentiveness Towards Children's Perspectives and Participation in Toddler Child Care

Lone Svinth

Abstract The Nordic research on toddlers has a strong tradition for microanalyses of adult-child relations in early childcare research. Within this tradition, it is well established that adults' attentiveness towards children's perspectives and what children experience here and now are a prerequisite for their well-being and learning. Inspired by this work, I and 85 toddler pedagogue and family childcare providers (practitioners) in a participatory action research project called '*With the Child in the Centre*', investigated how increased attentiveness towards children's perspectives can change children's participation and being in pedagogical practice. Together, we challenged cultural habits and socially embedded relational patterns with the 0–3-year-old children in order to provide new opportunities for participation and relational being in toddler childcare. Based on a sociocultural perspective of learning as participation, the transformative ambition was to explore how practitioners develop generative processes of coactions with children. For one week the practitioners were invited to pay special attention to and engage more actively with a specific child believed to be in a troubling position. The practitioners' reflections were reported in written narratives, which form the empirical grounding for this study. I found that the practitioners' capacity to reflect the details of the present moment could be increased and that the practitioners' increased attentiveness towards children's perspectives provided more varied and engaged relations with the 0–3-year-old children in toddler childcare. The study shows how a more open and curious approach enables new understanding of children's relational being, their intentions and meaning making. By changing their attentiveness and coaction with these children, the practitioners made new opportunities for participation available for the children in toddler childcare. The study also found that a pedagogical sense of presence is a prerequisite for the development of the practitioners' attentiveness and inquisitive approach towards children and coaction.

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Introduction

In their complex and multifaceted coactions with children, practitioners must often act on the spur of the moment. Given the everyday life in toddler childcare with its tensions and contradictions, the practitioners[1] often do not have time to sit back and deliberate on what to do in a particular situation. Practitioners are expected to act pedagogically – right here and now. Sometimes an action may consist of holding back the practitioner's own action, thereby providing space for sensing what the child is experiencing and communicating in the situation. These sensitive and child-centred educational processes are often highlighted as central for children's learning and development in childcare settings (Dalli et al. 2011; Sheridan and Pramling Samuelsson 2009; Sommer 2015). One aspect involved is that individual practitioners manage to see a present situation from the child's perspective and remain open and inquisitive about the child's actions and intentions (Goodfellow 2008; Bae 2004; Svinth 2013). Yet few studies explore how practitioners manage to open themselves to children's perspectives in ongoing pedagogical processes. There is also limited research on how practitioners, with carefully tuned responsiveness to children's actions and expressions from moment to moment, help to provide new ways of participating and relational being for children.

In *With the Child in the Centre*,[2] we aimed to study how practitioners managed to increase their attentiveness towards the child's perspective and how the child's participation is expanded. The study is based on the following research question:

[1] According to Statistics Denmark, 19 % of the Danish children below the age of one attend a childcare, while 91 % of the children age 1–2 years attend a childcare. In Denmark there are two main categories of toddler childcare settings: (1) Nurseries for 0–2-year-old children (8.500 attending children in 2014). In many settings nurseries are integrated with preschools for 3–5-year-old children (63.000 children age 0–2 in 2014). In nurseries 58 % of the pedagogical staff has a degree in pedagogy. (2) Public family childcare where 41.000 children age 0–2 in 2014 attended childcare. A public family childcare is run by the municipal but takes place in a family home with a single adult and usually four children. A family child-care provider does not hold a degree in pedagogy. When both nursery pedagogues and family child-care provider are referred to, I use the term practitioner.

[2] 'With the Child in the Centre' (Barnet i Centrum) is a 2-year participatory action research project that was carried out in collaboration with Assistant Professor Ole Henrik Hansen and Postdoc Anders Skriver Jensen under the leadership of Professor Stig Broström, all from DPU at Aarhus University. The project was financed by the 18 participating municipalities from Denmark and ended in December 2014. The article is based on a case study conducted among the 85 nursery pedagogue and family child-care providers who took part in the 'Coaction and Learning' laboratory, for which I was responsible. The action research was based on the following general research question: 'How can the laboratory describe, analyse and develop the adult-child encounters and describe and analyse their importance for children's participation, learning and becoming?' The 85 participants were divided into three teams, and during the 2-year duration of the study, I met up with the teams 16 times per team for 5 h on each occasion, either at the Aarhus University campus in Emdrup or at VIA in Viborg. See Broström (2016) and Svinth (2016) for a description of the action research project.

How does a pedagogical attempt to increase attentiveness towards the child's perspective influence adult-child coaction and the child's opportunities for participating in nursery and family childcare?

Inspired by, e.g. Ozanne and Saatcioglu (2008), the research ambition in *With the Child in the Centre* is to improve everyday life for children and adults in the participating toddler childcare settings. Together, we studied each practitioner's attempts to be attentive and open to a specific child's perspectives for a week in order to see how the relation and child's participation developed in light of the increased adult attention.

Learning as Participation and Children's Relational Being

This study is framed by a sociocultural perspective on learning (Bruner 1997) in which learning is understood as a process taking place when children develop or change their participation in social practices (Dreier 1999: 83). The emphasis on participation highlights that all learning is social and that a broader and more relational approach to children's learning is fruitful (Gergen 2009; Bruner 1997). Children's learning is not limited to learning skills and cognitive functions but also includes their formation of identity and experience of belonging to a childcare setting as a community (Bruner 1997). Children's participation is influenced by the opportunities and constraints provided by the context, coaction with practitioners and other children. How children experience the coaction influences their engagement, curiosity and meaning making in the situation (Sommer 2015). The coaction is anchored in toddler childcare as a social, cultural and historical context that forms a special frame of reference for each child, but most of all, coactions are relational processes (Gergen 2009). With the concept 'coaction', Gergen (2009: 31) suggests we consider human action within a relational confluence. Instead of a distinction between verbal and non-verbal communication, Gergen (2009: 34) suggests we attend to unified acts of coordination, where words/movement/facial expressions form a seamless whole. Gergen's theorising encourages the view that human connection replaces separation as the fundamental reality (Gergen 2009: 62). The person is constituted by a multiplicity of relationships (ibid.: 149). This understanding is also reflected in the work of Gerhardt, who states: 'The baby and the care it receives is an inseparable whole' (Gerhardt 2004: 305). Emphasising coactive confluence as an alternative way of explaining human action, Gergen (2009) challenges an understanding where boundaries between people are taken for granted. Gergen rejects a sense of self as fundamentally independent of other people and a bounded existence based on a separation of individuals. In his view, individual persons are in all stages of life by-products of relational processes. His vision on relational being is to seek to recognise a world that is not within persons but within their relationships (ibid.: 5). An analytical view of the flow of coaction as it is experienced here and now by the child therefore contrasts with the positivistic, abstract and often formalised descriptions of children's learning.

Both adults and children incorporate different conceptions about each other, the coaction and its potential into the continuous flow of exchanges, and each coaction holds the potential for new ways of relating to each other and to the situation. These ways potentially contribute to the continuing and expanding flow of relationships (Gergen 2009) and thereby provide new opportunities for participation and being, e.g. for children in troubling positions.

Gergen (2009: 149) suggests that from every relationship there emerges a residue or a resource in the form of potential actions (e.g. language, emotional expressions and scenario movements). Some relations leave traces that are well practised, while others leave little but whispers of possibility (Gergen 2009: 149). Gergen (2009: 47) distinguishes between degenerative and generative relational processes. While the former are corrosive and bring coaction to an end, the latter are catalytic and inject relations with vitality and stimulate the expansion and flow of meaning (ibid.). The assumption is that children relate to what is meaningful in the situation and that children's perspectives and ways of relating can be interpreted when their various forms of expression and actions are analysed (Fink-Jensen 2010).

Pedagogical Presence and Openness to Children's Perspectives: Existing Research

Adult-child interaction is often highlighted as a core aspect of high quality in childcare settings (Kärrby and Giota 1994; Sheridan and Pramling Samuelsson 2009). For example, in their research review of 0–3-year-olds in nurseries, Bjørnestad and Pramling Samuelsson (2012) found that interaction between nursery pedagogues and children is a key factor regarding toddlers' learning and development (Bjørnestad and Pramling Samuelsson 2012: 5). In the literature, adults' contributions to good relations are described in terms such as *warmth and empathy* (Goodfellow 2008), *responsiveness* (Rinaldi 2006) or *acknowledgement* (Bae 2004).

Not least the Nordic research on toddlers has focused for decades on nursery pedagogues' openness to children's perspectives as a central aspect of fruitful adult-child interaction in childcare settings. The studies have shown that if nursery pedagogues transgress their own perspectives and intentions, it underpins (1) children's involvement and engagement (Emilson and Folkesson 2006; Emilson 2007), (2) children's experience of being seen and acknowledged (Bae 2004; Hundeide 2004) and (3) children's meaning making, learning and development (Sheridan and Pramling Samuelsson 2009; Pramling Samuelsson and Asplund Carlsson 2008). In a study of preschool pedagogues' openness to children's perspectives and preschool children's opportunities for participation (Svinth 2013), I described how preschool pedagogues' presence in the interaction with children was important for their attentiveness towards the perspective of individual children.

Research on nursery pedagogues' and family childcare providers' sense of presence in toddler childcare is very limited. In her qualitative study, Goodfellow (1995)

found that practitioners describe their sense of presence as 'in tune with the child', 'being actively involved' and 'placing all of one's concentration on the child'. In elementary schools, research shows that pedagogues' increased awareness of their own attentiveness, thoughts, emotions and interactions gave pedagogues a better and more varied means of handling everyday challenges (Herskind and Nielsen 2011; Hart 2004). In addition, the pedagogues' subjective experience of presence increased their involvement and their ability to reflect during the interaction (Roeser et al. 2013; Langer and Moldoveanu 2000).

Theoretical Perspectives on the Adult's Attentiveness to the Child's Perspective

As illustrated above, pedagogical attentiveness towards and acknowledgement of the child's perspective and experiences comprise a central aspect of fruitful adult-child interaction with 0–6-year-olds. However, research also reveals a major qualitative difference in how practitioners prioritise and practise this attentiveness (Johansson and Pramling Samuelsson 2007; Palludan 2005; Bae 2004; Svinth 2013). Habitual norms and the situated complexity in childcare settings together with other constraints challenge the adults' attentiveness in the moment (Svinth 2013; Goodfellow 2008). In this section, I will present theoretical proposals as to how attentiveness towards the children's perspectives can be interwoven with a concept of pedagogical presence.

Thorbjørn Hansen perceives openness as an attentive attitude that entails 'making ourselves attentive and giving room (time, silence, calm, presence) for amazement and understanding' (Hansen 2010: 21). According to Pilz (2008), attentiveness leads to an open mind and gives presence to this moment in life. Davies uses openness to describe a similar phenomenon. Openness, she states, encourages new ways of listening to the child (Davies 2014: 21), including holding back and changing the habitual practice that defines one as a practitioner. When the nursery pedagogue listens, sees and in other ways considers the child's perspective, it becomes possible to gain insight into the child's intentions and meaning making (Davies 2014). Openness does not involve receiving confirmation of what the practitioner already knows, rather it is an openness towards the not yet known. Following this line of reasoning openness is not perceived as a quasi-democratic process trying to smooth the practitioner's control and management, as Dahlberg et al. (2014) phrase it.

Davies describes openness as an ethical relation based on respect for diversity and the other person, with which listening is a constant openness to the yet unknown. This involves emergent listening where we permit ourselves to be surprised and affected by the other person with all the uncertainty it may imply (Davies 2014):

> Listening is about being open to being affected. It is about being open to difference and, in particular, to difference in all its multiplicity as it emerges in each moment in between

> oneself and another. Listening is about not being bound by what you already know, it is life as movement. Listening to children is not just a matter of good pedagogy; encounters with others, where each is open to being affected by the other, are integral, I will suggest, to life itself. (Davies 2014: 1)

For Davies, the importance of openness cannot be overestimated. Being open to being affected by the other person is the way that humans and the communities to which we belong create and recreate themselves (Davies 2014: 10). Openness is therefore an opportunity to see life and one's own approach to life in a new and perhaps surprising light by, e.g. creating the opportunity for new ways of knowing and new ways of being a participant. As Fink-Jensen claims the practitioner's attentiveness towards the child's perspective is intentional in the way that the adult tries to bracket his or her previous understanding and assumptions about the child (Fink-Jensen 2010). Langer et al. (2012) also suggest that the practitioner's openness makes the child's experiences, meaning making and intentions more visible to the practitioner, which is vitally important for how the adult handles, e.g. conflict situations and emotionally upset children. As I have previously found (Svinth 2013), remaining attentive to the child's perspective in everyday life in childcare setting is a major pedagogical challenge. When investigating the practitioner's attentiveness towards the child's perspective in the situated complexity of a childcare setting, it is relevant to dwell on how attentiveness is connected to a sense of presence.

I suggest that the practitioner's attentiveness in the coaction with children can be conceptualised as a *pedagogical presence* where the adult's self-regulation of attention is perceived to make her[3] conscious of the complex connections that exist between outer events and the practitioner's emotions, thoughts and actions (Herskind and Nielsen 2011; Nielsen and Kolmos 2013). When considered from a sociocultural perspective, both children's and adults' awareness is developed and regulated by their participation in sociocultural practices (Bang 2009; Vygotsky 1978). As with other human functions, the way we pay attention is guided by the context and interactional patterns in the childcare settings. Goodfellow (2008) describes presence as an existential state of 'being with children'. Presence provides the key to how children in childcare experience their day (Layzer and Goodson 2006). The focus on the adults' way of being and relating can also be found in the work of Langer, who, from a social-psychological perspective, defines presence (mindfulness) as a flexible state of mind in which we are actively engaged in the present, noticing new things and sensitive to context (Langer 2000: 220). As Langer et al. (2012) underline, being mindful with a child requires actively making new and subtle distinctions about the child, noticing subtle idiosyncrasies, being sensitive to its uniqueness and noticing change as it develops through time. These are very demanding undertakings, but Langer assumes that, if the adult develops sensitivity and openness to variations in the context and perspectives, rather than relying on preconceptions and categorisations during interaction, new understandings of the situation and the child will be possible (Langer et al. 2012). Also in Langer's view,

[3] I mainly refer to practitioner as 'her' because of the high percentage of women in the field. Please do not see this as noninclusive of male practitioners.

pedagogical presence can be described as the practitioner's meta-awareness of her own understandings of the child and her way of relating with the child. The same aspiration can be found in the work of Bae (2004), where the preschool pedagogue's attentiveness in the moment – as expressed in direction of gaze, facial expression, posture and pitch and tone of voice – is included in what she describes as spacious dialogical patterns. Rodgers and Raider-Roth (2006) are quite explicit when it comes to why presence in an educational setting is relevant:

> Presence is a state of alert awareness, receptivity, and connectedness to the mental, emotional, and psychical workings of both the individual and the group in the context of their learning environments, and the ability to respond with a considered and compassionate best next step. (Rodgers and Raider-Roth 2006: 265)

This definition of presence includes the pedagogical dimension which is essential for analysing ongoing coactions in toddler childcare. The intended focus of study in *With the Child in the Centre* is pedagogical presence as a prerequisite for the practitioner's attentiveness towards the child's perspective and her considerations and compassionate 'best next step' in relation to the child.

Children share their everyday life in a childcare setting with adults and other children. Nevertheless, every participants experience this everyday life differently. Differences in cultural habits, social positions, relation to the practitioners, individuality and in children's language development among other factors shape the child's experiences and participation (Svinth 2013).

Insight into these complex relational processes of adult-child encounters requires a research design where the situated everyday life of a childcare setting is the primary point of departure.

Research Design

Since *With the Child in the Centre* was addressing the development of good pedagogical practice, the practitioner's engagement and contribution was considered vital to the process. On this basis, the study was designed as a *participatory action research project* where the practitioners played the leading role in generating information on their own experiences with increased attentiveness towards a child's perspective and participation. Participatory action research is characterised by research conducted *with* people and not *on* people (Bradbury and Reason 2003). With participatory action research, close cooperation is sought between the researcher and the practitioners who, through their own investigations and adjustments in practice, are coresearchers (Cronholm and Goldkuhl 2004: 48). As Wadsworth (1998) highlights, participatory action research is not only research that is followed by action. It also includes actions that are explored and changed and subsequently studied again by researcher and practitioners. Action research therefore aims at ongoing and collaborative reflexivity and interpretation of the child-adult encounters as a social phenomenon with an intention to change and develop the encounters.

The Intervention

In *With the Child in the Centre*, we were interested in how increased attentiveness made the practitioners more open to and curious about children's perspective. The intention was also to study how increased attentiveness towards the selected child and its perspective could lead to adjustments in the adult-child encounter and ultimately expand the child's possibilities for participation. Each of the 85 participating practitioners in the laboratory *Coaction and Children's Learning* were in May 2014 asked to increase their attentiveness towards a selected child during a week of their own choice. The practitioners were asked to reflect their choice of focus child[4] and their experience with the increased attentiveness in a written narrative (Hansen 2009). Each participant was also asked to reflect on how the increased attentiveness influenced the encounters with the selected child, the perception of the child and the child's participation. These one- or two-page narratives were collected by the author in August and September 2014 and form the empirical grounding for this study. By the time of the intervention, the practitioners had participated in eight 5-h long workshops with the author on adult-child interaction and children's learning. Although the practitioners were introduced to sociocultural theories and the various concepts, e.g. openness towards children's perspectives, attentiveness and learning as participation, the study did not focus on how the different concepts were understood or applied by the practitioners.

The study focused on how the practitioner herself gave meaning to and practised 'increased attentiveness towards a child'[5]. See the analysis on the following page for examples of this. In the late summer of 2014, I thematised and presented the narratives for discussion and validation in semi-structured focus group discussions (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009) with the practitioners. The remaining analytical work, which is reported below, was conducted by the author in the winter of 2014/2015.

Ethical Considerations

The aim of the intervention was to study how increased attentiveness influence children's participation. The overall aim was nevertheless to develop more positive and ethical encounters for the adults and children involved (Brinkmann 2010). It was therefore important that each participant was able to create encounters he or she found meaningful and fruitful. It was also emphasised that the increased attentiveness should be carried out with consideration for the sometimes difficult conditions in the toddler childcare setting. The attentiveness towards a child was not going to be on the expense of another child in need in the present moment. In other words the ethical considerations concerned other children in the toddler childcare settings as

[4] The child was in most cases selected due to the practitioner's concern for its well-being and development, e.g. due to the child's many conflicts with adults or other children.

[5] See Svinth (2016) for a more detailed description of the research design.

well as the selected children and co-workers. Inspired by Hundeide (2007) the practitioners were also reminded not to impose themselves on the selected child and to respect the child's zone of intimacy. The participants' judgement and creation of meaningful and engaging encounters were in other words core aspects of the study.

Analysis

The processing of the narratives was based on a thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006). A thematic analysis is characterised by a quest for repeated patterns to define themes in the institutions' pedagogical practice. In Braun and Clarke's approach, a theme is comprised of 'something important' in the material evaluated in relation to the research question. This 'something' could, for example, be ways in which the practitioners made themselves open to new conceptions of the selected children or descriptions of how encounters with these children were adjusted. As I will revert to below, I was looking for analytical variations within each theme. Based on the research question, I have chosen two overlapping themes for analysis: (1) practitioners' conceptions of their selected child and individual encounters viewed in the light of their openness to the child's perspective and (2) children's possibilities for participation in the light of the adults' attentiveness to and adjustment of the encounters.

The Adult-Child Encounter and the Adults' Attentiveness Towards the Child's Perspective

In the practitioner's narratives, there were many different suggestions concerning how the increased attentiveness to a child was expressed and experienced. One childcare leader described his attentiveness like this: 'It was like looking into a bee hive and only seeing one bee'. More focused daily contact and involvement with a child were among the common suggestions for special attentiveness. In some cases, the practitioners took the opportunity to develop new child-centred initiatives such as massage or new forms of storytelling. Generally, the practitioners experienced that their special attentiveness to a child both changed their understanding of the child and an encounter. As Gergen (2009: 83) highlights, the most important fact about attention is the way in which it fashions what we take to be the world before us. A nursery pedagogue described something similar in her narrative:

> It has become very clear to me that everything revolves around my conceptions of the child and his actions. How I see/read his intentions affects my response to him, which can be self-perpetuating if I am not attentive and conscious of my actions.

This and other practice stories describe an increasingly nuanced view of individual children and the importance of an encounter. Most practitioners described how their special attentiveness to a child led to a greater understanding of the child's intentions and experiences here and now. The practitioners managed to actualise and

add new nuances to their understanding of a child and what was often previously referred to as the child's worrying behaviour. Several practitioners realised that they previously tended to misinterpret the child and that the special attentiveness made them notice small details about the child that they had not noticed before. For example, one nursery pedagogue described how her view of a child has become more positive and that she has become far more nuanced and competent in her encounters with other children. Another nursery pedagogue had a similar experience:

> I am more aware of the small signals the child sends. These small nuances help to make the difference in an encounter. I notice now that he communicates clearly with the other children and is not physical towards other children in frustrating situations.

The practitioner attunes herself to the encounters with the child in new ways. This increased attentiveness expands her conception of the child and open up for new ways of interacting. In Gergen's (2009) terminology, this nursery pedagogue is becoming more aware of the generative potential of her coaction with children, an awareness that is developed and explored in the living encounters with the child. Another practitioner describes the generative potential of her openness like this:

> I find that the more open and curious I am towards the child, the more I experience that the 'picture' I have of the child is only one of many. I now see how many competences the child has.

The descriptions also reflect that encounters are mutually constituted, and when practitioners engage themselves with individual children in new ways, their conception of the children is broaden. As I well elaborate much more in the next section of the analysis, this change in conception has a major impact on the child's well-being, its opportunities for fruitful participation and it's emergent understanding of 'who am I'. How the child is met has very much to do with how it's perceived. A nursery pedagogue realised:

> He is actually very loving and wants contact with the others…. The child's frustration due to lack of language skills was misunderstood in the past.

A family childcare provider has a similar experience:

> I used to find her a little difficult to deal with. Now I look forward to spending time with her.

When the practitioners cultivate their sensitivity to subtle variations in context and perspective, rather than relying on entrenched categorisations from the past, important insight can emerge. Langer et al. (2012) assumed that an adult with presence can develop openness to variations in context and perspectives rather than falling back on preconceptions and categorisations during an encounter. This study reveals that not only new conceptions of specific situations and children are made possible – new generative patterns of coaction are also possible. I find that the relational confluence both regard the conception of the child and the way he/she is met in coaction with the practitioner. A nursery pedagogue gives an example of this:

> I have gained more understanding of the child and like to work with the child now. I feel and see the child more clearly – am ready to let the child show the way to what he needs.

Making the coaction more meaningful to the child by following the child's initiatives has become an element of this practitioner's generative processes. The increased meta-awareness of the practitioner's own contribution to the encounter is also reflected in the following quote: 'I gave the child tools to navigate with when playing with the other children. Now the child has far fewer conflicts with other children'.

The practitioners describe in various ways how they are better equipped to contribute to encounters in multifaceted and varied ways, including addressing what the next step in the relationship with their selected child should be. A number of practice stories have an undertone of openness with the practitioners making room for new things to happen. A central aspect of this openness is that the children are welcomed in the meaning-making process of the encounters. The children's contributions to and understanding of the encounters are attributed meaning and importance. The practitioners contribute to children's being with an orientation towards generative relational processes that open up for new and enriching encounters. A number of descriptions provide insight into a relational intertwining of adults and children rather than viewing children as separate individuals:

> There is clearly a progression in my encounters with the child. When I choose to focus on a single child, I am more receptive to noticing nuances in the child's intentions. When I relate to the child in a more curious and focused way than I would otherwise do, I notice new aspects of the child and relate differently to him. Earlier, my assumptions regarding the child's competences and intentions were based largely on what I have heard colleagues say about him. My earlier image of the child was based on something that *was* the case rather than something that *is* the case now.

The nursery pedagogue went on to explain what happened when she tried to be extra attentive and open:

> The child also opens up towards me. He notices that his intentions are followed and supported. He very quickly adjusts to this new reality and develops competences/strategies in relation to his way of contacting other children and adults and in relation to having his wishes fulfilled. He relaxes much more and expects somehow to be seen for whom he is, which affects his encounters with the other adults. Whether it's the new way I am talking about him, or whether his new strategies make a difference, can be hard to say. It's probably the case that the two things together reinforce each other in a positive spiral. But I saw during this week that he relaxes more and his encounters with others have generally changed.

In Gergen's (2009) terminology, the nursery pedagogue's encounter with the child can be described as a generative process in which her availability and nurturing coactions are vital for the child's well-being and participation. The narrative illustrates how the nursery pedagogue experiences that the child is in the process of becoming a person and that her attentiveness towards the child results in the toddler's new ways of being. Encounters require mutuality, and when this happens, both the child and adult are in a generative process of relational being. The narrative illustrates, as Gergen (2009) points out, that there is no independent state from which a child can be described 'as it is' without considering the context and situation. In Gergen's terminology, the nursery pedagogue is expanding the scope of her

preferred actions and enabling experiences that help to shape what the child can do and know and how he understands himself and his community (Bruner 1997). When the nursery pedagogue explains that her 'image of the child is based on something that *was* the case rather than something that applies now', this can, in Langer's terminology, be described as an encounter brought to life. According to Langer (2000: 220), knowledge about the child, the relation and the encounter is brought to life when the practitioner engages in the present, notices new aspects and is sensitive to the ongoing moment. The fact that these processes are mutually constituted is also revealed in the following quote from a nursery pedagogue: 'When I experience that the child is receptive to my contact, it encourages me to continue. It makes me more curious about the child'. A family childcare provider experienced the same and wrote:

> I would almost dare to say that when we open up to another person in this way, we will inevitably get a more positive and far more multifaceted picture of the other person. This has great importance for the encounter and opportunities available to us both.

The Child's Participation Following the Adult's Adjustment of the Encounters

In the practice stories, there were many suggestions concerning how the adults try to establish a sense of presence and how their way of relating was to adjust in the coaction. Comments such as 'I stop and try to understand what is happening for the child', 'I try to hold back my interpretations a bit and stay more curious about what the child is trying to tell me' and 'I follow the child's initiatives and join in his play and activities' are repeated in the practice stories. One nursery pedagogue wrote that her openness towards the child's perspective has made her more patient and more able to adjust her attentiveness in the present moment. Others described how their efforts towards openness have prompted them to notice their own misunderstandings, e.g. regarding the children's intentions.

The narratives contain many different descriptions of how the adults' attentiveness to and adjustment of encounters expands the scope for the children's participation. For example, 'She has come out of her 'shell'. She interacts much more with the other children. She plays, talks and smiles more. She appears to display more curiosity and is more engaged'. 'She asks me for help if something is difficult. She didn't do that before. She used to be very quiet. Now she is more visible also in relation to the other adults'. 'He generally relaxes more and has become more involved with the other children. He has noticed my attentiveness and seeks me out more. He expects that I'll join him in his activities'. One family childcare provider described how only three of the four children in her daycare often play together while the fourth child (Jim) observed the others from a distance. She admitted that she had not been very aware of this until she decided to be more attentive to Jim, e.g. by following his initiatives and joining him in his play. Slowly, the other three children began to do the same, and more and more often, Jim's initiatives turned into

coactions involving all four children. In this case the adult's attentiveness towards a child was picked up and inspiring other children to be more attentive as well.

In her narrative, one family childcare provider described how her special attentiveness and adjustment of the encounter affected a child's participation in her group of children. In her introduction to the narrative, the family childcare provider described that 'Anna (1.6 years) is not very patient when she is hungry. She is a girl who often cries if she is admonished or doesn't get her way'. Anna attends the family childcare together with three other girls aged 2.10–2.11, all three approaching preschool. The family childcare provider was encouraged to consider what Anna is trying to communicate in these conflictual situations and how the family childcare provider's own way of relating influences the coaction. The family childcare provider wrote in her narrative:

> We are all sitting at the table, I am making open sandwiches and the children are telling me what they want on their bread. I pass the dish round and they can take the food they want themselves. I also pass the dish to Anna, who looks at me with a broad smile, as I usually give her a piece of bread. She happily takes a mackerel sandwich. The older children say they want 'pre-school sandwiches', so I cut theirs into quarters. I then take Anna's plate with the intention of cutting her sandwiches into bite-size pieces but Anna protests loudly and looks at me crossly. I ask if it is because she also wants pre-school sandwiches and Anna laughs and says YES. I cut hers into quarters too. Anna has some trouble handling the bread and soon she is covered in mackerel. But she's so happy because she can do the same as the other girls.

The family childcare provider wrote in her reflection on the episode that she initially considered cutting Anna's sandwich up. 'I don't want that kind of mess' she wrote, adding 'However, I decided that of course Anna should be allowed to try and eat pre-school sandwiches like the others'.

In this narrative it becomes possible to see how the adult's perception of the child is intertwined with her interpretation of the situation and her actions. Rather than allowing her actions to be governed by an 'automatic pilot' or a frustration over the child's resistance, the adult is able to put her routine reaction on standby and adjust her encounter with the child in a more fruitful direction. As Gergen (2009: 141) highlights, every impulse to 'do this' and 'not do this' represents a 'voice' from past relationships. The family childcare provider allowed her usual conception 'Anna is impatient and cries if she doesn't get her way' to be challenged and instead made space for an alternative understanding of what Anna was trying to communicate during the mealtime. With her adjustment 'of course Anna should be allowed to eat pre-school sandwiches', the family childcare provider adjusted her preconceptions of Anna and her anger. By opening up to investigate what Anna is trying to communicate in the situation, she confirms Anna as someone who can contribute to the community, which, in Gergen's terminology, opens up for Anna's engagement and enthusiastic participation (Gergen 2009). The family childcare provider's confirmation, which in principle can assume many different forms, from a smile, a nod, a glance to a touch or a verbal comment, should not be considered a means of deflating the child's confidence but as an acknowledgement of Anna as a participant in the process of creating meaning in everyday life. Anna has the opportunity to experience that she is cocreating the encounter and that the family childcare provider sees

and understands her intentions. Gergen (2009: 243) suggests that the primary aim of education is to enhance the potentials for participating in relational processes. In the above example, the family childcare provider makes new relational experiences possible for Anna and also opens new ways of participation.

As implied by the family childcare provider's subsequent reflection, openness and cocreation of practice is demanding. It involves, e.g. relinquishing limitations that one's perceptions and actions have been subjected to. Greater clarity about one's habitual practices and the impact they have on others may often be resisted. Davies expresses it in the following way:

> We may, without realizing it, be resistant to encounters in which we are open to being affected, because of unexamined attachments to some aspect of the status quo. (Davies 2014: 28)

In the above example, the practitioner's anticipation of the mess Anna would make with the mackerel sandwich prompts the practitioner to resist Anna's wish despite Anna's overt frustration. In Gergen's (2009) terminology, the family childcare provider made herself responsible for her relationship with Anna by maintaining a process in which coaction and participation can take new forms. The narrative also shows that even though both adults and children are carriers of patterns of actions and speech that can shape an encounter, the adult is in a privileged position (Bae 2004) when the encounter is to be brought in a more fruitful direction.

Discussion

There is presently a strong global focus on children's cognitive learning in toddler childcare settings. Also toddler childcare in Denmark is influenced by this global focus with an increased interest in instructional teaching and adult-controlled activities (Sommer 2015; Ahrenkiel 2015). As Ahrenkiel (2015) points out, there is a trend for increased use of standardised methods and tools in pedagogical work with toddlers in Denmark. These tools are often embedded in an individualistic view of children and an assessment rationality that is difficult to harmonise with attentiveness towards children's perspectives and a sociocultural learning perspective. Political demands for generalised descriptions of the pedagogical practice as expressed in the curriculums and the quality information demanded by the municipalities involve a risk of obscuring the focus on the complexity and dilemmas in creating fruitful encounters between adults and children (Svinth 2013). The Nordic social pedagogy and virtues such as a holistic view of children and child-centred everyday life in Danish toddler childcare settings (Ahrenkiel 2015) are challenged by these tendencies. Nursery pedagogues' and family childcare providers' relational processes as they are experienced here and now with children are underprioritised in the current political trends. Combined with financial cuts, Danish childcare settings are currently under great pressure. The current situation constitutes a barrier to pedagogical presence and attentiveness and the desire to move adult-child

interaction in a more fruitful direction. When research on the importance of adult-child interaction is taken into consideration, there is cause for concern.

Being attentive to the children is a very challenging task, and it is understandable why adults often fall back on what Langer et al. (2012) call mindless interaction with children. The pace of everyday life makes pedagogical presence difficult, especially if the conditions are not favourable. It is often easier to take behavioural cues from the past or use rules about effectiveness, rather than key into the ongoing situation with the child. It has major implications for children's well-being and learning if attentiveness to their perspectives and engaged participation is toned down. Developing pedagogical presence and adult-child encounters emphasising the child's experience must be prioritised ahead of programme techniques and standardisation.

Summary

During a participatory action research project, 85 nursery pedagogues and family childcare providers were invited to increase their attentiveness towards and encounters with a selected child for one week. The study found that children's participation is expanded when practitioners increase their attentiveness towards children's perspectives and respond to children's initiatives with cocreation of practice. The study shows how increased attentiveness towards children's perspectives changes the adults' conceptions of children and strengthens insight into the relational conditions for coaction and children's participation. The study describes how the practitioners create new opportunities for participation and being for the children through, e.g. setting aside habitual conceptions of individual children and situations. Using Gergen's (2009) terminology, the participants are said to step outside the individualistic tradition and address the relational condition for participation. The study shows how children's participation is cocreated and how the practitioners' actions invite and sustain the process of generating meaning, thereby contributing to the children's state of well-being and becoming. This underlines the importance of a shift in focus from individual children's competences and knowledge to a relational perspective in which participation and children's being are cocreated. Fruitful experiences with coaction shape not only what children can do and know but also how children see themselves and how they come to sense their own belonging (Bruner 1997). The study therefore draws attention to the limitations of perceiving people as separate entities, where children's actions are interpreted independently of relations and context. Children's opportunities for participation and being are cocreated with the practitioner's; hence, the adults' conceptions of the children have great importance for how they meet children and form fruitful opportunities for participation and being.

This transformative case study has several limitations. First of all, the intervention lasted only a week. Although some of the participants find that their relationship with their target child has changed dramatically, it is not possible to say whether the selected children's participation or sense of being in general has changed. In

many nurseries and family day-care homes, the conditions are not favourable. Although the practitioners managed to increase their attentiveness, conditions may not allow them to broaden this approach to all children. Last but not least the empirical grounding of this study is solely based on information from the practitioners. In further research it would be relevant to include observations of adult-child interaction to validate the narratives.

Every adult-child encounter is a potential pedagogical moment where important opportunities for participation and becoming are at stake. Even conflictual encounters can, as the study shows, be converted into curiosity and fascination when a practitioner holds herself back for a moment and become attentive to a child's perspective and engagement in the present moment.

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Chapter 10
Children and Pedagogues as Partners in Communication: Focus on Spacious and Narrow Interactional Patterns

Berit Bae

Abstract The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) has led to changes in early childhood education policies and practices in many countries. Taking Norway as a point of departure, it is interesting to note that the national curriculum guidelines emphasize that children's rights to participation shall be integrated into the work with the content (Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research 2006). Reading the official guidelines, it becomes clear that respect for children's views and various modes of expression shall be an integral part of the work of the pedagogues in Norwegian preschools (Norwegian Ministry 2006). This means that it does not suffice to invite children's views only at certain times or at specific decision-making or choice routines. Their right to participate must be taken into consideration in various kinds of everyday activities.

Introduction

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) has led to changes in early childhood education policies and practices in many countries. Taking Norway as a point of departure, it is interesting to note that the national curriculum guidelines emphasize that children's rights to participation shall be integrated into the work with the content (Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research 2006). Reading the official guidelines, it becomes clear that respect for children's views and various modes of expression shall be an integral part of the work of the pedagogues in Norwegian preschools (Norwegian Ministry 2006). This means that it does not suffice to invite children's views only at certain times or at specific decision-making or

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choice routines. Their right to participate must be taken into consideration in various kinds of everyday activities.[1]

This chapter deals with how relational qualities and communicative aspects create premises for children's participation. It explores how child-adult communication contributes to how everyday interactional processes evolve. Qualitative differences, described by the metaphors of spacious and narrow patterns, are interpreted in terms of their potential for children to express themselves and take part on their own terms. Towards the end of this chapter, the interactional qualities will be discussed in relation to other relevant research.

Background

Several researchers have addressed issues on what the right to participation means for children in different ages and situations (Kjørholt 2001; Schultz-Jørgensen 2000; Smith 2007). A brief sketch shows that various theoretical and methodological approaches have been employed to shed light on children's participation in practice. Some have interviewed children concerning aspects relevant for their right to participation in educational childcare (Eide and Winger 2005; Formosinho and Araujo 2004; Sheridan and Pramling Samuelsson 2001). Others have studied decision-making routines and children's choices in various situations (Bjarnadottir 2004; Kjørholt 2005; Seland 2009). Others still have analysed children's participation from the perspective of learning (Berthelsen and Brownlee 2005; Emilsson and Folkesson 2006; Johansson 2004; Pramling Samuelsson and Johansson 2009).

In his discussion Schultz-Jørgensen (2000) maintains that meeting children as subjects with rights must not be seen primarily as a pedagogical project, where adults transfer knowledge about their rights to participate. He emphasizes that children have an inborn right to be met as human beings and respected from the moment they are born. In line with this, other researchers, amongst them Woodhead (2005, 2008), hold that the principles put down in the UN Convention on children's rights are radical compared to traditional upbringing and adult roles. Along with Smith (2007), Woodhead (2005, 2008) argues that implementing articles 12 (participation), 13 (freedom of expression) and 14 (freedom of religion, thought) in practical situations challenges familiar ways of thinking about adult-child relationships and demands new role expectations for adults who take care of children. He concludes that the UN Convention does not only change the status of children but also changes the way we think about ourselves (Woodhead 2008:63).

I follow Woodhead and others pointing to the need for critical reflection on adult roles, when trying to realize children's participatory rights in practice. This means amongst other things that what goes on in everyday interactions must be critically analysed in terms of how adults allow space for children to express their thoughts and experiences. When looking at empirical research from early childhood educa-

[1] See Bae (2009a) and Bae (2010) for details on the Norwegian guidelines.

tion in the Nordic countries, it becomes apparent that the quality of the adult-child relationship varies according to childcare and pedagogues (Bae 2004; Emilsson and Folkesson 2006; Johansson 2003, 2004; Sheridan 2001). Some relations are characterized by warm, responsive and respectful ways of relating, whilst others are characterized by more distant and controlling modes. These qualitative variations indicate that unequal conditions exist when it comes to realizing children's right to participation in early childhood child care.

The above-mentioned differences might be interpreted in relation to adults' views of children and their own role in relation to them. Based on the analyses of staff views of children in Swedish child care, Johansson (2003, 2004) discerned three different groupings. These groupings were categorized as the following: (a) the child is a fellow being; (b) adults know better; and (c) the child is viewed as irrational. Such findings imply that relational conditions which influence on children's possibilities to express themselves are unevenly distributed. Some pedagogues and staff will face serious challenges in communicating respect for children's views and experiences. For instance, how is it possible to combine a view of children as irrational and at the same time show respect for their ways of communicating and right to participation?

In a study conducted in early childhood childcare in Norway, I have explored salient features of dialogues between children and pedagogues and observed how communicational acts of both partners influence the quality of the interaction (Bae 2004, 2009b). This study builds on theoretical grounds emphasizing equity and reciprocity in relations; hence both children and pedagogues are seen to *contribute* to how interactional processes evolve. Based on findings from this investigation, this chapter will address two central questions: What are the salient features in qualitatively different interactional patterns between pedagogues and children? How do various patterns create premises for recognizing children's subjectivities and their right to participation?

Studying Teacher-Child Interactions: A Norwegian Micro-ethnographic Study

Theoretical Perspectives

Before shedding light on the questions above, let me point to the need for critical thinking regarding theoretical perspectives on adult-child relationships. Theoretical concepts function as lenses which lead the attention towards what is focussed and how one interprets what happens in practice. Due to this theoretical positions/concepts are not neutral tools. In the context of early childhood education, it becomes important to reflect on what types of concepts and understandings are used when studying teacher-child interaction. As argued elsewhere (Bae 2004, 2005, 2009a; Rhedding-Jones et al. 2008), it seems necessary to take a critical stance towards the one-sidedness and unilateral way of thinking which dominates much theorizing

about adult-child relationships in early childhood education. As several researchers have pointed out, such research tends to take the perspective of adults for granted, seeing children primarily as objects for alteration and change (Canella 2002). Such unilateral approaches lead attention away from noticing children's verbal and non-verbal initiatives, making it difficult to see them as subjects in their own right. Hence, theoretical lenses which objectify children make it difficult to view children as active participants who contribute to shaping their relational experiences.

To counteract relational practices, which emphasize unilateral control on the part of the adult, it is useful to look for conceptualizations that lead the attention to the subjectivity and experiential world of children and at the same time depict pedagogues as emphatic human beings who are willing to make an effort in trying to understand children's points of view.

In an attempt to work in this direction, I have, in my research on teacher-child dialogues, chosen some concepts from Schibbye's (1992, 1996, 2002, 2009) dialectical understanding of relations. The conceptualization of *mutual recognition* has been a guiding theoretical tool. A crucial aspect of mutual recognition is being able to shift from one's own perspective to that of the other and to confirm the other's right to his or her own experience. Schibbye argues that shifting perspectives presupposes self-reflexivity in the sense that one is able to differentiate what goes on in one's own self from what goes on in others. Without a self-reflexive attitude, there is a risk that one takes one's own perspective for granted and becomes 'blind' to what children and other people are trying to express from their own point of view/perspective.

According to this line of reasoning, relationships characterized by mutual recognition are supposed to take care of two fundamental and opposing needs, which human beings experience in relationships, that is, the need for attachment/closeness, on the one hand, and the need for differentiation and individuality, on the other hand. As Schibbye (2002, 2009) argues, the idea of mutual recognition is in line with the thinking on intersubjectivity as understood by Stern (1985) and others. This means that if relationships are characterized by mutual recognition, they will be conducive to intersubjective encounters and provide interactional space for both partners to share thoughts, intentions and experiences.

I have found Schibbye's line of thinking fruitful for studying teacher-child dialogues, since it emphasizes that partners in interaction are of equal worth. It explicitly leads attention to how the teacher and the child create mutual conditions for each other's actions. It represents an alternative approach compared to research where the adult-child relationship is described from a one-sided perspective, objectifying children and taking the perspectives of adults for granted. Interactions and dialogues are not conceived as static or ready-made; hence they cannot be programmed through pre-packed methods and techniques or solved by a 'quick fix approach'. Interactions between children and pedagogues are conceived as 'processual' phenomena, where the subjectivities and communicational acts of those taking part influence how interactions evolve. In contrast to theories based on unilateral thinking, conceptualizations on intersubjectivity and mutual recognition have the potential of shedding light on teacher-child dialogues as reciprocal encounters. In the microanalytic study described below, this kind of thinking was used as a point

of departure to explore how qualitative aspects of dialogues between pedagogues and children create premises for recognizing children as subjects in their own right.

Methodological Approach

The study is based on a qualitative methodology, inspired from different fields, notably clinical psychology and micro-ethnography. Two preschool pedagogues, working with children aged 3–6, were followed by a participant observer for almost a year. In total 14 children were chosen as target children. Everyday interactions between the pedagogues and the 14 children were video-filmed in three different situations: mealtime, circle time and free play period. The filming was done in short periods of 3 days a month in each institution from August to May the following year.

For the purpose of interpreting and analysing qualitative aspects of the dialogues, Schibbye's *part process analysis method* was chosen (Schibbye 2002, 2009; Løvlie 1982). This method helps to delineate short sequences (part processes) based on video-filmed material. Observers take note of what theme is in focus of the interaction, along with interpreting experiential qualities based on nonverbal communication. By describing and interpreting what is said and communicated by both partners, this methodological approach captures some of the flow of the interaction. At the same time it leads the attention to the experiences of the individual children and pedagogues taking part. The combination of the data collection design and this observational method generated a rich source of descriptive material of micro-level processes, totalling 730 part processes. Over the years the transcribed interactions have been used as a 'pool' to analyse different aspects of the teacher-child relationship (Bae 2004, 2005, 2009a, b, c).

As I have described elsewhere (Bae 2004, 2005), the analyses of the video material evolved through different steps in the course of the research process. One important finding was that when analysing interactions across contexts, it became evident that some interactional themes occur both at mealtime, in circle time and in free play periods. Based on the empirical material, I categorized the themes under the following headings: (a) conversations, (b) practical cooperation, (c) playfulness/humour and (d) setting of limits. These themes were created inductively, and they seem valid in relation to the social ecology of early childhood settings. Any adult working with children in early childhood settings will – to a greater or lesser extent – be involved in interactions around these four themes.

Analytical Tools: Two Contrasting Interactional Patterns

In trying to shed light on the research questions regarding qualitative differences in teacher-child interactions, I looked for variations and contrasts within the pool of transcribed interactions (730 part processes). To bring forth theoretically interesting

differences, two contrasting patterns were created as analytical tools. They are described by the metaphors of *spacious and narrow interactional patterns*. In all three observational contexts (mealtime, circle time and free play), there were examples of these two contrasting types. It was also possible to observe both spacious and narrow patterns within each of the four different interactional themes. Interactions focussed on, for instance, conversations, practical cooperation, playfulness and setting of limits might be communicated in ways that made the interactional atmosphere either spacious or narrow. On these grounds I concluded that the qualitative differences were not spurious, and they could be termed *patterns*.

Before describing salient communicational features within each pattern, I would like to briefly discuss how these metaphors emerged. Observing the interactional sequences on the video, my intuitive experience was that some of the processes were characterized by vitality, openness, movement and freedom for both adults and children to express themselves. Other interchanges appeared as being more constricted, with less vitality and space for self-expression for both partners, often ending on a 'low key' in terms of the child's vitality. Taking all the transcribed sequences as a database, I looked for qualitative variations between the sequences. The focus was on how they differed in terms of validating the child's vitality. In order to bring forth theoretically relevant variations, I kept the conceptualizations on mutual recognition and intersubjectivity in mind. The terms spacious and narrow seemed to capture some of the experiential quality of the dialogues. They refer to the interactional space which is created between the teacher and the children and describe what I would call a *processual quality.*

It is important to note that the terms narrow and spacious are not used as classifications of persons or individual dispositions. Contrary to much thinking on relations, the interaction is not interpreted in terms of individual traits. In the study both pedagogues were observed taking part in interactions of varying quality. Depending on the situation, the individual child or the content of the interaction, the pedagogues were sometimes involved in spacious patterns and sometimes in narrow ones. On this background it is meaningful to say that both the pedagogues and the children come forth as living, experiencing human beings, involved in complex processes affected by many factors.

Results

Some Salient Features in Spacious Patterns

In the following, I attempt to give an idea of what constitutes salient features of interactional processes of a spacious kind. The analytical approach is grounded in interpretation, with the aim of enriching the understanding of what goes on in everyday interchanges. Based on what is communicated both verbally and nonverbally, the interchange is interpreted in terms of how the communication seems to recognize the children in their experiential world and how the process might promote their participation.

The space of this chapter limits a detailed discussion of various patterns.[2] It is important to keep in mind, however, that it is not one single communicational act or aspect which leads to spacious or narrow interaction. It is how several aspects are combined in processes, which evolves over time that determines the quality of the dialogue.[3]

Children's Contribution

I have chosen the term *contribution* in order to bring attention to the fact that children are active contributors in interactions with their pedagogues. Such a focus challenges perspectives where children might be seen primarily as objects and receivers of adults' actions. This view often goes together with an adult role, where the primary functions are to evaluate, correct or stimulate whatever the children bring to the interaction.

One of the interesting features which came to the fore in my analyses was the way children used what I called *attention markers* as starting point to involve the adult in some kind of interaction (Bae 2004, 2009a). Nonverbal cues like touching, trying to get eye contact with the teacher, leaning forward or pointing to something in front of them were important signals when addressing adults. They also used artefacts like toys or material thing and during mealtime things such as slices of carrots, orange peels or the like. The use of artefacts was usually accompanied by some kind of verbal comments, such as the following: *Shall I tell you something? You know what?* Or just *You!* Albeit individual differences in style, all the children contributed to the interaction in some way or another.

In spacious patterns it is often observed that children spontaneously share thoughts and experiences, be they stories from home, from holidays or from the kindergarten. They seem eager to spontaneously 'chain in' (Wood et al. 1980) regarding ongoing conversations, contributing with their association to the dialogue. Looking at the ways children express themselves, much individuality comes to the fore. Some children are very articulate communicators both verbally and nonverbally (through body language); whilst others share their initiatives in a more quiet, less strong voice. Despite their various communicational styles, the children's initiatives are visible, and they are responded to with interest. Hence, the spacious patterns seem to create interactional space for diverse *individual expressions* to be validated.

When analysing the interactional sequences in my study, *questioning* came forth as a dominant feature. At a closer look, variations came to the fore, as to who asked questions and in what way. It was interesting to note that in interchanges of a spacious kind, children tended to ask questions. Instead of being at the receiving end of the pedagogues' closed questions, the children themselves contributed with active

[2] See Bae (2004) for a full presentation of the study.

[3] When I first started the project, the analytical approach was focused on separate communicational acts on the part of the teacher, a strategy that proved a failure in terms of the data, theoretical development and collaboration with the pedagogues (see Bae 2005).

questioning. This could be when they were in doubt regarding factual knowledge. One instance showed a girl listening to a story about lions asking *Do lions (teeth) live in America or in Africa?* Or children could be uncertain whether they had perceived a message from the teacher correctly. For instance, when instructed to fetch some books in some neighbouring room, one boy comes back to check out whether he has understood the message right. In such cases the children actively collaborate in a way which leads to a successful result (the book is brought from the other room). When children ask questions, they create a premise for a teacher's role where she/he comes forth as a source of knowledge or as support in problem solving.

Still another feature in spacious patterns is that a *playful attitude and playful initiatives* often appear, both on the initiative of the child and that of the teacher. In my study playful initiatives and interactions were observed in all kinds of situations and contexts. At mealtimes, for instance, it happened that children began to play with things on the table, like a napkin, a piece of fruit, etc., inviting the teacher to join in a playful dialogue. In spacious patterns, the teacher is observed to respond positively to these kinds of humorous initiatives, following up in the same as-if mode. One example shows a 4-year-old girl, who is usually very shy and does not use many words when communicating with others, taking a more active role. During mealtime she spontaneously begins to play with various things at the table, for example, she pretends that an orange peel is a turtle which bites the teacher's hand. The teacher and the girl keep their common focus on the 'turtle', and they repeat the same playful dialogue several times (Bae 2004, 2009a).

When taking part in reciprocal playful interactions, children and adults might be connected in a spirit of joyful vitality. Interpreted in terms of the theoretical perspectives, such moments can be seen as illustrations of intersubjectivity at work in early childhood settings. They illustrate that children and adults are not locked in positions on opposite sides of a divide. As I interpret it, confirmation of playful initiatives contributes to interactive processes where children and adults take part on equal terms.

It is also interesting to note that in spacious patterns there is *room for making mistakes*, a point which will be explored below. The interactional atmosphere seems to invite both partners to share, allowing them to change positions if needed. The child's experiential world is validated along with that of the teacher. My theoretical interpretation is that such patterns mediate mutual recognition between children and adults, and they support children in efforts to express their own views.

The Teacher's Contribution

When we look at the teacher's communication in spacious patterns, one distinctive feature seems to create conditions for children's active contribution: the teacher's *attentive and focussed presence of mind.* Such presence of mind creates premises for noticing the children's attention markers and for responding to them in confirming ways. The analyses show that in the spacious patterns, the teacher is *focussed on*

where the children have their attention, be that on a thing/artefact they are handling, something they are looking or pointing at or some idea that they are trying to express. Such focus creates premises for joint involvement in a nonverbal or verbal dialogue. Hence, it makes sense to argue that the teacher's focussed attention is conducive to children's active participation.

When analysing the ways pedagogues respond, another salient feature becomes noticeable. Embedded in the pedagogues' presence of mind seems to be an *openness towards the children's metacommunicative signals* such as tone of voice, facial expressions, bodily posture and other kinds of nonverbal cues. Such cues might be interpreted to convey feelings or the children's experiences in the situation. Responding to these cues, the pedagogues' communication is observed to be expressive. She uses her tone of voice, facial expression and bodily posture in an effort to attune to the child's emotional mood, be it playfulness, uncertainty, excitement, appeal, wonderment, tiredness or whatever.

Another salient feature is that both pedagogues are observed to be *tolerant of mistakes or incorrect ways of expressing things*. Correctness is not underlined as a prominent value, and children are not punished or humiliated in front of others, if they make mistakes. For instance, when children use an incorrect word or communicate language mistakes, the pedagogues interpret what the children express with a benevolent attitude. One interchange shows a girl who tells about how she drove a *radioactive* car with her father in a fun park. Her contribution is received by a teacher who listens empathically and tries to understand. Instead of attending to the mistake – the expression radioactive car – with a 'public' correction, her listening attitude conveys that she interprets the child's communication in a benevolent way. Another example illustrating tolerance for mistakes shows a boy who eagerly waves his hand pointing to a calendar on the wall behind him and accidentally comes to turn over a glass of milk and make a mess on the table. Instead of scolding him or commenting on his actions in a derogatory way, the teacher asks him to fetch a cloth so that he can contribute to cleaning up the mess on the table. He immediately runs to fetch a cloth and they collaborate in cleaning the table. These illustrations show how the relationship between pedagogues and children has space for imperfection.

An interesting feature is that in spacious interchanges there are *relatively few questions from the teacher.* When they arise, they are often communicated with an open, wondering tone of voice, mediating that the teacher is not seeking one specific answer. Along with this the teacher is sometimes observed asking questions to check out that she has understood what the child means. For instance, when the girl referred to above asks whether *lion's teeth* (which is the name of a flower in Norwegian) lives in America or in Africa, the teacher asks her in an open tone of voice whether she means *lions*? By this the teacher contributes to the interactional process with an attitude of respect for the girl's view. The conversation continues in a way where both the girl and the teacher acquire the opportunity to share knowledge. My interpretation is that spacious patterns mediate that it is OK to ask questions when in doubt and that this goes for both pedagogues and children. The dialogical atmosphere seems to enhance a spirit of curiosity and conveys that it is OK to share your insecurity.

In the course of the analyses, one type of interchange struck me as especially interesting. In conversations it sometimes happened that the teacher asked questions implying one specific answer, which the child was unable to provide. In some interactions when the pedagogues were setting limits for a child's behaviour, they sometimes communicated this in an abrupt or strict way, which seemed to make the child confused and/or embarrassed. Such sequences could easily have turned into a narrow pattern, which is often rounded off at a 'low key', void of the initial vitality.

The analyses showed, however, that on several occasions the teacher seemed to notice that she had misinterpreted the child's initial communication. She became more sensitive to the child's nonverbal and bodily cues, which in these instances could be interpreted as communicating embarrassment of some sort (see also Bae 2004). As a response to these, she recomposed herself and invited the child anew to take part. My interpretation of such interchanges is that the teacher realizes that her communication has been way off in ways which are not pleasant and might be hurtful from the child's point of view.

Interpreted in terms of the theoretical concept of mutual recognition, the pedagogues can be said to practice self-reflection, a process which includes being able to change perspective and take the position of the other. By empathizing with the child, the teacher takes responsibility for the painful situation she has created. She admits that she misunderstood or asked a silly question and invites the child to express once more what he or she had in mind. By acknowledging her own shortcomings, the teacher gives the child a new chance to share. Such interchanges mediate that pedagogues, as well as children, are fallible human beings liable to make mistakes. Moreover, children get the opportunity to experience that misunderstandings and unpleasant feelings do not necessarily destroy the relationship. When acknowledged, troublesome interactions have the potential of creating feelings of connection amongst human beings who are different in other respects.

Based on a theoretical interpretation, I suggest that in a dialogical atmosphere, with the salient features described above, children get the possibility to experience that the teacher tries to understand and share their interests and concerns. The open dialogical space conveys respect for their intentions. This in turn makes children more liable to take the initiative and pursue what they have in mind and to experience that they can influence what happens to them. It seems reasonable to argue that such relational experiences support the realization of children's participatory rights.

Looking at the variety of modes through which pedagogues express themselves in spacious patterns, one might also conclude that children's initiative and vitality seem to bring forth a wide range of the pedagogues' repertoire, such as attentiveness, knowledge, empathy, playfulness and self-reflexivity to mention a few qualities. Both children and adults can be said to share from their perspective in a variety of ways and moods and to influence each other reciprocally. Without relinquishing teacher's responsibility and authority, the spacious patterns include moments of intersubjective sharing between children and pedagogues. The spacious patterns seem conducive to validating children's experiences and creating a relational space for experiencing both similarity and difference.

Some Salient Features in Narrow Patterns

As a contrast to what comes to the fore in spacious patterns, I will now briefly touch upon what constitutes of what I term narrow patterns. The main difference is that in these patterns the teacher seems to be much more in control of how the interactional processes develop. Hence the children are put in the role of primarily responding to whatever initiatives the teacher takes. Because the teacher comes forth as the dominating partner, I will begin with sketching the teacher's contribution to shaping the premises of interchanges of a narrow kind.

The Teacher's Contribution

When analysing how the children's initiative and attention markers are responded to, the reactions seem more unpredictable compared to the spacious processes. The analyses show that the teacher tends to be less attentive and not focussed on where the children have their attention, be that things, artefacts or sharing experiences. Her metacommunicative cues – interpreted from tone of voice, bodily posture and facial expression – are less expressive and convey less interest in whatever the children take the initiative to share. More often than not, the teacher is seen to respond primarily to the verbal content of the child's communication and is less attentive to the experiential mood of the children, communicated by various nonverbal cues. Hence, the teacher comes across as more emotionally distant.

In many instances the teacher seems primarily preoccupied with pursuing her own agenda, such as asking questions, keeping it orderly around the table or in the circle and reminding the children of rules rather than being attentive to where the child has his/her focus. Combined with being less emotionally expressive, such communication creates dialogical premises where children get less support for expressing their own views.

Along with teacher's behaviour which tends to be less *sensitive to the nonverbal and metacommunicative signals of the child*, the turns of dialogues tend to be controlled by the pedagogues' initiatives. This becomes evident through a tendency *to ask many questions* where the adult already has the answer. One of the main differences between spacious and narrow patterns was that the narrow processes were often controlled by pedagogues asking questions of a closed or rhetorical kind, in other words questions with a predetermined answer. Examples here could be the following: *What day is it today? What is the name of the bird's mouth?* Or *what comes after autumn?* If the children do not come up with the expected answer, the teacher herself answers the question.

Another interesting difference between the two patterns is seen when it comes to setting limits. Compared to the way limits are communicated within spacious processes, where the teacher clearly communicates what she experiences in the situation and what she expects from the children, the narrow patterns are more one-sided in the sense that the communication tends to focus on children's behaviour as faults or shortcomings. Along with this the teacher's communication often carries a tone

of anger or irritation, and the message might come across in an abrupt manner or it might contain *degrading* comments. Due to the one-sidedness and negative focus, such patterns carry the potential for children to feel humiliated in front of others. Interpreted in terms of the theoretical perspective, the pedagogues show less self-reflection or willingness to admit mistakes/misunderstandings.

Another noticeable difference is that pedagogues and children *share less of playful and humorous actions.* Compared to what evolves within spacious patterns, the tone of the communication and the interactional atmosphere are on the whole more *serious.*

The Children's Contribution

It is interesting to note that in response to the many questions from the teacher, children **a**re often observed to make an effort in *trying to come up with a satisfying answer.* They venture with various suggestions and try to make their contribution to the ongoing dialogue. The content of their contribution is, however, to a large extent controlled by the teacher's questions and/or evaluative comments. For instance, when the teacher asks a question pursuing one specific answer and the children try to come up with a satisfying answer, they are often met by an evaluation of a reluctant kind, what I call *yes-but answers.* An example is when the teacher pursues the question regarding what comes after the autumn, many children come up with suggestions like *my birthday*, *my daddy comes home*, *St. Lucias' Day*, etc. The teacher nods and goes on to ask *what else comes after autumn*, indicating that she is not fully satisfied with the answers. This mediates that the children's contribution is not good enough. Another controlling response is that the children's answers might be 'drowned' in an enthusiastic praise, which emphasize the adult's position as an evaluator, more than the child's position as a contributor. Comments that judge or evaluate whatever contribution the children may venture tend to lock the children in a position where their energy goes to finding the correct answer. Instead of following up on their own thoughts and intentions, the children tries to find a response that satisfies the teacher.

In contrast to what is observed in interactional processes of a spacious kind, where more of children's input to the interaction originates from their own initiatives, there are also fewer questions posed by children. By referring to rules like speaking one at a time or pursuing a theme which is on the pedagogue's agenda, the interaction is more controlled and creates less space for the children to spontaneously share their experiences, questions and associations. The children are put in the role of responding to the premises of the adult; hence, the interactional space to participate on their own terms will be narrowed. Likewise, the teacher creates a narrower space for what she herself gets back from the children with regard to their thoughts and feelings. The quality of the relationship between pedagogues and children will be less rich in terms of what they share with reference to knowledge and emotions.

When analysing the narrow processes from start to end, it is interesting to note that such interactions are often rounded off by a *withdrawal on the part of the child.* This is **c**ommunicated by children looking down or away and sometimes with an irritated or embarrassed look on their face. The interest and vitality expressed through their attention markers at the start seem to have disappeared at the end of the interaction. One interpretation could be that the many closed questions and evaluative comments lead to cautiousness and/or reluctance. Such responses might create doubt whether or not spontaneous sharing of thoughts and experiences is OK. A combination of aspects seems to make the narrow patterns less conducive to children participating and pursuing thoughts and ideas, which are important from their perspective.

In contrast to the spontaneous sharing and flexibility of positions observed in spacious patterns, the narrow interactional patterns seem to cast both children and adults in more *constricted and less generous roles.* The interaction limits both partners when it comes to expressing themselves and, hence, creates a restricted space for sharing from their subjective worlds. On the whole, children's space for participating is more controlled, and the experiential quality of the dialogues does not promote intersubjective sharing. Within this kind of relational atmosphere, children's right to participate on their own terms is not enhanced the way it is within spacious patterns.

Discussion

As shown in this chapter, communicational qualities inherent in spacious interactional patterns open up the dialogical atmosphere between children and adults and create relational premises for children to exercise their right to participate and express their views. Salient features in such dialogues are a focussed attention on the part of pedagogues; tolerance of mistakes; willingness to admit misunderstandings; relatively few closed questions, along with emotional expressivity; and a playful attitude. Analyses show that when such features dominate dialogues, they create premises for both children and adults to express their subjectivities and contribute to these dialogues. Neither children nor pedagogues need to be cast in fixed and limited roles. Relations characterized by the above features point to a democratic teacher role, in line with the challenges emphasized in research discussing the realization of children's participatory rights.

These findings are confirmed by other studies (Emilsson 2008; Johansson 2004; Pramling-Samuelsson and Johansson 2009; Sandvik 2009). In her study of what contributes to a democratic upbringing in early childcare centres, Emilsson (2008) finds that in order to change power structures in teacher-child interactions, three aspects are important: (a) pedagogues' closeness to the child's perspective, (b) their emotional presence and (c) their playfulness. These aspects resemble qualities which come to the fore in what I have called spacious patterns. Pramling-Samuelsson and Johansson's (2009) study also shows that children take the initiative to involve

their pedagogues in play and playful activities. They argue that it is important that the pedagogues are physically and mentally present in the child's world, in order to be able to support play and learning in early childhood education.

As I have argued elsewhere (Bae 2006, 2010, 2012), play and playful interaction can be interpreted as a practice where children exercise their freedom of speech and of thought. On this background, it is interesting that empirical findings from early childhood settings seem to confirm that playfulness contributes to a democratic atmosphere. This point is emphasized by Emilsson (2008), who concludes that an attitude of playfulness is of central importance in a democratic upbringing in early childhood childcare. In addition to contributing to realizing the goals of early childhood education, my study also points in the direction that playfulness – and being involved in playful interactions – is of importance to pedagogues' professional vitality and development. At this point the analyses corroborate with Edmiston's (2008) study of play. One of his main conclusions is that adults might join children in their play in ways that are deeply satisfying for themselves, as well as ethically educating for the children. Engaging with children's play seems to foster vitality for both adults and children and can be mutually satisfying.

At the same time, research on teacher-child interaction from many countries documents interactional patterns featured by greater control from the teacher through closed questions and evaluative comments (Buzzelli 1995, 1996; Emilsson and Folkesson 2006; Haug 1992; Rogoff 2003). This interactional style, which is in line with some of the salient features found in narrow patterns, tends to cast both children and adults into fixed positions, limiting children's participation and their opportunities for expressing thoughts and feelings. Interpreted from the perspective of mutual recognition, interactional patterns dominated by these features do not enhance children's participation, taking part on their own terms. Nor are they conducive to a dialogical atmosphere where children and adults can share experiences and discover that, in spite of differences, they are human beings able to be connected and enjoy each other's presence.

The fact that communicational aspects inherent in narrow patterns can be observed in teacher-child dialogues in different countries and child care suggests that they represent some sort of cultural heritage or educational prototypes and are expressions of deep-seated attitudes regarding communication in learning contexts. This in turn emphasizes the need to take a critical look at theoretical perspectives and focus on consciousness raising with regard to ingrained attitudes which might be taken for granted (Bae 2009a).

Based on my analyses, the picture is not, however, black and white. The children and pedagogues in my study take part in – to a greater or lesser extent – some spacious and some narrow encounters. In my view the categories of spacious and narrow patterns *cannot be seen as an either-or dichotomy*. The interactional atmosphere of any early childhood context is full of complexity. Thus, persons, attitudes, materials and organizational aspects might create premises for qualitative differences in interactions. The variations in my analyses, both amongst the children and in the pedagogues' ways of meeting them, lead to the conclusion that creating conditions for intersubjective encounters and democratic relationships is a very complex

matter. Such relationships cannot be accomplished by simply focussing on special communicational techniques or using programmes or instruments. As indicated in this chapter, it demands a respect for the children's initiatives and experiences combined with a self-reflexive attitude, including the ability to take the perspective of the other and a willingness to change positions.

One approach to understand more about how dominating discourses undermine intersubjectivity and democratic relations might be to critically reflect on dominant ways of conceptualizing the relationship between pedagogues and children. Using practical examples or narratives as a background for reflecting on differences between spacious and narrow patterns might be another approach. Keeping in mind that in everyday interaction diverse patterns and qualities are likely to come to the fore; both spacious and narrow patterns should be looked at with interest. My suggestion is that they can be used as analytical tools and taken as a point of departure for asking critical questions regarding one's own practice. It might be useful to ask questions like the following: 'Is the staff/teacher attentive to the children's attention markers and initiatives?' Or 'where do all the closed questions come from?' 'Why are there so much control and so little room for spontaneity and playfulness in some relations?' Critical reflection on such questions is a way to become more aware of conceptions and ways of communicating which are usually taken for granted in early childhood contexts. Collaborative work, where preschool staff has reflected along these lines, has been proven fruitful in becoming more conscious of adult roles and communicative aspects in everyday interactions (Bae 2009d).

Concluding Comments: Looking Ahead

Given all the diversity there is in any preschool, creating conditions for children's participation and democratic dialogues between children and pedagogues requires an insight, an open perception and a commitment to respecting children as human beings. Such attitudes enhance encounters where children and adults get the possibility to transgress the divide between them and meet as communicational partners, leading to moments of reciprocal sharing. Embedded in spacious interactional patterns is the potential for democratic encounters and for realizing children's right to participation.

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Chapter 11
How Positive Childhood Experiences Promote Children's Development of Democratic Skills in Denmark

Charlotte Ringsmose and Grethe Kragh-Müller

Abstract The development of children as democratic citizens is a strong focus in Danish/Scandinavian child care tradition. Danish children and youth people perform at a high level (take first place) in international studies that measure being prepared for living and acting in a democratic society. Due to cultural and historical values, the foundation for the development of democratic skills is shaped through policies, culture, and practices in families, primary school, and child care. Listening to and giving children an influence on their everyday lives in lived democracy is an important part of the culture from very early on.

A central part of the Danish/Scandinavian tradition in child care is the emphasis on listening to the children's perspectives on everyday life and giving them an influence in both child care and school. At the same time, we find that Danish children and young people perform at a high level (take first place) in international studies that measure being prepared for living and acting in a democratic society. In the International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS) (Schulz et al. 2008), a comparative study on young people's preparation for undertaking their roles as citizens in a range of countries and on the influence of globalization in the twenty-first century, Danish students take first place in knowledge of democracy and society.

The same studies also show that Danish children and youth have a high level of knowledge about the economic, political, and democratic organization of society. Even the less-advantaged children in Danish society perform at a high level. PISA

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surveys show that Danish students have faith in themselves and their surroundings (Mejding 2004; Egelund 2007). They show great skills in teamwork; they like to go to school and take responsibility for their own learning.

In this chapter of the book, we will explore how Danish policies, culture, and practices in families, primary school, and child care lay the foundation for the development of democratic skills and character formation in children and the challenges connected to it.

First the theoretical background for the study will be presented. After looking into the political level—the Danish society and the national laws for Danish schools and child care—we will move on to looking at the Danish historical and cultural values of democracy underlying children's everyday lives. Finally we will trace how the policies, legislation, values, and theories underlie and influence everyday practices in child care and schools.

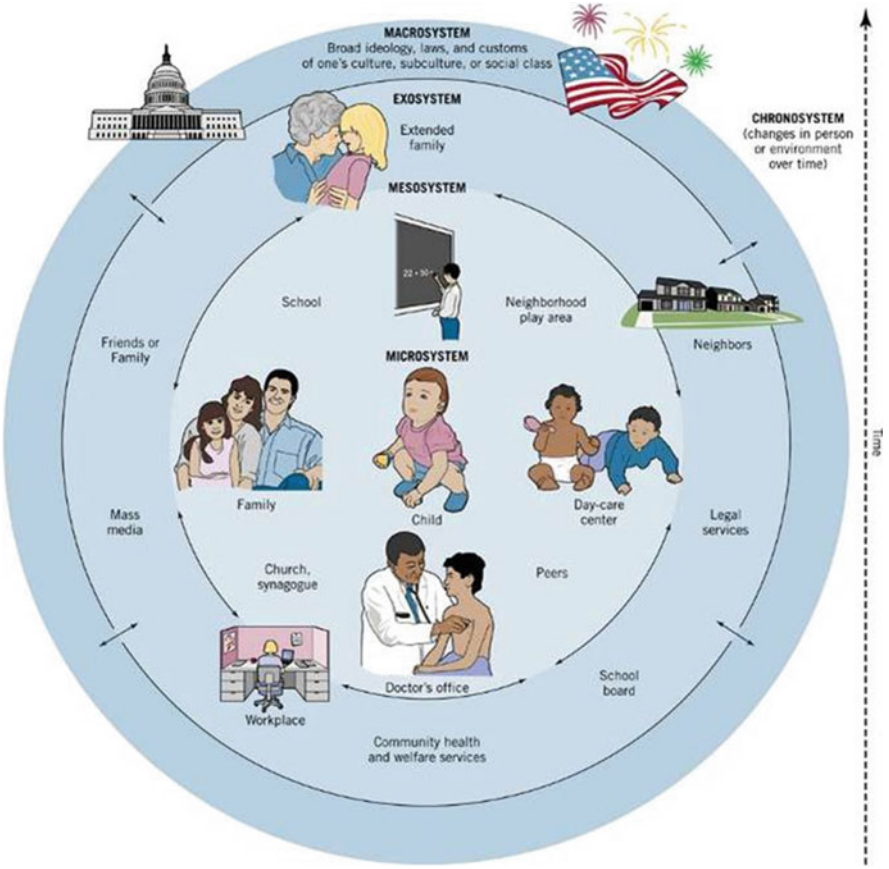
Theoretical Perspectives and Methods for the Study

In order to explore how childhood experiences promote development of democratic citizens, we base the analysis on sociocultural theories of children's development (Bronfenbrenner, Vygotsky, & Holzkamp). In this theoretical framework, children are considered active participants of the society and culture in which they are born. Development takes place through the children's active participation in that society and culture. Through participation in traditions, daily routines, and rituals of family and child care, the child gains understanding and constructs meaning of society.

Vygotsky's (1982) theory, developed further by Holzkamp (2005) and Dreier (2008), describes human development as embedded in a socio-historical-cultural process connected to culture and history. According to Vygotsky (2004), every psychological function is represented twice: first as a collective activity and social action (inter-psychological) and second as an individual activity (intra-psychological).

Significant adults, as well as other children, influence everyday practices in child care and families, sharing cultural values, discourses, cultural artifacts, and ways of thinking (Kragh-Müller 2010). As the number of children who spend their days in child care has increased significantly in Denmark over the past 35 years (today, 98% of Danish children attend child care), child care staff play an important role in children's development as family.

Developmental psychologist Urie Bronfenbrenner (1917–2005) introduced the ecological systems theory (*The Ecology of Human Development*, 1979) to describe how different sociocultural systems interactively influence children's development. This model provides us with an understanding of how children's development and learning are influenced by society and culture, from the macro to the micro level. This model will be used as a structure for the chapter.



The microsystem represents the child's closest relations: parents, siblings, relatives, neighbors, and peers. The mesosystem refers to the relations between two or more microsystems in which the child is an active participant. The exosystem refers to social relations that are important to the child's family/caretakers and thereby indirectly influence the child: workplaces, local businesses, colleges, friends, media, etc. Finally, the macrosystem refers to society systems: government, administration, legislation, rules, and values. All these systems interact and influence children's development.

In order to analyze everyday practices (e.g., the relationship between teachers and children in child care), we also base the study on Loevlie Schibbye's (Schibbye 2002) theory on acknowledging relationships. Schibbye describes how relationships between adults and children in which the adult listens to the child in order to understand a given matter from the child's perspective lay the foundation for the child's character development (e.g., the development of self, self-esteem, and social competencies).

Methodologically, we will draw upon surveys and studies, and the implications of the studies will be analyzed and discussed in order to understand how policy, culture, and positive childhood experiences influence quality in school and preschool and thereby enhance or limit children's participation and development of democratic skills. We will point to specific aspects of positive childhood experiences that lead to this development.

The Danish Society: The Nordic Model

Denmark is a small country in Scandinavia with a population of 5.5 million people. The welfare state economy provides an equitable distribution of income, and most public services (e.g., medical services, hospitals, homes for elderly people, schools, universities, etc.) are funded by taxes.

At a macro level, and in order to understand how children develop democratic skills, living and growing up in a democratic society is linked to democracy development. An international comparative study covering 1995–2005 puts Denmark in first place when it comes to democracy (http://videnskab.dk/kultur-samfund/verdens-bedste-demokrati-er-dansk).

Country[a]	1990	1995	2000	2007
Denmark	1	1	2	1
Finland	2	2	1	2
Sweden	3	4	3	3
Iceland	5	6	6	4
Norway	4	3	4	5
Canada	6	7	7	6
Belgium	8	5	5	7
Germany	7	10	10	8
Switzerland	12	13	11	9
New Zealand	14	11	8	10
Netherlands	9	8	12	11
Slovenia	–	12	15	12
Luxembourg	15	16	14	13
United States	11	9	9	14
Australia	10	14	17	15
Austria	13	18	21	16
Spain	18	15	16	17
Hungary	22	20	13	18
Portugal	19	21	19	19
Ireland	17	17	18	20
Czech Republic	28	19	20	21
Malta	24	25	25	22
Italy	16	22	22	23

(continued)

Country[a]	1990	1995	2000	2007
Cyprus	26	24	23	24
Japan	21	26	28	25
Poland	20	23	24	26
United Kingdom	25	28	29	27
France	23	29	27	28
South Africa	29	27	26	29
Costa Rica	27	30	30	30

Source: Democracy barometer.org
[a]Country ordered by their Quality of Democracy Ranking in 2007

The Nordic countries score high in terms of democracy. These countries have social welfare systems and free market economies with high standards of living in common. The Nordic countries also share some of the same cultural and historical values, which contribute to the formation of a strong and consistent democracy.

Denmark is also singled out among countries in a major international survey regarding creative capacity (*Europe in the Creative Age*, Professor Richard Florida and Irene Tinagli, Demos 2004). The skills of democracy and creative capacity are probably linked and form a good basis for living in a postmodern society with its high demand for innovation and creative thinking.

National School Policies and Legislation That Support Development of Democracy

On a macro level, national policymaking plays an important role in creating opportunities for children's development as democratic citizens. This development begins at an early age. Culture and everyday practices likewise influence children beginning in early childhood.

In the twenty-first century, school and child care/preschool play a crucial role in preparing children for their future roles in society. The Danish public school system attaches importance to character development and social qualifications, as well as academic qualifications. The same is true in child care.

This way of looking at school and child care is partly a reflection of policies and legislation. The national laws for both the public schools and child care in Denmark state that the aims of the school/child care are not only to teach children academic subjects but also to support the children's character or personality development.

National Laws for Public Schools in Denmark The Danish "folkeskole" (kindergarten, elementary, and middle school) is a comprehensive school. Emphasis is put on knowledge and skills, as well as on the child's personal and social development as an active participant in a society (and school) that is based on democracy. The children gain confidence in their own possibilities and learn independent judgment.

Laws for the Danish public school, "folkeskolen":

- The folkeskole shall, in cooperation with the family, further the students' acquisition of knowledge, skills, working methods, and ways of expressing themselves and thus contribute to the all-round personal development of the individual student.
- The folkeskole shall endeavor to create such opportunities for experience, industry, and absorption that the students develop awareness, imagination, and an urge to learn, so that they acquire confidence in their own possibilities and a background for forming independent judgments and for taking personal action.
- The folkeskole shall familiarize students with Danish culture and contribute to their understanding of other cultures and of man's interaction with nature. The school shall prepare students for active participation, joint responsibility, rights, and duties in a society based on freedom and democracy. The teaching of the school and its daily life must therefore build on intellectual freedom, equality, and democracy.

These aims are important pillars upon which school practices are built. A primary goal of education is to teach students how to learn, how to think critically and creatively, how to communicate effectively, and how to solve problems as they arise.

School is based on a will to help children become active participants in shaping the societal community. It is considered important that children learn to take a stand and to argue for it and that the individual sees herself or himself as part of a community so that the values and forces of the community are continuously being developed.

Some schools in Denmark work actively to design learning environments that challenge the children to focus, analyze, discuss, and practice ways to express oneself and to solve problems in the different fields of knowledge. To accomplish this, children's skills must be challenged. These schools also engage children in learning to approach work and life in general with an "engaging and exploring spirit" (www.hellerupschool.dk).

National Laws for Child Care in Denmark Denmark participates in international studies that compare countries on academic performances (PISA/OECD). When the OECD reports showed that Danish school children did not perform as well as expected when compared to other countries, the Danish Parliament passed a new national law in 2007 for child care with increased emphasis on learning. Even so, the law states the importance of child care supporting all facets of a child's development.

The law on child care in Denmark (Dagtilbudsloven, Lov nr. 501; 06.06.07. Velfaerdsministeriet/Law on Child Care in Denmark, Ministry of Welfare, 2007) emphasizes that child care must provide an environment for the children that promotes their well-being, development, and learning. Child care also must give the children a possibility to develop and learn through play and planned activities. The law further states that:

- Child care staff and parents should work together to give children care, support their development, and promote their self-esteem.
- Child care must allow the children influence on their own lives so that they can learn to participate in a democratic society.

The law also emphasizes children's possibilities for learning in six areas: language, social competencies, personal competencies, nature and nature's phenomena, cultural expressions and values, and body and movement. Plans for learning emphasize both learning academics and the children's character formation.

The law states that learning academics and character formation are equally important for children. Likewise, the law draws on the UN Resolution of November 20, 1989, concerning children's rights to be heard and given an influence on their own lives. The verification of the UN Resolution has meant that Danish children by law must be heard in different matters that affect them (e.g., parents' divorce and placement outside their home). The resolution has also influenced policymaking in schools and child care.

It is also stated in the law that children in child care must be interviewed once a year about their opinions on the care they are receiving. The results must be posted on the Internet. A commission under the Danish Ministry of Education has developed a questionnaire that can be used when interviewing the children. This questionnaire includes questions to the children about child care in general, about their relationships to the other children and friendships, about the pedagogues (e.g., whether the child likes the pedagogues and feels that they like him/her, whether the pedagogues listen to the child, scold him/her, etc.), about indoor and outdoor equipment for play, and a range of other things.

On a macro level, the policies and legislation for both child care and schools in Denmark support the children's character formation and learning as well as demand that the children must be given an influence on their own everyday lives.

Historical-Cultural Values That Support Development of Democracy

The development of democratic skills is strongly connected to society and the cultural and historical values that institutions are based on from early childhood. In Denmark, democracy and democratic skills are deeply rooted values in society, homes, and school environments.

"Value" is not a concept that is easily defined, as it can refer to different matters. Generally, some ways of thinking and acting within a given culture are considered more desirable and better than other ways of thinking and acting. Such cultural values are socially created within participation in different groups (e.g., families, peers, working communities), and they change upon social interaction within different groups and depending on the development of society. Within a given society,

different cultural values emerge, including political values, religious values, values in child-rearing practices and education, etc.

On the basis of international research, Andersen (1995) concludes that the following values are predominant in Danish society:

- Matters are discussed with the goal of reaching consensus.
- Little difference exists between people in power and other participants.
- Individuals want to decide things for themselves and have an influence in society.
- Acceptance of politicians and the public sector.
- Pride in being Danish and less openness to other nationalities.
- Christian Protestant values play an important role in society (e.g., the old-fashioned Lutheran belief that children are born sinful and need to be civilized by their parents persists and is reflected in the child-rearing practices in family, child care, and schools), together with the modern goal of acknowledging the child as socially directed and active in its own development.

These Danish values intertwine society and are part of the everyday life that children live and learn about.

A study by Dan Buettner from National Geographic supports the studies above concerning Danish values in society. Buettner researched countries that were reported as the most happy in the world (Thrive 2011). He visited those locations where people express the most happiness on international surveys. As Denmark always emerges as one of the happiest countries in these comparative surveys, Buettner identified those characteristics that seem important for the happy feelings in Denmark. Some of them are connected to the positive childhood experiences that lead to democratic children. These characteristics are:

- Building an environment of trust
- Practicing tolerance
- Seeking status equality
- Seeking economic equality
- Caring for the young and old
- Enjoying freedom
- Getting the right job
- Working just enough
- Cultivating the art of living
- Making cozy, well-lit home environments
- Nudging people into interaction
- Optimizing cities for activity
- Volunteering
- Using taxes

What Buettner noticed when visiting Denmark was that seeking equality also involved very young children. He describes a visit with a Danish family, where he noticed how Danish children have input in decisions from a very young age. When

families are debating where to go on summer holidays, for example, even the youngest children have a voice.

Looking at the *mesosystem*, the parent's values in child-rearing practices—interactively influenced by the values of the macro- and exosystems—support children's character development and the development of democratic values. Tolerance and autonomy are the values on which most parents built their child-rearing practices. Honesty and responsibility also were found to be common values (Andersen and Hestbaek 1999) forming a basis for interacting with children and shaping their character development through modeling. Another study showed that autonomy and social responsibility exist side by side with more traditional values in child-rearing practices, such as limit setting and obedience. This study also showed that with the change in policies and legislation on children's rights, democratic values are becoming more dominant in society (Sigsgaard and Varming 1996).

A study from 2010 on quality in child care (Kragh-Müller 2010) showed that that the most important quality factor for Danish parents was a personal relationship between pedagogues and children. It was important for the parents to feel that the pedagogues liked their child, made the child feel welcome, and had positive feelings about the child. Also, they felt that good outdoor facilities and the opportunity to play with friends were important for their children. They felt that children could learn in child care, but not through school-like teaching. It is more important for the children to be allowed a happy childhood.

The tradition in Denmark is that culture and everyday practice in child care have been built on the legacy of German philosopher Friedrich Froebel, who emphasized children's right to a happy childhood in its own right and not just as a preparation for adulthood. Froebel strongly believed in giving children freedom to play with friends and learn through play. In this tradition, Danish child care centers are still called boernehaver (kindergartens = garden for children)—places where children are free to play with friends in a garden designed for children.

Several studies point to the democratic values underlying everyday practices in Danish child care. One study (BUPL 2010) showed that the top priority concerning goals for child care in the majority of Danish local communities was acknowledging relationships between the pedagogues and the children. The majority of child care centers in Denmark follow a child-centered approach in which values such as trust, respect, equality, and dialogue serve as a foundation and thus have a significant influence on children's development and character formation. The focus on growth-promoting relationships and children's right to have an influence on their own lives are likely to influence their development as democratic citizens. Another study, focusing on the curriculum in Danish child care (Brostroem 1995), showed that trust, autonomy, social competencies, and the importance of play were mentioned in most curriculums throughout the country.

These studies of values point to the importance of children being allowed a happy childhood, during which they are allowed to play with friends and they are listened to and given an influence on their lives. Such early experiences seem to promote children's well-being and democratic development, as they are taken seriously and allowed an influence from a very early age in child care and family.

Policies, Legislation, Values, and Theories into Practice

Moving to the micro level, this section focuses on everyday practices in child care and explores how policies, legislation, and cultural attitudes and values are brought into everyday practices that promote children's character development and learning of democracy. As theories, intentions, and policymaking do not always show as intended in practice (Palludan 2007), the discussion also addresses how children's development is promoted and associated with challenges.

First, what constitutes a positive childhood for children is discussed. Then, the focus will be on how and to what extent children can influence their everyday practices in child care. Finally, the extent to which pedagogues support children's character development through relationships is also discussed.

A Positive Childhood Childhood as a concept has been discussed in relation to how much training in academic subjects should be imposed on small children. The discussion emphasizes that children should be viewed as more than future capital in society and should be allowed a positive childhood in its own right.

As mentioned, child care in Denmark is culturally established on the tradition of Friedrich Froebel in which play is valued as a way of learning in early childhood. In child care, the tradition has been to support children's play and learning on the basis of their engagements and influence on their own everyday life. Child care consists of a variety of possibilities for activities, both outdoors and indoors, and for playing with friends. In order to find out what constitutes a positive childhood, it is important to ask children themselves.

Kragh-Müller (2011) interviewed children in two different cultures, Denmark and the United States, about what they considered to be quality in child care. The children in both cultures agreed that playing with good friends was the most important. They underlined that playing with friends was fun and that it was also important to have nice areas in which to play. They wanted to have an influence in their care and believed that this was actually the case when they were playing as they could decide for themselves what to play and with whom to play. They also stated that they did not like activities that were chosen and strongly structured by the pedagogues (e.g., circle time). The children interviewed also found it very important to have "nice pedagogues" who liked them and were kind to them, and they did not like the strict pedagogues who would scold them. These results have been supported by other research (e.g., Einarssdottir 2005; Hviid 2002; Kousholdt 2006; Sigsgaard 2002).

Lived Participation: Influence and Agency As was mentioned above, listening to and giving children an influence on their everyday lives is important. Influence can be defined in different ways. Kragh-Müller (2010) describes how influence can mean that children have choices in child care (e.g., if they want to play inside or outside, when to eat their lunch, and whom they want to sit next to at lunchtime). Alderson and Montgomery (1996) describe four levels of participation and influence in everyday life: (1) children are informed or instructed about everyday

practices, (2) children can comment on the practices, (3) children's views are taken into consideration, and (4) children can make decisions, either on their own or together with the other participants. In this definition, it is important not only to listen to the children but also that their opinions are given an actual influence on everyday life.

Studies about children's influence on everyday practices show different results. Warming (2007) concludes that the intention in many Danish child care centers is to give children an influence in everyday life, but it is unclear how much influence the children actually get. Even when adults have the intention of letting children influence their everyday life in child care, it is not an easy task to change everyday practices simply by passing new laws or changing attitudes (elements of child care sometimes exist subconsciously and are closely connected to the adults' own experiences as a child).

Kragh-Müller (2010, 2011, 2012) interviewed children and adults on quality in child care. The children agreed that they had an influence on whom to play with and what to play. The children also stated that the pedagogues decided on all other matters in child care. This finding was supported in a study by Svinth (2012), who found that the children had an influence on what to play and with whom, but observation showed that when it came to other activities (e.g., circle time and planned activities), the children had little or no influence.

In a Norwegian study, Bae (2004) concluded that the children's opportunities to influence child care consisted of choices between possibilities decided by the pedagogues. A Swedish study by Pramling Samuelsson and Sheridan (Sheridan et al. 2003) showed that when the pedagogues were able to understand the children's perspectives and interests and allowed them to influence planned activities, the children felt heard and that their perspectives had importance.

The research points to the importance of giving children the opportunity to influence their everyday life in child care (e.g., Pramling Samuelsson & Sheridan, 2003). But studies also show that legislation, cultural values, and intentions are not implemented easily into everyday life. When it comes to the curriculum and activities involving the pedagogues, it seems that children are not often granted influence. Some studies (Kragh-Müller 2010; Svinth 2012) showed that the children were listened to but did not actually have a say as to how everyday practices were performed. Another important question is how much influence a child should be granted on everyday life, as children developmentally are not always able to consider the consequences of their choices.

Research (Kragh-Müller 1997) shows that children accept that they do not have an influence in all aspects of everyday life. One 8-year-old child noted, "It is important for me to have an influence, but my parents have more influence than I have. That is OK because they have lived longer and know more." This research also showed that the children who did well socially in child care and schools were the children who felt that they had an influence on their own lives. When the interviewed children mentioned what was important for them to have an influence on, it was typically small things like (e.g., being allowed to stay up a little later sometimes to watch a movie or to have a say about inviting friends home or what new clothes to buy).

Sometimes it is possible for a child to have an influence, but sometimes children (and people in general) want something that is not really in their best interests or in the best interests of other children/people in a given situation. Children take time to develop and become able to fully reflect on what is best for themselves and for other people. For this reason, children do need the help of adults who listen and support the child's development of self, social competencies, character development, and learning of democratic values and skills. Children also need the help of adults so that they can have an influence on their own lives according to their age and development, so that they are not put in situations in which they have responsibility for making decisions without being able to fully comprehend the potential consequences. With these considerations in mind, it is still important to respect children as small individuals with the right to influence their own everyday lives.

The Relationship Between Children and Pedagogues According to Klafki (2001), character formation and the possibility of having an influence on everyday practices are closely connected. Influence on what is learned and how is important, as this will motivate children and promote their learning about themselves and cultural values. Klafki explains that the individual needs to be open to other people in the community and culture and that other people (e.g., pedagogues in child care) need to be open to what the individual person (e.g., the child) brings into the community. This makes the relationship between pedagogues and children an important part of children's character education and development into democracy. A case example will show the importance of the relationship between pedagogue and child.

It is 10 o'clock and the toddlers are getting dressed to go to the playground. Inger (pedagogue) is helping the children get dressed. When Trine (new pedagogue) joins them, she notices that 2-year-old Sophie stands alone crying. Trine goes to comfort her. Inger joins them and says, "Sophie must put on her rain suit and she does not want to do that."

Trine takes Sophie's hand, sits down with Sophie on her lap, and says, "You are upset because you don't want to put on your rain suit." After a little while, Sophie calms down and Trine says, "I am helping you with your rain suit and then we can go to the swings and have fun." Sophie does not protest, but gets upset again when Trine wants to put on her winter coat. She wants to put on her new pink rain coat and she wants her dummy. Trine asks Inger if it is OK. Inger says that Sophie can put on a cardigan and her new pink raincoat, but she is not to have her dummy.

Sophie cries and wants her dummy. Trine asks Inger if it would be OK to comfort Sophie a little with the dummy. Inger says, "No, she is seeking limits and testing you because you are new. She is just hysterical because she has too many choices at home." Trine says, "Don't you think that it is the opposite way around? That she does not have an influence on the small things that are important to her, and therefore has to fight harder to try to have an influence?" Trine sits for a few minutes with Sophie on her lap, allowing Sophie to have her dummy. After a little while, Sophie calms down and they go outside to play.

This example illustrates the different ways that teachers understand and relate to children and points to different ways that adults establish relationships to children. Inger understands the child in terms of children wanting to control adults and in terms of needing the adults to take control and set limits. Trine understands the child

as communicating her needs and the things that are important to her and considers it important that the teacher listens and gives the child an influence where it is possible.

The Norwegian psychologist Loevlie Schibbye (2002) describes how a feeling of self-worth and social competence develops through the foundation of an equal relationship where both the opinion of the child and the adult are heard and given an influence on everyday life. Schibbye's theory is founded within an existential and psychodynamic framework and is based on attachment theory and a system-oriented approach.

The development of self can only take place within a mutual relationship with other people. Inspired by the German philosopher Hegel, Schibbye (2002) describes this relationship as dialectical—influenced by both persons in the relationship. In the case story above, Sophie's behavior can only be understood looking at how the pedagogues understand and respond to Sophie, because their way of understanding and acting sets the conditions for how it is possible for Sophie to act in a given situation. The task for any human being is to develop within a relationship where each person has the possibility to experience connectedness (meaningful relationships with other people) and separateness (a feeling of self).

The basis on which to develop a strong sense of self, self-worth, and social competence is an acknowledging relationship between the child and adults (Schibbye 2002). Bae and Waastad (1999) describe four aspects as important in such acknowledgment:

1. *Understanding and empathy.* In the case story, Trine understands that Sophie is upset because she does not want to put on her rainsuit. Trine puts her understanding into words, helping Sophie to clarify her feelings while checking if she understands Sophie correctly. Trine also listens and understands that Sophie is happy with her new raincoat and so wants to put on this coat for going outside. She also understands Sophie's need to have her dummy to calm her down after getting upset in her conflict with Inger.
2. *Interconnectedness.* This refers to the importance of the adult being able to stay together with the child and contain his/her feelings. When Trine understands and reflects Sophie's feelings, these feelings become clearer and more real to Sophie, and this helps her learn to cope with the feelings and her understanding of herself as a person develops.
3. *Openness.* The adult should be open to understand the child's need for influence. This sometimes means that the adult must let go of a need to control a given situation and recognize that both persons may influence the way in which a situation turns out. In the case story, Trine understands Sophie's need to calm down, and she lets her have her dummy for a short while until she can manage without it. Trine also understands that Sophie is so fond of her new raincoat that is very important for her to wear it going outside. As it is too cold outside, an extra cardigan solves the problem and Sophie can wear her new raincoat.
4. *Self-reflection and being able to distinguish between one's own needs, feelings, and thinking and the child's needs and ways of feeling and thinking.* It is

important that the adult is able to reflect on his/her own way of understanding and feeling. In the case story, the conflict between Inger and Sophie is difficult to solve because Inger is not reflecting on her own way of understanding and acting, and Sophie is not developmentally able to do so. This makes it difficult for Sophie to develop an understanding of herself, Inger, and the whole situation.

When Trine listens and understands, Sophie will learn that she is a person worth listening to, which will support her feeling of self-worth. When Trine puts into words how Sophie is feeling, this supports her development of emotion regulation. Sophie also will be able to learn that conflicts can be solved when listening to each other. Trine's behavior communicates to Sophie a value of respect in human relationships and the importance of mutual understanding and influence on everyday life. In this way, Trine's behavior sets a model for Sophie's character development and development of democratic skills at a very early age.

As can be seen in the sections above, children emphasize the importance of having an influence on everyday life. The case story, at a micro level, illustrates the importance for children of having an influence on things that matter to them. It also illustrates that even though policies and legislation on permitting children's influence on everyday life are reflected in changed cultural values and attitudes, adults still need to reflect and work to put such policies fully into practice.

Final Reflections

The development of democratic citizens, which is a central part of Danish/Scandinavian tradition in child care and schools, is connected to the way we interact with children from early childhood and to children's participation in everyday life activities. Positive childhood experiences, such as mutual respect, acknowledging relationships between adults and children, and adults that are deeply interested in the viewpoints of the children scaffold democratic citizens.

The development of children as democratic citizens is a strong focus in Danish/Scandinavian child care tradition. Throughout the chapter, we have used phrases such as "adults give" or "grant" influence to children. These are common words used to describe the relationship between adults and children showing a thinking in power relations between adults and children. Is such influence something given from adults to children, or is such influence a right you have as a person? Changes in society and attitudes are moving in the direction of children having more rights, but changes in attitudes and values change quicker than changes in everyday practices.

Children are active participants in democratic processes. The changing values of culture and society are reflected in the laws and practices of child care and families. We still face challenges; we want children to have influence, but we also want them not to experience too much stress, and we want them to be able to handle the

influence. In order to develop as human beings, we must experience the power to debate the influences over our lives and to be active in shaping them.

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Chapter 12
Re-metaphorizing Teaching and Learning in Early Childhood Education Beyond the Instruction – Social Fostering Divide

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Abstract In this chapter we present and argue for a "third way" for early childhood education, beyond the dichotomy of the social-pedagogical and the preparation-for-school approaches. On the basis of empirical research, conducted in preschools as well as other developmental research, and educational philosophy and theorizing, we argue that avoiding residing to one of the poles of this dichotomy can be achieved through examining and reflecting on the guiding metaphors constituting different perspectives on how to outline early childhood education and care practices, such as day care and preschool. A reconceptualization or re-metaphorization of learning, communication, and education is presented. We suggest that this perspective provides a way of construing central features of preschool – such as learning and caring, the social and the individual, and play and learning – as integrated, rather than disparate features that need to be related.

Introduction

Early childhood education and care practices such as preschool[1] are important to the socialization and upbringing of children in society. In a sense, such institutions fill the function of catering for the continuation of culturally accumulated and valued experience in the growing generation. In complex societies, children's experiences

[1] In Sweden, the word *förskola* [preschool] has come to replace the older name of *daghem* [literally: day-home]. We will therefore refer to this institution as preschool. Furthermore, the term *förskollärare* [preschool teacher] has come to replace *pedagog* [pedagogue]. We will therefore use the term teacher in this text. In Sweden, the term preschool refers to the education and care institution for children 1–5 years. Today (the latest statistics is from 2014), 83 % of all children in this age span attend preschool. For the 4–5 years old, 93 % of all children in Sweden attend preschool (Swedish National Agency for Education: http://www.skolverket.se/statistik-och-utvardering/statistik-i-tabeller/forskola/barn-och-grupper).

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are no longer delimited to their primary socialization in the family. Rather, in institutions such as preschool, children make a wider repertoire of experiences than they would make if not attending such practices. Given the central role of early childhood education in complex societies, how we organize these practices to provide children with ample developmental opportunities and support is important. While there is today a wide acceptance and endorsement of early childhood education, how to best organize such practices is more debated. There are many approaches to – or pedagogies (Pramling and Pramling Samuelsson in press) of – early childhood education and care (i.e., day care, preschool), such as Montessori, Reggio Emilia, HighScope, Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP), Waldorf, and cultural-historical ones. While these all differ from one another, and may also share some features, early childhood education is often discussed in terms of two overarching traditions. These are the social-pedagogical and the preparation-for-school tradition. While the former (here referred to as social fostering, cf. social education) is characterized by a social concern, with an emphasis on children's development as persons and social participants, the latter is characterized by a focus on learning and providing the foundations for children's later schooling. The social-pedagogical approach is often seen as distinctively Scandinavian. However, for over 30 years, scholars such as David Elkind (1982, 1988a, b, 2007) have argued for the need to find a third way for early childhood education. In this chapter we discuss the basis for such an alternative to organizing preschool, through rethinking some constitutive metaphors to educational theory and practice.

The concept of metaphor is integral to our reasoning. A metaphor, simply put, means to speak about something in terms of something else, as if it were the other. With our neologism, "re-metaphorizing," we intend two things: first, to emphasize the metaphorical nature of our reasoning as scholars and practitioners and, second, that these metaphors may need to be rethought, reconceptualized, in order to take us out of locked positions in a dichotomously constituted discourse. A premise for our reasoning is what was argued by Lakoff and Johnson (1980) in their influential work, *Metaphors We Live By*, that is, that metaphor is pervasive not only in language but also in thought and other action. As they argue, our ordinary concepts structure our perception and our actions, including how we relate to others and ourselves. However, the metaphorical nature of these concepts tends not to be recognized, unless they are explicated. One of Lakoff and Johnson's examples is the metaphor "argument is war." They suggest that we not only speak about arguments in this way but that this is also how we go about arguing. That is, we attack positions, plan and use strategies, abandon indefensible positions, take a new line of attack, change tactics, gain or lose ground, defend ourselves, counterattack, and perceive that we win or lose. In this sense, "argument is war" is a metaphor we live by. A change of metaphor, for instance, into "argument is a dance" (Lakoff and Johnson 1980), would mediate our engagement in argumentation differently. Our understanding of what an argument is would change accordingly. In line with this reasoning, we suggest that concepts such as teaching, education, and learning be re-metaphorized to inform debate on early childhood education and care, in our case preschool.

Re-metaphorizing Teaching and Learning

In his insightful exploration of teaching, zoologist S. A. Barnett (1973) discusses the names we give ourselves as a species: *Homo sapiens* (thinking man), *Homo faber* (man the maker), and *Homo ludens* (playing man, Huizinga 1950). To these ways of constituting what is human, Barnett suggests that we can be understood in terms of *Homo docens* (teaching man), arguing that "teaching is distinctively human" (Barnett 1973, p. 394). He defines teaching as:

> behaviour which has two properties: first, it must induce a specific change in the behaviour of another of the same species: second – and this is crucial – it must be persisted in and adapted until the pupil achieves a certain performance. Adjustment of signals to meet the need of an audience is an objective criterion of empathy (Ruesch and Bateson 1951). It is a rare phenomenon in the animal kingdom. It is not universal even in our own species, but it is a feature of some pedagogical interactions […] Nevertheless, the definition excludes many activities which are commonly classed as teaching: lecturing is the most prominent. (p. 393). […] To use current jargon, the definition requires that there should be feedback from the pupil. Hence I am restricting the term teaching […] to teacher-pupil relationships which are interactive, rather than dogmatic or authoritarian. (p. 394)

According to this conception, teaching is at heart an attuned, responsive action where someone supports someone else in developing a skill or an insight. It is dialogic – or even, particularly in the context of preschool which is a social arena where children learn together, polyphonic – rather than monologic (see Wells and Arauz 2006, on the latter distinction). Hence, what may be the prototypical exemplar of teaching, lecturing, is not included in this conception of teaching. Instead, teaching as here understood requires the teacher being responsively attuned to the response of the child and able to change his or her actions accordingly to make some mutual sense. This conception of teaching can be aligned with Bakhtin's (1986) work on communication, where every utterance is an explicit or implicit response to a previous utterance and also anticipates a coming response. This means, among other things, that there is no clear boundary between teacher and child and between speaker and listener, even the listener becomes the speaker and vice versa. Sense becomes a matter of interactively negotiated and achieved understanding among participants, rather than the transmission of information from one to the other.

Furthermore, as hinted at by Barnett (1973) in the quote above, this interaction is not merely one of educating in a strict sense but inherently intertwined with caring, responding emphatically to one another. This feature of communicating has been developed in the educational philosophy of John Dewey (1859–1952). From an evolutionary perspective, he reasons about the importance of children learning rather than being guided by inherited, instinctive behavior:

> In learning an action, instead of having it given ready-made, one of necessity learns to vary its factors, to make varied combinations of them, according to change of circumstances. A possibility of continuing progress is opened up by the fact that in learning one act, methods are developed good for use in other situations. Still more important is the fact that the human being acquires the habit of learning. He [or she] learns to learn. The importance for human life of the two facts of dependence and variable control has been summed up in the doctrine of the significance of prolonged infancy. This prolongation is significant

> from the standpoint of the adult members of the group as well as from that of the young. The presence of dependent and learning beings is a stimulus to nurture and affection. The need for constant continued care was probably a chief means in transforming temporary cohabitations into permanent unions. It certainly was a chief influence in forming habits of affectionate and sympathetic watchfulness; that constructive interest in the well-being of others which is essential to associated life. […] Increasing complexity of social life requires a longer period of infancy in which to acquire the needed powers; this prolongation of dependence means prolongation of plasticity, or power of acquiring variable and novel modes of control. Hence it provides a further push to social progress. (Dewey 1916/2008a, p. 50)

This reasoning means that the child's dependency on others, and thus the importance of social relations, may be our greatest asset. It makes it possible for us to make very different experiences and therefore develop into unique individuals (cf. Nelson 1996). Through these different experiences and not only contingent on our biological constitution that we each have a unique set of DNA, we become individuals. Dewey's reasoning (1916/2008a) also implies the importance of variation for development. This reasoning has consequences for how we understand the pedagogical institutions of society, such as preschool and school. Dewey continues:

> If there were any strict "law" of repetition, evolutionary development would clearly not have taken place. Each new generation would simply have repeated its predecessors' existence. Development, in short, has taken place by the entrance of short-cuts and alterations in the prior scheme of growth. And this suggests that the aim of education is to facilitate such short-circuited growth. The great advantage of immaturity, educationally speaking, is that it enables us to emancipate the young from the need of dwelling in an outgrown past. The business of education is rather to liberate the young from reviving and retraversing the past than to lead them to a recapitulation of it. The social environment of the young is constituted by the presence and action of the habits of thinking and feeling of civilized men. To ignore the directive influence of this present environment upon the young is simply to abdicate the educational function. (Dewey 1916/2008a, p. 79)

From this perspective, an education is not a set of activities where children are expected to on their own discover established knowledge but instead through pedagogical means establish shortcuts to important knowledge that they need to take part in. Such knowledge tends to be codified or reified (Wenger 1998) in cultural tools, and the child takes part in this knowledge through being engaged in conversations where these tools are introduced and used. Since the child takes over cultural tools, knowing always has a social and cultural anchoring; the child's knowledge is not disconnected from culture. At the same time, appropriating a cultural tool requires active sensemaking of the child, which means that knowledge also has a personal flavor. Of greatest importance to the child's further development in an unknown future is learning how to learn. In line with Dewey's (1916/2008a) reasoning, Barnett (1973) emphasizes the importance of childhood and teaching to human development. He argues that teaching as here defined (see above):

> may well be universal in human communities. There is good reason to think it crucial for the survival of our species. Man has – zoologically speaking – one gross behavioural deficiency, and teaching helps to make up for it. The deficiency is our lack of standard, species-typical behaviour patterns. We have no standard methods of building, or hunting, or eating,

> or keeping ourselves clean, or courting, or looking after our young. Certainly, we have no standard type of family; and we have no typical group structure. (p. 401)

Rather, we have the possibility of becoming different "according to our upbringing" (loc. cit.). Understood in this way, teaching is pivotal to human development; it is what allows us to rise above our biological constitution and develop as cultural participants. Teaching, in Barnett's (1973) cogent reasoning, "makes us what we are." While teaching is understood as integral to human nature and development (see also Tomasello 1999), in complex societies important parts of this practice are institutionalized in preschool and school. What children learn in these institutions are in many cases different from what they learn in their everyday life outside these. Vygotsky (1987) clarifies this distinction in terms of socialization. In the child's primary socialization, he or she becomes part of ways of organizing the world through participating in mundane activities with caregivers and significant others (cf. Mead 1934/1967). What the child learns is what Vygotsky refers to as everyday concepts. These are mastered by the child in the sense that he or she can use these in relevant ways in common practices. In contrast, when entering the pedagogical institution of school, the child undergoes a secondary socialization. This institution is organized specifically for the purpose of regenerating important knowledge in the growing generation. In this institution, the child is introduced to what Vygotsky (1987) refers to as scientific concepts. These are learned in a different way than everyday concepts. Scientific concepts are learned in a more voluntary and formal manner, through teaching. Scientific concepts in this account do not refer exclusively to the concepts of science. Rather, these are what today would be referred to as institutional or academic concepts. For example, the concept of "cousin" may be understood by the child as an everyday concept, meaning that he or she is able to use this term in a relevant and proper way to refer to his or her cousin. To master "cousin" as a scientific concept, in contrast, means to understand that the term cousin refers to the child of one's mother's sister. The institution of preschool is different from school and may be seen as a place in between informal everyday learning and more formal, school-based practices. This makes preschool a particularly interesting milieu for studying phenomena such as teaching, learning, and conceptual development.

Teaching in Early Childhood Education

In this section we will outline our conception of teaching and early childhood education. Our account will be based on empirical research conducted in actual preschool practices, other kinds of empirical research, and theoretical and philosophical work. From developmental research, we argue that a basic constituent of education is the triadic relationship. The nature of this relationship and its development in ontogeny is clarified by Tomasello (1999) in the following way:

> Six-month-old infants interact dyadically with objects, grasping and manipulating them, and they interact dyadically with other people, expressing emotions back and forth in a

> turn-taking sequence. If people are around when they are manipulating objects, they mostly ignore them. If objects are around when they are interacting with people, they mostly ignore them. But around nine to twelve months of age a new set of behaviors begins to emerge that are not dyadic, like these early behaviors, but are triadic in the sense that they involve a coordination of their interactions with objects and people, resulting in a referential triangle of child, adult, and the object or event to which they share attention. Most often the term *joint attention* has been used to characterize this whole complex of social skills and interactions. (p. 62, italics in original)

Entering into this triadic relationship means that the child "tunes into" and also tries to get the other (the adult) to tune into the child's attention, "using deictic gestures such as pointing or holding up an object to show it to someone" (loc. cit.). Tomasello argues that this "simple act of pointing to an object for someone else for the sole purpose of sharing attention to it is a uniquely human communicative behavior" (ibid., p. 63). Establishing triadic relations with a child, that is, teacher and child coming to share attention on something third, thus becomes pivotal to what can be called education (Doverborg et al. 2013). Clearly, learning is a far wider concept than education. But since preschool and other similar institutional arrangements are instances of early childhood *education*, understanding children's development in these requires a concept of education and not merely learning. Against the background of this reasoning, it should be recognized that preschool is a social arena where many children tend to be present at the same time. Hence, the triadic relation will be more complex but critically requires the teacher and children coming to share attention on something common. This feature of preschool, that is, its group-based nature, will be elaborated on below.

Furthermore, while sharing attention on something common is necessary for a teacher to contribute to the child's education, it is not sufficient. Participants also need to share perspective. This is referred to in sociocultural theory as establishing intersubjectivity (Rommetveit 1974, 1992). The importance of this notion can be simply illustrated by the following example. If the teacher and children look in a book about nature, they may point at pictures and make each other attend to "those look the same," "that is different from that one," and "look, these are similar." However, while the teacher and children may share attention on the same depicted objects, the children may perceive these as similar in the sense of them being in a forest, or being (depicted as) of equal size, while the teacher may intend that some animals share the number of legs or that some have wings while others do not. Without clarifying what is attended to, teacher and children will thus, in effect, talk past each other, and the children will not be supported in developing their understanding. Much everyday communication can proceed in this fashion, using deictic references (Ivarsson 2003; Iverson and Goldin-Meadow 2005), that is, pointing in language ("this, that, here, there") and gestures. Rising above this local language, a more expansive language (e.g., "wings, legs, gills," etc.) is important to make sure participants share perspective. Speaking about matters in this way means to take a perspective on what is spoken about. This semiotic mediation (Wertsch 2007) carries beyond the here and now and is therefore critical to education. By its very nature, education points beyond the local and temporary. Without this ambition, education is reduced to entertainment while it lasts. This feature of pointing

beyond does not only apply for the relation between activities in early childhood education and care such as preschool and the child's experiences outside this milieu but also the relation between different activities in preschool. Education, as Mercer (2008) suggests, is made from a series of events. Hence, an education is not simply a number of one-offs. The child must also be assisted in making sense of the relation between these; how what we do now relates to what we did yesterday or what we will do later. Establishing such relations provides the child with some kind of narrative where separate parts are integrated and made sense of. Engaging children in weaving such narrative threads is yet another important feature of early childhood education understood as a communicative endeavor.

One of the constituents of Barnett's (1973) account of teaching, as we have already mentioned, is that the teacher is responsive to the response of the child and adjusts her teaching efforts accordingly. This means that she has to be able to access the child's perspective. The importance to educational psychology research of studying the child's perspective goes back to the founding work of Jean Piaget (1896–1980). Being critical to Binet's intelligence-testing practices, Piaget argued that studying how many children can master certain test items do not tell us much about their development. Rather, he argued, we need to study how the child approaches the tasks they face, regardless of whether they arrive at the expected answer or not (see Pramling and Säljö 2015, for an elaboration). This stance has been pivotal to much research ever since. The notion of the child's perspective and the importance of attending to it have also been very important to early childhood education (Sommer et al. 2010). In studies within a developmental pedagogy approach (Pramling Samuelsson and Asplund Carlsson 2007, 2008), preschool practices where this principle has been orchestrated have been investigated. This research has emphasized the fact that preschool is a social arena, based on group activities rather than individualized studying. A basic premise of this pedagogy is that in every group of children, there will be a variety of ways of understanding something. This fact is used as a pedagogical asset in furthering children's understanding. This is done through allowing and supporting children to share their understanding among the group. The teacher orchestrates this discussion and takes a meta-perspective to make the children see that (a) there is a variety of ways of understanding something in the group and, hence, that (b) not everyone understands in the same way (Pramling 1996). This insight is in itself arguably pivotal to develop recognition of other points of view. This insight is of intellectual as well as caring importance, if for the moment making this artificial distinction. Understanding the perspectives of others requires the insight *that* there can be different ways of understanding something. Through meta-communicative elaboration, the teacher orchestrates the conversation in order to make children develop this insight as well as supporting them in appropriating a wider repertoire of ways of understanding. This reasoning implies an important difference between learning in preschool and learning in school. In the latter institution, children are expected and taught to learn to understand something in a particular way, for example, that the moon is a celestial body circling around the Earth and with the Earth circling around the sun. In contrast, and from our reasoning, in preschool, the child may develop this insight but

also other ways of understanding the moon (e.g., as an animator in a fantasy story and as a variety of shapes (crescent, full moon). Hence, rather than learning "the proper" notion, preschool children, according to our conception, are challenged and supported to develop a richer repertoire of different ways of understanding something.

The teacher engaging children in meta-communication about this variation is analogue to what children spontaneously do in their play. As well known (e.g., Sawyer 1997; Schwartzman 1978), when playing, children speak *in* as well as *about* what they (are to) play. Sometimes this meta-level talk, that is, talk about the play, becomes the main activity, rather than the play planned. Since in educational activities the teacher intends to make children aware of different understandings, this talk is sometimes referred to as engaging children in metacognition (Pramling 1990), that is, focusing on their own and others' understanding. Hence, the teacher employs a practice of shifting from engaging and talking *in* an activity to engaging and talking *about* it, a shift that is familiar to children from their own play.

Another important feature of teaching and learning in ECE, closely related to our previous point and stemming from the tradition of developmental pedagogy (Pramling 1996; cf. the closely adjacent tradition of variation theory, e.g., Marton 2015), is that in order to discern something, something has to vary. If, for example, wanting to develop children's understanding of the geometrical shape of a triangle, it is not sufficient to simply show a triangle and tell children that this is a triangle. Neither is it sufficient to show a number of examples of different triangles ("this is a triangle, this is another triangle," and so forth). Instead, as clarified by empirical research (Björklund 2014; Magnusson and Pramling 2016; Pramling Samuelsson et al. 2009; Wallerstedt 2014), the opposite strategy is actually far more productive in supporting children to discern a concept. One example is provided by Magnusson and Pramling (2016). Studying children's understanding of graphic symbols, they show how providing several examples of the same symbol (e.g., triangle as a conventional symbol for warning) does not facilitate children developing this conceptual insight. Hence, induction is not shown to be a powerful means for conceptual development. Instead, varying what is to be discerned (e.g., the triangle as a symbol for warning) in terms of the presence and absence of it, that is contrast, while other features remained constant was seen to be powerful in supporting children to discern this concept. This finding, which is counterintuitive and counter to common educational practice, has clear educational implications. If wanting to facilitate children discerning something (e.g., the geometrical shape of a square), rather than providing several squares, this shape needs to be varied with other geometrical shapes (e.g., triangle and parallelogram). Hence, variation is important to teaching in several ways: as a source to develop children's insight that people understand differently, to develop a richer repertoire of ways of understanding, and to facilitate discernment. Per implication, the variety in experience among the children in the preschool group becomes an asset in challenging and furthering their understanding.

Managing Tensions and Integrative Practice

Education, including preschool education, in a sense constitutes a field of tension between continuity with the child's experiences (Dewey 1916/2008a), on the one hand, and in nature being and needing to be discontinuous with the child's experiences (Luria 1976; Vygotsky 1987), on the other (see also Säljö 2006, for an interesting elaboration on this difference). The argument that education has to be continuous with the child's experiences is that without this relation, what the child is introduced to will not make sense or be of relevance to his or her life. However, simply building on the child's previous experience is problematic for several reasons. One is that in a social arena such as preschool, building on the child's experiences and interest will privilege some children, while other children not having these experiences or interests will not be catered for. Another reason is that education can only to some extent build on the child's experiences and interest; it must also introduce him or her to other fields of knowing and phenomena, providing the means for making experiences that he or she would not have made if not participating in this practice. This is, in fact, a basic premise of education in the form of preschool and school, if taking a Vygotskian point of view (1987; see also Luria 1976). Through participating in these educational institutions, the child is introduced to and supported in appropriating forms of knowledge that he or she would not have done in other more informal practices. This opens up the child to new experiences and phenomena. However, even scientific concepts need to be related in some way to the child's everyday concepts in order for these to make sense to him or her (Fleer and Pramling 2015; Vygotsky 1987). Also Dewey (1938/2008b), even if emphasizing school as by necessity being continuous with the child's previous experiences outside school recognized the importance of the child encountering what cannot be explained by what he or she already knows. This discontinuous gap provides the incentive for engaging the child in a process of inquiry, which according to Dewey is pivotal to the child's development. What Dewey refers to as inquiry is well aligned with the tradition in Scandinavian early childhood education and care (day care, preschool) of providing for children's experiences through thematic work (Doverborg and Pramling 1988), where they are engaged in investigative practices over a prolonged time on a theme encompassing many features. The theme provides a kind of narrative thread (cf. above) weaving these different events and objects together. Education in a sense plays out in the tension between children's experiences and by the institution privileged forms of knowledge. Managing this tension lies at the heart of early childhood education understood as a communicative endeavor.

One of the many legacies of one of the educational theoreticians we build our argument on, John Dewey, is to problematize dichotomies between, for example, theory and practice, teaching and caring, and play and learning. In a number of studies, Johansson and Pramling Samuelsson (e.g., 2006; 2009) have shown that children learn while playing and play while teachers organize teaching, *if* teachers leave "space" for the children to do so. If teachers do not allow children to play with what

is taught, this unified process is hindered, and children come to learn to keep playing (something to do at breaks in school and after school) and learning (during lessons) separate. Younger children do not make this distinction, and Pramling Samuelsson and Asplund Carlsson (2008) therefore suggest that we understand children in preschool as playing-learning children. With this concept they intend to capture how young children do not separate play and learning but act and respond from their own perspectives in making sense of the world (reality and fiction) and how they sometimes spontaneously and sometimes with the support of adults examine their own thoughts and ideas. Children make sense interchangeably in and out of playfulness. Attending to the child's perspective, it becomes clear that young children do not distinguish between playful and other forms of making sense of, and interacting with, the world. Rather, children learn to make this distinction from adults and institutional arrangements. Before that children simply make sense of the world with all means available, not least playfulness (Sommer et al. 2010).

One main aspect of early years education (in fact for education at large) is to make patterns visible to children. As Gärdenfors (2010) writes, one feature of learning is so-called aha-experiences, that is, when we suddenly understand something (cf. Wertheimer 1945/1959), when metaphorically speaking parts fall into place. Gärdenfors (2010) gives the example of children suddenly understanding how letters in a text are coordinated with speech sounds and combined into words. We often talk about this insight as children having broken the reading code. This is one example of children discerning patterns. Another example is when a child knows that bullfinch does not stand for a single bird but for a category with the name representing a pattern of properties distinctive of this kind of bird. Certain patterns are part of our culture, which tends to make them self-evident and by that invisible until we encounter another culture with other patterns. But also within a culture, there are variations of patterns that we have to experience for becoming able to interpret, understand, and act as members of this culture. One example is the pragmatism of knowing when it is appropriate to speak in terms of a certain genre and where another is expected and appropriate. Mundane examples of recurring patterns in ECEC could be how mealtimes are carried out, the procedures of going outdoors, and what circle time is. But also more specific skills, such as being able to solve a puzzle, can be understood as a question of discerning a specific pattern. Particular domains of human activity and knowing, such as mathematics and music, have their own set of constitutive patterns (e.g., part-whole, number order, the cardinal principle, and time, tempo, genre, respectively). To communicate about patterns is to involve children in becoming aware and making sense of the world around them. Importantly to education, Gärdenfors (2010) points out, teachers have to learn to see patterns "for being able to choose the patterns that are important for them [children] to understand" (ibid., p. 155, our translation).

A recurring tension in discussions about preschool is between care and learning, where by tradition the focus has been on children's social development, something often related to the care of children. However, from the perspective here developed, on empirical and theoretical grounds, this dichotomy has very little bearing on everyday life in preschool (cf. also Dewey's philosophical critique of such dichoto-

mies, above). Both care and learning take place in interaction, communication, and relationships. A caring situation without some form of communication/interaction is not a caring situation, and education without a responsive caring relation is not appropriate for young children (Johansson and Pramling Samuelsson 2001). Communicative responsiveness (see above) denotes not only that we respond in speech when someone orients toward us or tries to make us notice something but also in acknowledging the communicative partner (see, e.g., Løgstrup 1956, for an elaboration), making communication at heart a caring practice.

Conclusions

In this text we have discussed, on the basis of empirical research (developmental research as well as studies of preschool practices) and educational theory and philosophy, how to theorize early childhood education and care in the form of preschool without residing to either pole of the social pedagogy or preparation-for-school dichotomy. A meta-discussion in our chapter concerns the metaphors we use to make sense of phenomena such as learning and how these metaphors have material consequences (Pramling 2011; Säljö 2002). We have argued that it is important in theory and practice that we do not simplify teaching and learning into the transmission and reception of information. Rather, from the point of view of our reasoning, teaching can be understood as the teacher entering into a process of sensemaking with children. Teachers do so through managing the relationship between children's experiences and challenging and supporting them in furthering their understanding. Important principles in doing so are to establish intersubjectivity with children on something (contribute to establishing a triadic relationship), to point beyond the local and temporary, to provide patterns of variation (through meta-level talk about different understandings in the group and through contrasting phenomena and objects), and to shift between talking *in* and *about* an activity. Furthermore, through our discussion of educational research, theory, and philosophy, we have argued for a perspective on how to understand and organize preschool practices where learning and emphatic caring, children developing as social and individual beings, and play and learning are integral features rather than separate factors to be related. This account points a way forward – provides a "third way" (Elkind 2007) – past the polar strands of social pedagogy and the preparation-for-school tradition of preschool.

Phenomena such as learning are not there for us to point at and look at, so we constitute them through metaphor. These metaphors have material consequences for how we go about supporting children's development, including how we teach. Much resistance to terms such as learning and teaching in the context of preschool, we argue, can be understood as implicitly presuming particular metaphors, for example, teaching as the transmission of information from knower (teacher) to pupil (child) and learning as receiving and storing such information, to be accessed (i.e., recalled) when asked for. These concepts of teaching, learning, and remembering,

in turn, presume a particular communication metaphor, the conduit metaphor for communication, that is, communication as the sending of information through a medium (see Reddy 1993, for a critical elaboration). However, as we have here tried to make clear, our conceptions (metaphors) of these processes (teaching, learning, and communicating) are very different. This is in itself one of the principles of our reasoning, that is, that the institutions of early childhood education and care, such as preschool, have to reconceptualize these terms from their traditional meaning in school. What metaphors should inform early childhood education practices, beyond the dichotomy of social pedagogy and schooled instruction? The present text has aimed to contribute to discussing this matter.

In the nature of our reasoning, the metaphors we use, that is, how we understand processes such as communication, have material consequences for how we organize early childhood education and care (day care, preschool) and communicate with children. Whether we see communication as mutually negotiated sensemaking or the transmission of information from knower to novice provides children with very different experiences and therefore developmental opportunities and support. The importance of engaging in communication as an inherently socially responsive process, rather than merely transmitting information to children and expecting them to reproduce that information, cannot be overstated. How teachers communicate with children socialize and shape their experiences, including what it means to learn and be social, responsive, caring, and cared for.

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Chapter 13
Collaboration Between Child Care and Parents: Dilemmas and Contradictory Conditions in the Institutional Arrangement of Child Care

Maja Røn Larsen

Abstract In Denmark, as in many other countries, children live their lives across different contexts, primarily in the home and in childcare institutions. The child's contexts are simultaneously both separated and related. On the one hand, the family and childcare are not automatically involved in each other's arrangements, but on the other hand, they are structurally connected and continuously interacting due to the crossover of the children's activities. Therefore, collaboration and coordination between parents and professionals is an important part of childcare practice. Based on comprehensive empirical work in different Danish childcare centres, this chapter discusses how parental collaboration in the pedagogical practice is often a rather paradoxical effort, developed in relation to contradictory historical and institutional conditions and requirements to treat parents both as equal participants, consumers and clients. In this way, challenges and dilemmas in parental collaboration in childcare are analysed in relation to larger societal conflicts about the relation between society and citizen and the overall purpose of childcare as state institutions.

Introduction

The Nordic countries have a long tradition of young children spending part of their lives in out-of-home care practices, and almost all children aged 1–6 attend childcare on a daily basis (e.g. Haagensen 2011). This is a trend that is also developing in many other OECD countries (Dalli et al. 2011; OECD 2001; Reedy and McGrath 2008; Sphancer 2002). In this way, an increasing number of children live their lives in settings inhabited by other children and different adults – parents and professionals. These different settings are separately organised, but at the same time, they are related through the children's trajectories of participation. Different research perspectives have shown how children's learning and development processes extend

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across the division between home and childcare – what occurs in one context is significant for what occurs in another (e.g. Andenæs and Haavind 2015; Dencik 2004; Fleer and Hedegaard 2010; Kousholt 2006, 2008; Sommer et al. 2013). This corresponds with a Danish social pedagogical tradition of focusing on the collaborative processes between parents and pedagogues, who have common and related, but also different, tasks in relation to supporting the children's possibilities for well-being, learning and development (e.g. Andenæs 2011; Andenæs and Haavind 2015; Højholt et al. 2014; Kousholt 2006; Røn Larsen 2011a; Røn Larsen and Stanek 2015). In general the Nordic countries and other parts of the world have experienced an increased focus on the processes of collaboration and shared care between parents and pedagogues (for the Nordic context, see, e.g. Andenæs 2011; Andenæs and Haavind 2015; Drugli 2010; Kousholt 2008, 2014, and for a broader international context, see, e.g. Bleach 2015; Boag-Munroe 2014; Morrow and Malin 2004; Reedy and McGrath 2008; Singer 1993; Sphancer 2002). Correspondingly, parental collaboration is a still more integrated part of childcare practice. However "parental collaboration" tends to be a collective name, covering a range of diverse meanings, when it comes to defining quality, content and forms of parent-childcare relations. The reasons and methods for parental collaboration in childcare are conceptualised and played out in very different ways. The various descriptions of "positive relations", collaboration and partnership represent everything from daily interaction and major goal-oriented parental programmes to the social interventions for children or families, who are of concern to the professionals (Boag-Munroe 2014; Højholt and Kousholt 2015; Juhl 2014; Røn Larsen 2011a; Røn Larsen et al. 2014). In this way, the concept of "parental collaboration" seems to draw on various figures of understanding in practice, policy and research – figures that sometimes conflict in relation to fundamental questions about how to understand children's learning and development processes. Even so, there is a *limited focus on these differences* and their implications in both research and practice.

Danish childcare is currently undergoing a major development that breaks with the previously unique professional autonomy to insist on the children's right to a childhood, with a high degree of independence and influence primarily centred around activities of free play in childcare (Gulløv 2015; Højholt and Røn Larsen 2015; Kampmann 2009, 2014; Kragh-Müller and Ringsmose 2016; Wagner and Einarsdottir 2006). Historically the Nordic social pedagogical tradition has involved the parents as collaborative partners in the development and support of children's everyday lives across their different life contexts. Over the last decades the professional autonomy has gradually been replaced by a political focus on the content and outcome of Danish childcare institutions. This focus includes different issues. Since the beginning of the 1980s, there has been a focus on involving "the user perspectives" in developing the quality of Danish welfare institutions such as childcare. This ambition has had ambiguous meaning with a democratic ambition of including the citizens' perspectives on the one hand and a more consumer-directed ambition on the other. When looking across the tendencies of parental collaboration in childcare, a political focus on educational or preventive objectives can also be identified. In a broader international tradition, which focuses on children's school life, parental

collaboration is often discussed in terms of "goal orientation", to improve the rate of "school success". Finally the parental collaboration is also related to overcoming "social heritage" from a "disadvantaged" family background (e.g. Bæck 2005; Kousholt and Berliner 2013; Lareau 2003).

Over the last decade, I have investigated some of the compound and conflictual processes in parental collaboration together with different research teams (Højholt et al. 2014; Kousholt 2008; Røn Larsen 2005a, b, 2011a, 2012; Røn Larsen and Stanek 2015). The empirical material from the projects consists of participants' observations, interviews with various agents from the childcare field (pedagogues, directors, parents and municipal managers) and a range of different policy documents about childcare development from both the municipality and government. The analysis presented in this chapter will encompass these different projects, in order to shed light on some general dilemmas and tendencies of parental collaboration in childcare. The analysis shows that for the pedagogues, the different, conflictual understandings of parental collaboration tend to present themselves as dilemmas, situations where the tasks in relation to parental collaboration become unclear and sometimes contradictory. This chapter focuses on how problems and dilemmas in the concrete practice of parental collaboration in childcare reflect larger societal and historical conflicts about the relations between citizens and society. This approach breaks with a common and widespread tendency to reduce parental collaboration problems to a question of individual backgrounds, for either professionals or parents. Parental collaboration dilemmas are often related to questions of parents being too demanding or "hard to reach" or professionals lacking knowledge or competencies (Røn Larsen 2005a, b, 2011a). According to this suggested solutions to collaborative problems are often reduced to questions of methods and communicative strategies, often detaching the problems from their historical background and institutional conditions. As an alternative, this chapter will link the dilemmas of parental collaboration to the conditions of the complex institutional arrangement of childcare (Dreier 2008; Røn Larsen 2011b). These analyses may be of interest to a broader audience, because the specific historical context of Danish childcare at the moment seems to reflect some issues with a broader international impact.

Dilemmas and Institutional Demands in Practice: An Example

The following is an example from a Danish childcare, where the pedagogues experienced dilemmas in relation to the parents of a 4-year-old girl. First of all, it demonstrates the social pedagogical tradition, where the pedagogues intend to involve the parents in supporting their child's possibilities of participation in the free play activities in her peer group. But it also illustrates the dilemmas in parental collaboration and how different conflicting figures of understanding are simultaneously at stake in the childcare practice. The subsequent sections of the article will unfold the institutional context for these dilemmas.

According to one of the childcare pedagogues, the parents insist that the girl take a nap after lunch with the younger children. The pedagogue disagrees with the parents. She thinks that the girl is too old for this, and her experience is that it hampers the child's possibilities to participate in her peer group's activities. The pedagogues describe it as a dilemma, because on the one hand they believe that they should accommodate the parent's wishes and they feel anxious about criticising the parents' choice. On the other hand, the pedagogues feel obliged to intervene, because they observe that the girl have difficulties with her peer relationships, because she is never present in the playground situations after lunch because of her nap. The pedagogues explain that they have tried to ask the parents whether it was really necessary for the girl to sleep during the day, but the parents insist. Otherwise, the girl becomes too tired in the evenings. After the talk, the professionals are worried that the parents feel insulted, and they sense that the parents have been distant ever since the meeting. However, they also think that the problem remains unresolved because of the parent's insistence. Afterwards the parents and the pedagogues no longer chat as they had in the past, and the pedagogues describe their relationship as rather tense. The girl continues to sleep in the childcare institution during the day, and the pedagogues remain concerned about her peer relationships. The situation seems to have reached a deadlock.

The pedagogues continue to discuss the situation, but they do not involve the parents, because they fear the parents might file complaints against them. Finally, the director of the childcare centre insists that they invite the parents for a new meeting. At this meeting, they begin the discussions by *exploring the specific meanings* that sleeping in the childcare centre have for the girl in her everyday life. It becomes clear to the parents how their insistence on the nap is influencing the girl's social life. However, it also becomes clear to the pedagogues that what they had thought of as the parents' neglecting their child's needs could also be understood as the parent's attempt to consider her needs in relation to their family life. Both parents work far from home, and the girl is delivered to childcare early and picked up late. Since they want to spend as much time as possible with their child, the parents consider it meaningful for her to have a "siesta" at the childcare. After sharing their different perceptions and discussing the implications for the girl's possibilities of leading a life that spans the different contexts, the parents and the pedagogues reconsider their own standpoints and their contributions to the girl's life. The parents allow more flexibility in relation to the pedagogue's arrangements for their daughter's nap and try to arrange their work-life a little differently in order to occasionally collect her earlier. The pedagogues become more explorative in order to understand when it is important to allow the girl to sleep, and they also start working more actively on supporting the girl's participation in the children's communities at other times.

The central point here is not to emphasise or discuss what was right or wrong in this specific case. Rather it is to show how different expectations to the relation to the parents are at stake at the same time. It is unclear for the pedagogues how to handle the differences between their perspectives and the parents. As one of the pedagogues explains after the second meeting:

> *Thinking back, I wonder what took us so long. Why did we drag it out? Well, I'm still not sure whether I agree with them [The parents]. But perhaps I understand them better now.*

Why did it drag out? Why does conflict become something "dangerous"? The process of collaborating with the parents was in many ways experienced as threatening to the pedagogues, as a process filled with dilemmas and uncertainty of who was right and who was wrong. Another aspect worth noticing is what happens when the question of "standards" or "principles" are abandoned and substituted with a joint exploration of meanings across this specific child's different life contexts, where the different perspectives become important and relevant to each other, rather than being reduced to the question of who is right and who is wrong. Here it becomes possible to establish a "chain of care", where pedagogues and parents support each other in exploring different aspects of the child's life in contexts to which they do not always have access (Andenæs 2011; Andenæs and Haavind 2015; Gullestad 1979; Kousholt 2006, 2008). By investigating each other's perspectives and reasons, it seems to become possible to develop better and more flexible solutions for the children. However, establishing the common exploration of different perspectives seems very hard within this institutional context. In the following section, I will propose a theoretical and analytical framework for understanding the unease and the dilemmas of parental collaboration related to historically developed, contradictory institutional conditions and demands.

Conflictual Collaboration in Institutional Arrangements of Social Practice

The overall focus of this chapter addresses the relations between dilemmas in everyday life and the larger institutional and political arrangement of which childcare is a part. The analysis focuses on *dilemmas*, a concept that stresses the personal side of structural conditions in an institutional context, for example, expressed in politics and management. If we want to understand concrete dilemmas and challenges in relation to parental collaboration in childcare, we need concepts that relate pedagogical practice to a larger institutional context involving many and often conflictual conditions and demands. In my research, this is done by understanding the social practice of childcare as a compound institutional arrangement with many, often conflictual interests at stake simultaneously (Axel 2009, 2011; Dreier 2008; Højholt and Kousholt 2015). However, we cannot reduce the influence of institutional demands on social practice to a question of simple causal relations. Instead, we need to explore the different conflicting subjects to make sense of their everyday lives (Dreier 2008). Here, the meaning of the institutional conditions is explored through analysis of first-person perspectives in relation to the meanings that they have for *persons in practice* (Busch-Jensen 2013; Dreier 2008; Schraube 2010). This research perspective breaks with traditional research from a "macro-perspective", focusing on the processes of "implementation" of a special act or legislation as the explanatory framework for initiatives and outcomes in practice, implicitly suggesting that development is the outcome or "percolation" of political strategies and rationales.

Instead, these analyses draw on inspirations from primarily critical psychology (e.g. Axel 2009, 2011; Dreier 2008; Højholt and Kousholt 2015), institutional ethnography (Smith 2005, 2006) and social practice theory (Lave 2008, 2011), focusing on the experienced dilemmas in practice as a part of peoples' participation in social practice that again is part of a more comprehensive institutional arrangement. In this way, institutional conditions are approached from "within", focusing on the concrete and contradictory meanings that the institutional conditions have for people and for collaboration in the everyday life in childcare institutions (Røn Larsen 2005a, b, 2011a, b). This analytical focus provides an opportunity to understand the experienced dilemmas and contradictions as connected to specific and yet contradictory institutional demands and conditions. This analytical approach illustrates how contradictions and conflicts in the processes of collaboration cannot merely be understood as problems of approach and communication strategies. Neither can they be comprehended as questions of failed political strategies. Instead, dilemmas in parental collaboration are related to contradictory institutional conditions for the parent-professional cooperation. The following section will focus on the identification of different but contradictory figures of understanding, which seem to be working simultaneously in the institutional arrangement of parental collaboration. These figures of understanding are analysed situated in an actual historical setting in order to understand their institutional foundation. The idea of pointing out these different figures of understanding of parental collaboration is *not* to use them in a descriptive manner, as "real" unanimous categories existing in different pedagogical practices. Rather, the ambition is to visualise some of the different logics and demands that are simultaneously at stake due to the contradictory institutional conditions of the collaboration between parents and pedagogues in childcare.

Parental Collaboration Between Differently Positioned Participants

Studying the childcare sector and specifically the relations between the professionals and the parents, it becomes obvious that this is a field where many political intentions often simultaneously set opposing demands. The childcare centres have had a very mixed historical development, and over time the collaboration between parents and childcare professionals has been ascribed with different kinds of meaning (Andersen and Rasmussen 2001). One central figure of understanding is part of the social-pedagogical tradition of Danish childcare. A central historical root of childcare institutions is the "børnehave" [as it is called in Danish]. These childcare institutions were developed at the beginning of the twentieth century as part-time options, which offered better developmental possibilities for the children of the more well-off, upper middle class – often founded in the pedagogical tradition deriving from Froebel (Ahrenkiel 2014; Hviid and Villadsen 2016 this volume). The "børnehave" had an ideological foundation in the vision of contributing to

developing democratic citizens. Partly originating from this tradition, cooperation with the children's parents was often considered an integral part of the pedagogical work in childcare. This corresponds with the tradition of considering pedagogy as support for the children's learning and development processes as an integrated part of their everyday life (Andenæs and Haavind 2015; Højholt and Røn Larsen 2014, 2015; Kragh-Müller 2012; Wagner and Einarsdottir 2006). In the 1980s, there was a major focus on the "user perspective" in developing the Danish welfare state. This approach was founded in a general critique of the welfare institutions and the dominant tendency of autonomy among professionals in the beginning of the 1980s, especially in relation to the healthcare systems, but also increasingly in the social and educational welfare areas, like childcare and schools (Højholt and Kousholt 2015; Røn Larsen 2005, 2006). As it will be further discussed in the following section, this focus has had rather antagonistic meanings in the development of childcare (Højholt and Kousholt 2015; Røn Larsen 2005, 2006). In one line of thinking, the development of the user perspective was considered a further democratisation of the public welfare institutions, an initiative meant to allocate influence and responsibility of childcare institutions to citizens of the welfare state. When studying Nordic literature on childcare from the late 1970s and the 1980s, it is possible to identify a professional ambition for more democratic ways of developing parental collaboration – not only in relation to the interests of the parents' own child but also in relation to the institution as a whole and to the entire group of children (e.g. Clausen et al. 1987; Ladberg 1986). More recent research shows that this figure of understanding still plays an important part in the pedagogical practice of childcare (Ahrenkiel 2014; Højholt et al. 2014; Kousholt 2006; Røn Larsen 2005a, 2011a; Røn Larsen and Stanek 2015). The same tendency also appears in an ongoing insistence on parental participation in the development of childcare, e.g. with initiatives to create more collective strategies for parental collaboration, where parents are asked to engage in the development for the entire group of children (e.g. Schødt 2005; Højholt et al. 2014; Nielsen et al. 2013; Røn Larsen 2005a, b, 2011a; for corresponding international tendencies, see, e.g. Crozier and Reay 2005; Cucchiara and Horvat 2009). Here it is possible to identify a *participant approach* to parents, with appertaining expectations of the parents contributing with their knowledge of their children and participating in developing the appropriate support for the children's life within the family and in childcare institutions. Intertwined with these ambitions for parental collaboration, the parents are also encouraged to contribute with voluntary practical work in the childcare and support initiatives within class community building, play relations etc. As one of the pedagogues in a childcare centre puts it, when explaining the importance of the parental collaboration:

> *Parental collaboration is important to the child, because a large part of the child's everyday life is lived in the institution. The parents are raising that child, and so are we. We have the child in common…*

For the children, the different settings are interlinked and influence each other. Therefore, what is institutionally separated when we analyse it from the position of the child is connected through the child's trajectories of participation (Fleer and

Hedegaard 2010; Kousholt 2006, 2008; Røn Larsen and Stanek 2015). In their everyday life, children are often dependent of the adults exchanging knowledge about the child's life elsewhere, as we saw with the example of the parental collaboration about the girl's nap in childcare. So, analysed from the perspectives of the children, the relationship between parents and pedagogues is a relationship between differently positioned but interdependent participants. Because of this, they have different interests and access to knowledge about the child, but they are also dependent on each other *exactly* because the child, who unites them, lives his or her life across the different settings (Røn Larsen and Stanek 2015). Therefore, the positioned differences are in both cases the source of conflicts and the reason for collaboration. As a father puts it when referring to the collaboration with the childcare centre:

> *We NEED to figure it out together. We are all interested in the well-being of all our children.*

In the example with the girl's naps in childcare addressed earlier, we see this figure of understanding, in the ambition of working the conflicts out with the parents in order to support the child's everyday life among her peers in childcare. Here the mutual relationship between parents and professionals involves a constant exploration of situated challenges in the children's lives and an insight into each other's different perspectives (Andenæs and Haavind 2015; Røn Larsen 2005a, b). The conflict might be an unavoidable part of such collaborative processes, and consensus is neither the precondition nor the aim of the collaborative processes. However, in practice conflicts are often considered problematic – something that it is important to avoid (Højholt and Kousholt 2015; Røn Larsen 2011a, b). In many ways, this longing for consensus relates to another strong institutional demand on the professionals' relationship with the parents – namely, the expectation that the parents are treated as consumers of welfare services.

Parental Collaboration Between Service Agents and Consumers

Juxtaposed with the figure of understanding of the parents as "equal" participants, the extensive focus on "user perspectives" as a central driver in the development of public welfare has also contributed to the development of another figure of understanding of the parent as a *consumer* of welfare services. The critical discussions of user influence resulted in changes in the legislation for the childcare area demanding parental boards in all childcare institutions. The board would approve the childcare institutions' business strategy (since 1993) and their nursery curriculum (Nursery Curriculum Act 2004). Several research projects have investigated the discourse changes in the changing legislations regulating the childcare centres over time. From different theoretical perspectives, these changes have been interpreted as political attempts to break with the pedagogue's authority and autonomy – thus

creating a fundamental change in the childcare institutions, turning them into "welfare shops" with "business strategies" for improving the supply of "core outputs" declared and labelled in "nursery curriculums". According to these analyses, pedagogues tend to become suppliers of "childcare services" (e.g. Ahrenkiel 2013; Krejsler 2014; Plum 2010, 2014; Rasmussen and Smidt 2000; Røn Larsen 2005a, b). In this process of modernisation, the management of childcare has been developed paradoxically. On the one hand it has been decentralised, and the different institutions have been compared with private companies, with local directors responsible for developing a business strategy for the implementation of the national nursery curriculum, strategies that were constantly monitored and authorised by the parental boards. On the other hand, the overall aims of childcare have been centralised by the Nursery Curriculum Act (2004) and the Child Care Centre Act (2007). This development has reformulated the attempt to include user perspectives into a *consumer approach* to parents.

A general feature that appears in conversations and interviews with childcare pedagogues from different kinds of 0–6-year institutions over the years is a kind of duality between the many intentions and ideals of parents' participation and involvement, as mentioned earlier, on the one hand, and the challenges and dilemmas of their influence as demanding customers on the other. In one kindergarten, the pedagogues decided that they wish to include parents more directly in the everyday life of the childcare centre, because they want the parents to engage with the other children and obtain a deeper insight into what is taking place. The local director of the childcare centre emphasises the need for an equal relationship, where the parents are *less guests and more participants* (cf. the former paragraph of this chapter). She expressed it as follows:

> *I would like them to just sit down and have a cup of coffee when they arrive to pick-up their children. And if the coffee pot is empty, they should just make another.*

Over a 6-month period, the pedagogues developed different kinds of initiatives in this childcare centre, inviting parents to stay longer, having dinner arrangements and special parents' meetings focusing on problems within groups of children. They constantly urged the parents to come and ask questions, if they were critical or curious about anything. However, this was not completely unproblematic for the pedagogues. One of the pedagogues describes the discomfort she sometimes feels when parents stay:

> *I generally feel that there is nothing they should not see. But still, sometimes I do wonder if perhaps we actually send them different signals. That perhaps we signal: 'Well now you should leave'. Because sometimes it is also awkward when parents stay on, right? Because you feel monitored and perhaps a little controlled.*

This pedagogue experienced a dilemma between the duality of her acceptance of the parents' presence and her anxiety about having them there. On the one hand, she felt that parents should be allowed to see and participate in everything, which is also an institutional requirement, specifically formulated by the director. On the other hand, she feels monitored and controlled when the parents are present. This might be related to the fact that, while she is obliged to think of the parents as equal partici-

pants, she is also institutionally encouraged to think of them as consumers of her service. In this specific municipality, there have recently been major concerns because a group of parents complained to the mayor about another childcare centre. As a result of this issue, the central administration strongly emphasised the need to avoid parental complaints. Therefore, these contradictory demands placed the pedagogue in a dilemma, because she should consider the parents to be equal participants and explore the different perspectives and potential conflicts with them, while she is also subject to institutional demands to have the parents control the quality of her welfare service. This demand was described by another pedagogue, who claimed:

> *I think I might be a little better at it [parental collaboration] than my colleagues, because I used to work in a shop before I became a pedagogue.*

This emphasises the pedagogues experienced demand of keeping the parents satisfied with the "welfare service" of the childcare institution. The director of a childcare centre also described how she sometimes felt split between her pedagogical intentions and her obligations to the political and administrative system as an employee:

> *Being the director, you are often placed in a major dilemma about where to direct your loyalty. But in relation to the political resolutions, whether you agree or not, you stay loyal. That is what we are hired to do.*

She described situations where she kept a lid on conflicts with parents who were dissatisfied, because she was afraid that they would complain to the political system or even the mayor, even though she disagreed with their point of view. The director described the feelings of being left with the responsibility for decisions that were actually being forced upon her from above, because she was expected to manage her responsibility so that harmony and consensus would be maintained in relation to the parents. In other words, she described the institutional demands of a consumer approach to parents. However, the consequences are also that sometimes she feels obliged to make decisions that do not serve the best interests of the children as a group from a pedagogical perspective, in order to accommodate the parent's individual wishes. Therefore, she felt that she was sacrificing the institutional demand to involve parents as active participants.

> *It is the user-perspective that is at stake. The core-output of this childcare institution is to take care of children.*

Returning to the example of collaboration with the parents demanding naps for their child in the childcare centre, this becomes a central institutional demand, when trying to understand the dilemmas for the pedagogues. On the one hand, they feel obliged to deliver the service that the parents demand in order to keep them from complaining, but on the other hand, they think the girl is too old to sleep during the day, and they observe that the nap is preventing her from participating in the children's communities. The pedagogues are conflicted by contradictory demands. They are required to treat the parents as consumers that control the quality of their welfare service, consumers who need to be satisfied in order to prevent them from complaining. This means that it took a long time for the pedagogues to address the problem with the parents, in order to examine the result on the girl's everyday life of this conflict of perspectives.

Parental Collaboration Between Expert and Client

The first childcare institutions in Denmark developed in the late nineteenth century, and since 1919, it has been possible to receive state support for these initiatives. From the beginning, a key objective was to look after children from low-income families, keeping them off the streets while their parents went to work (Hviid and Villadsen 2016; Schwede 1997). Currently, these historical roots seem to be reactualised as another competing figure of understanding in the development of strategies for parental collaboration – namely, what could be called the *client approach* to parents. In recent years, the political interest in parental collaboration has increased, and new forces are at stake, especially connected to a political agenda on early preventive efforts in relation to children and families that are considered "disadvantaged" (Højholt and Kousholt 2015; Juhl 2014; Røn Larsen et al. 2014). This intention can be observed in, e.g. the Parental Responsibility Act (2007) and the Child Care Centre Act (2007 & 2010), both emphasising the parent's responsibilities to contribute to the child's life in childcare. In relation to parental collaboration, these ambitions seem to raise new questions, challenges and dilemmas. The Danish childcare is to an increasing extent considered a part of the social interventions around "disadvantaged" families and can be made mandatory, e.g. in relation to bilingual children, with a possibility of economic sanctions, if the parent doesn't deliver the child into childcare. In addition the pedagogues are often expected to participate in inter-professional family work, a relation that some pedagogues describe as counterproductive to the parental collaboration, since it tends to "install a relation of control" as a pedagogue puts it. In this relation it can be complicated for parents to express a different opinion than the pedagogues, without appearing suspicious. In the former example with the girl, we saw the contours of this figure of understanding in the silent, yet disapproving attitude to the wish of the parents that their child should continue to take naps in childcare. This is in contrast to the idea of parents as consumers, where they were monitoring and controlling the pedagogues. Here, the pedagogues are expected to monitor and control the parent's support of their child – a figure of understanding that tends to encourage the parents to hold back worries and problematics in relation to their child, thereby undermining the collective exploration in relation to supporting the child's everyday life across contexts.

Parental Collaboration as Partnerships About Learning

Since the beginning for the 1990s, an increasingly dominant trend in childcare institutions has been connected to a focus on learning and preparation for school and further educational progress for children. This is specifically clear in the Nursery Curriculum Act (2004) that mirrors the generally increased focus on children's education in an international context, reflecting a global competition context related to, e.g. the PISA processes. This persistent focus on learning and school preparation breaks with the former traditions of the Danish childcare and is also implicating

changes in the practice of parental collaboration. Previously, issues of education and learning played a rather insignificant role in the Danish childcare. The professionals have for a long time refused the concept of "pre-school teachers", insisting on being called pedagogues, continuously insisting on "childhood in its own right", with an emphasis on processes of free play, participation with and influence on the children (Kragh-Müller and Ringsmose 2016). This historical background is important in order to understand the Danish context for parental collaboration, which differs from most international research perspectives within the French-English tradition, which tend to have an immanent educational perspective, focusing on the possibilities for learning, and the possible "learning outcome" for children (e.g. Boag-Munroe 2014; Larsen et al. 2011; OECD 2012). This tendency reflects similar tendencies from the school area (e.g. Hedeen et al. 2011; Henderson and Mapp 2002). According to these trends, the Danish social pedagogical tradition appears to be under increasing pressure. The latest Primary Education Act states that "All children should be as clever as they can be" (Kousholt and Hamre 2015). Local Government Denmark states that this also applies to childcare services in pre-school: "Children will only have equal possibilities in life if we start in the earliest years of a child's life" (KL 2014 – my translation). In Denmark, these discussions of learning play an increasingly significant role in children's childcare life. It also influences the processes of parental collaboration. In a childcare centre for 0–3-year-olds, the following notification about a parent meeting was distributed to the parents:

> *We know from research that a childhood can either be won or wasted. We are eager to win the childhood of your children. This is why we do everything in our power to make your child thrive and learn everything he/she needs to be able to do - both here in nursery, and to prepare for 'kindergarten' and later for school.*

In this childcare centre, a central part of the parental collaboration consists of meetings between pedagogues and parents when the child turns two. In the meetings, they discuss the children's achievements in relation to a two-page list with standardised learning goals defined by the nursery curriculum, as discussed by the pedagogues within this municipality. After such a meeting, the pedagogues and parents are supposed to sign a developmental contract, which includes what the parents will do prospectively in order to support the child's development in the areas where the child is facing challenges. The prevailing figure of understanding in these situations has central similarities to the one with parents as clients – but with a specific focus on *parents as supporters of learning processes*. In relation to the beforehand defined learning goals, the pedagogues are considered to be the experts on children's development and learning, who are supposed to support the parents improve their parenting. This figure of understanding has for a long time played a central part in relation to families that are considered to be disadvantaged (e.g. Højholt and Kousholt 2015; Juhl 2014) However, it is only recently that this kind of logic has dominated the broader parental collaboration (for contractual relationships with parents in Danish schools, refer to Knudsen 2010). As one of the pedagogues explained regarding supporting learning at home:

Well, we know from research that the real progress happens at home – if the parents change their attitudes, the children can take major steps forward, steps that the parents didn't even imagine.

Here it is important to notice that this approach also seems to silence the exploration of the concrete differences between the perspectives of parents and pedagogues, since the answers to what a child needs (in relation to learning properly) are already defined, no matter what the parents might think or imagine. Similarly to the consumer relationship, but with a reverse relationship of control, the exchange of different perspectives on the individual child's life tends to become irrelevant.

Concluding Discussion

This chapter has illustrated how parental collaboration in Danish childcare institutions is a very complex phenomenon consisting of a range of different activities, entailing several contradictory and often competing logics or figures of understanding. However, in practice and in research, we often consider it a unanimous and harmonious thing. By analysing pedagogues and directors' perspectives in practice, it becomes clear that parental collaboration is a field with great tensions and dilemmas. The dilemmas are strongly linked to the historically developed conflicts and contradictions in the institutional conditions and demands for pedagogical work in childcare. A central figure of understanding of parental collaboration follows the social pedagogical traditions by inviting parents in for development of conditions of children's influence and free play. As a part of this tradition, parents are considered equal but different participants than the pedagogues in ensuring quality in the individual children's lives within the family and childcare. Because they are positioned differently, their perspectives are considered particularly important. The investigation of the different perspectives, and therefore the potential conflicts, is central to the development of the children's life conditions and developmental possibilities within the family and childcare. However, parents are also considered consumers of the welfare services, including childcare: As consumers, they participate in the ongoing assessment of the quality of the childcare centre, including the work of the pedagogues – and the childcare centre personnel are made responsible for delivering a certain level of parental satisfaction. As shown in the examples, this entails the risk of covering up the differences of perspectives between parents and professionals. Since the parents have the authority to decide what is important for their children and to evaluate the childcare's capacity to deliver the expected service, it becomes risky for the pedagogues to challenge the parents' understanding. This anxiety relating to different perspectives and potential conflicts tends to undermine the process of joint examination of the underlying reasons for these differences. Another form of logic appears to be playing a still more significant role as a condition for the childcare institutions and the professionals. The leading figure of understanding is the relationship between the pedagogue as an authoritative expert and

the ignorant or "unwilling" parent as a potential client. The pedagogues are responsible for establishing a relationship with the parents that supports the goals for the children's development in order to protect them for "the social heritage" of their parents, goals that are often already defined in the legislation and the nursery curriculums. In this relation it becomes potentially threatening for the parents to be open about their problems and perspectives on the children's lives. Similar to the situation in the consumer relationship, the actual examination of the content and reasons for different perspectives is easily derailed. The differences between the parents' and the pedagogues' perspectives are, at best, irrelevant for the childcare practice and, at worst, problematic because they get in the way of achieving the defined goals. This figure repeats itself in relation to the parents as "supporters of learning", where the children are regularly assessed in order to support the parents developing efficient strategies for preparing their children for further education. Here the investigations of the parents' perspectives appear to be reduced to figuring out where they can improve their efforts to nurture strong future citizens. In both cases it therefore becomes risky for the parents to challenge the pedagogues' perspectives, which are often presented as standardised plans for the expected progress of development and learning.

For the pedagogues these different institutional demands and different figures of understanding present themselves as dilemmas in practice, because they represent contradictory ways of confronting or inviting parents to collaborate. Dilemmas like these give us an insight into the lived experiences with institutional contradictions through the different approaches to parents inherited from the history of childcare. Through the examination of the unease and dilemmas within the pedagogical practice in collaboration with the pedagogues, we are able to address the institutional and structural contradictions. Concurrently with the modernisation process of the public welfare institutions, the responsibility of harmonising the irreconcilable demands is decentralised to the local director, and, at the same time, the practice is increasingly regulated by centrally defined standards. Thus, the responsibility for the development of childcare practice and parental collaboration relating to the complex and contradictory institutional conditions becomes a matter of the director's capability and competencies. Due to this process of decentralisation, conflicts deriving from the immanent paradox of the modern welfare state are demonstrated by numerous situated conflicts in the parental collaboration. For the individual professional, it appears to be an insurmountable exercise to overcome the immanent conflicts and paradoxes of the modern welfare state, but as the responsibility is individualised and personalised, the structural side of these conflicts becomes very difficult to address.

The parental collaboration has gradually been influenced by different political perspectives on the relationship between citizens and society, with different figures of understandings of power relations and authority to define children's needs and potentials. These political interests have been supported by new regulations and governance strategies in relation to improving childcare services and measurable learning outcomes of child life in childcare institutions. The social pedagogical tradition of collective exploration and specific development of actual pedagogical

practice of negotiating and adapting to the specific children and their family's situation is under heavy pressure from globalisation, which has entailed increased focus on education, competition, measurement, standardisation and goal orientation.

To put it bluntly, one might ask if the future development of parental collaboration, which is all about developing the best practice for each child, is now reduced to simply negotiating how to most effectively achieve the standardised goals. Are we in fact at risk of losing something important in the process, having parents as important participants in supporting children's development of their lives, as a part of the collective life in childcare?

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Chapter 14
The Professional Identity of the Danish Pedagogue: Historical Root in an Education with Focus on Democracy, Creativity, *Dannelse and a 'Childhood Logic'*

Sigrid Brogaard-Clausen and Charlotte Ringsmose

Abstract This chapter explores the identity formation of the Danish early years pedagogue, paying close attention to early year democracy and *dannelse*. With a focus on *dannelses* and democratic processes, the significance of the artistic and creative processes emerges, both in the education of the pedagogue and in the emphasis on a childhood logic in pedagogical thinking and practice. A historical consideration of the education of the Danish pedagogue positions the pedagogue as an integral part of a social-democratic welfare state system and cultural belief system. However, concerns are raised in relation to recent policy developments that have challenged the pedagogical education and tradition of democracy and *dannelse*, while narrowing students' broader knowledge base in the artistic and creative *dannelse* processes. Despite the strong tradition of a distinct early years pedagogical identity and autonomy, the early years pedagogue are under pressure from an international comparative and competitive agenda promoting stronger centralised and external governance. The key message from this chapter is to highlight the risk that comes with lack of awareness of and attention to Danish early years values and traditions within an international competitive context and how this may result in political decisions to abandon the (pedagogical) tradition of *dannelse* and democracy.

Introduction: Dimensions of a Professional Identity

In the previous chapter, it was identified how we should be cautious about portraying just one Nordic model for early years. Similar caution should be applied when looking at the Nordic Early Years Professional. The Nordic countries, Denmark,

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Norway, Iceland, Sweden and Finland, share a tradition of a degree-level qualified workforce in early care and education (ECEC), but the emphasis on early education and/or social pedagogy differs. For that reason the starting point in this chapter will be from the national perspective of the Danish authors. The chapter will provide insight into what characterises the early care and education (ECEC) workforce, 'the pedagogues', in Denmark, aiming to provide opportunities to consider similarities and differences to ECEC professional identities in other countries, rather than an attempt at any direct comparison.

Our starting point is that professionalism is 'a discourse as much as a phenomenon: as something that is constantly under reconstruction' (Dalli and Urban 2008:132). This ongoing construction of professionalism relates to Giddens' (1991) definition of identity, adapted here in relation to a professional identity. Professional identity is constructed by, and consists of, reflexive beliefs and understandings about the professional's own narrative that is developed in regular interaction with others and the external world. Rather than seeing professional identity as a set of traits or observable characteristics, professional identity is established by how pedagogues see themselves as individuals and as a group (responsibility, values and ethos) and how they are positioned and position themselves within society.

While considering professional identity formation as ongoing, Brock's (2006) proposed dimensions of professionalism can provide a further detailed framework for examining the professional identity of the pedagogue, where professionalism is based in knowledge, education and training, skills, values, ethics, autonomy, status and power. The chapter, therefore, explores these aspects in the context of the professional identity of the Danish pedagogue which is rooted in the history of the education of pedagogues. We explore how personal and group identity formations interrelate with workplace, institutional and political constraints and opportunities, focusing on social status and parental and community expectations (Siraj-Blatchford 1993). We argue that Danish pedagogues contribute to shaping society and its citizens, both now and in the future, although their principled position is under threat due to an increased international focus on ECEC with an emphasis on narrowly defined academic skills (Brogaard Clausen 2015).

The professional identity of the Danish early years pedagogue signifies itself with its professional and educational roots in democracy, emancipation, egalitarianism and a good life (Brogaard Clausen 2015). Founded in the work of early years pioneers, the education of the pedagogue in Denmark has, throughout the century, been built on and promoted *dannelse* and democracy. '*Dannelse*' [ˈdanəlsə] is a term used to describe the child's and adult's ethical engagement in developing knowledge and competences. *Dannelse* both refers to the content of knowledge and to the process where knowledge is acquired and developed. *Dannelse* has constructive and critical potential, where the child/adult *acquires knowledge* of the culture in the encounters with surroundings, object, activities and other children and adults, while *creating culture* and *gaining experiences and opportunities for critical thinking and democratic understanding*. The pedagogical aim for *dannelse* is for adults and children to use knowledge and competences ethically in relation to themselves and others and, based in the values of democracy and a good life, aim and work towards a better and more meaningful society (Clausen 2004). In the tradition of the

Danish pedagogue, arts and creativity have been vehicles for such *dannelse* alongside a tradition that emphasises children's play in democratic communities.

The identity of the Danish early years pedagogue will be considered below, paying close attention to the above-mentioned values and traditions of democracy and *dannelse*, where community and relationship building is essential both in the past and present Danish pedagogy. The chapter will also explore the significant prominence on artistic and creative processes in the education of the pedagogue, as well as the emphasis on a childhood logic, both in pedagogical thinking and practice. To examine the identity formation, the chapter will firstly explore the historical roots and development of the education of the Danish pedagogue. Attention is then drawn to the position of the pedagogue within the welfare state, as an integral part of both a welfare system and a cultural belief system. However, concerns are raised in relation to recent policy developments that have challenged the pedagogical education and tradition of democracy and *dannelse* and narrow students' broader knowledge base and the artistic and creative *dannelse* processes. The professional identity of the Danish pedagogue is under pressure from an international comparative and competitive agenda promoting stronger centralised and external governance. As referred to in Chap. 5, increased political interest in ECEC has resulted in a push for more school preparatory learning in early childhood, and this is challenging the social pedagogical approach, even in countries like Denmark, where there is a long historical tradition of a distinct early years pedagogical role and identity. Before the chapter concludes, we therefore reflect on the ways that pedagogy and *dannelse* as themes explored within an international context (may) highlight the fundamental importance of the concepts that underpin Danish pedagogy. The key message from this chapter is how consideration of one nation's values and traditions in ECEC is needed both to enable considerations of early years professionalism across nations and to better understand the Danish social pedagogical approach and learn from this – possibly before it is too late. We therefore need to address this by providing insight in to the profession through history, traditions of arts and creativity, democracy and the role of the pedagogue in the community and the status and position of the profession. The Danish social pedagogical approach is part of a long historical tradition and culture now challenged by globalisation; however, little awareness of and attention to this tradition may result in political decisions to abandon the social pedagogical tradition.

Historical Roots: Civic and Pioneering Movement

The education of pedagogues in Denmark was established during the last century and was founded in the pioneering work of Hedevig Bagger and Anna Wulff, who promoted *dannelse*, equality, respect, trust and a childhood logic from the beginning of the century (Bagger 1891, Magnussen in Fischer and Schultze Henriksen 2002; Schwede 2004).

These two pioneers were inspired by Froebelian thinking, but Hedvig Bagger emphasised a Danish critical understanding of the Froebelian ideas, where the

kindergarten was to be 'the home away from home', and she objected to strict structures. She adapted some of the Fröbelian occupations such as sand, clay, block play as well as drawing, needlework, storytelling, games and singing, however warned not to make these creative activities into 'structured work' (Boelskov 2005). A key value of her pedagogy was the promotion of free and spontaneous child-led play in the outdoors (Bagger 1891; Schwede 2004; Boelskov 2005). In both her writing and teaching, a democratic ethos was promoted, where the kindergarten teacher as a role model, a cultural bearer, was responsible for developing a strong non-biased relationship with each individual child based on respect and trust (Bagger 1891; Fischer 2005). The kindergarten teacher was to avoid punishment of the children, as showing respect for and trust in the children meant understanding what was driving their behaviour. To support the children's *dannelse* (based in Christian values), the need was to create a calm environment rather than using 'power language and commands'. Furthermore it was expected that the kindergarten teacher/pedagogue was 'serious and diligent in developing her personal *dannelse* and professional competences' (Bagger 1891 p 113).

Bagger recognised the importance of the interpersonal relationship with parents, but this was even stronger in Anna Wulff's pedagogy, regarded as essential in promoting the young children's *dannelse* – and in supporting the community. Wulff developed her college with a focus on supporting and educating the poorer communities, valuing trusting relationships with the families. In establishing the Froebel Hojskole (high school) in 1906, Wulff's idea was to create kindergartens and kindergarten teachers that were able to provide children and families with opportunities for solidarity and community. Prioritising the child's urge for play and occupation was promoted to enable responsible and free individuals to develop (Schwede 2004).

In 1928 Sofie Rifbjerg founded the third college for pedagogues, distinguished from the Froebel colleges by the inspiration from different theories, such as Montessori, psychoanalysis and cultural radicalism. She believed in the liberation of the child both physically and mentally, freed to think, construct, imagine, free in emotion and will. She promoted an anti-authoritarian stance and a celebration of the creative activities. To be able to liberate the child, the kindergarten teacher needs to experience freedom and independence, and Rifbjerg described this as the main role of the education: 'to develop teachers to be brave and free humans, who can look themselves and others in the eyes, and dare face life as it is' (Rifbjerg 1969: 225). The teachers should base their work in respecting the child's spontaneity and various activities by creating an enabling environment that promoted the child's development *of dannelse* together with other children (Rifbjerg 1969). Creative and artistic processes were an essential part of this *dannelse* process.

Creativity and the Arts: Essential in Dannelse and Democracy

The arts have traditionally been honoured as an important part of Danish ECEC, also as a vehicle for democracy *and dannelse*. The tradition of the education of pedagogues has fostered a professional identity, where *dannelse* and democracy are

closely linked with the creative activities in the arts, as both can be seen in Bagger's and Rifbjerg's thinking (Rifbjerg 1969; Fischer and Schultze Henriksen 2002). Creative activities have been central in the pursuit of democracy, emancipation, egalitarianism and a good life, where students and children engage in a broad range of practical, theoretical and ethical areas in the arts, bringing skills and activities together to promote innovative thinking as part of personal (and professional) development (Ringsted and Froda 2008; Tanggaard et al. 2012). In international comparative research, the creative dimension has been recognised as distinct to Danish ECEC, as Petrie and Chambers establish 'the education of pedagogues acknowledges that, [..] music, drama, dance and the visual arts open their [the students'] eyes to wider dimensions of existence, and richer possibilities for the children they will work with' (2009; 3,4).

Initially inspired by Froebelian thinking, the colleges used artistic activities to challenge and support the child's holistic and versatile development. Influence from cultural progressive artists in the 1930s further strengthened the artistic and creative activities, where painters like Egon Mathiesen, who taught at Rifbjerg's college, also linked creativity and freedom to democracy (Fischer and Schultze Henriksen 2002). Free access to open-ended materials was recognised to provide the children with opportunities to express their own initiatives and personalities, and artists were often engaged to inspire both pedagogues and children (Fischer and Schultze Henriksen 2002; Larsen 1998).

The priority of aesthetic and artistic expressions reflects a recognition of young children's natural bodily, action-orientated, experimental play, learning style and expression. Through these activities children obtain knowledge of and experience with symbols, materials, aesthetic and social processes, cooperation and negotiation (Kidd et al. 2010). This artistic *dannelses* take place when the young child's learning and development are connected to the child's social interactions, bodily and material experiences, in collaboration with other people. The child does not learn best through directed teaching, but through everyday life creative activities and play and by 'being together' (*samvaer*, a key concept in Danish pedagogy) with other children and adults (Hansen 1997). The bodily, sensuous and action-orientated forms of learning coincide with the traditional artistic processes, engagement and expressions. The arts provide the basis for the activities and for 'being together', which supports the child's understanding of itself and others and learning in a number of ways (Kim 2012).

The pedagogue thereby becomes a cultural facilitator and culture bearer, providing opportunities for creative processes and activities, and by *being together with* the child(ren) they contribute to that child's acquired knowledge, skills, *dannelse* and aesthetic disposition (Ploug 2007). Through these activities the children gain experience with and knowledge of culture, gaining knowledge of the 'codes' that they (will) meet in culture, in society and in the education system. This participation and engagement with knowledge and *dannelse* become a significant part of both the children and the pedagogues' cultural capital.

Engaging Children and Parents in a Democratic Community: Childhood Logic

Traditionally the Danish pedagogues' self-perception is that they do not teach but rather care for children, in the understanding of care as 'developing strong relationships with them and engaging them in a democratic community' (Brostrom and Wagner 2003:17). The perception of childcare as outside the educational context can be traced back to the founder of the first kindergarten in Denmark, Niels Juel-Hansen, who in 1871 wrote 'The kindergartens are not schools – all school base learning are excluded. The main aim of the kindergarten is to contribute to the education of the childish/childlike in the child' (Fisher 2005, p 14; this is echoed by the head teacher of the Schou and Trolle school in 1897, Schwede 2004, p 29). In correlation to this, the Union for Child and Youth Pedagogues (*Born og Unge Pædagogers Landsforening* (BUPL)) stipulates, 'the day care centres are not a part of the educational system, but are considered as places where children can participate on their own terms in the creation of child life' (BUPL 2006:3). This creation of 'child life' involves the children's self-governed activity in play and practical-aesthetic and creative activities. A personal, reflective and relational pedagogy and the individual's personal and professional identity and authority are thereby essential in creating the democratic environments (Broström 2004; Petrie et al. 2009; Juul Jensen 2011; Peeters 2001).

In the creation of democratic communities and 'child life', children, parents and pedagogues are given opportunities to contribute as competent citizens with their experience, point of view, interpretations and ideas (Brogaard Clausen 2015). In international research there is recognition of how the Danish pedagogues establish specific *dannelses* values in the interpersonal relationships with colleagues, children and families, which are key in 'supporting identity, solidarity and the ability to comprehend the cultural context' (Peeters 2001). The pedagogues and the children develop the ability to understand and act in accordance with democratic principles by participating in different kinds of cooperation and decision-making (OECD 2004). The Danish pedagogues and children do not exist in separate hierarchical domains but in shared life spaces (Petrie et al. 2009). The child-child relationships and interactions, the horizontal relationships, are equally as important as the vertical relationship to the adult and children's absorption in their own play and activities are prioritised (Broström and Frøkjær 2012).

In a comparative study of early years professional's identity formation in three European countries, Juul Jensen found that the Danish pedagogues' perceived identity is based in a 'childhood logic' focused on children's play, appreciative relations, participation and dialogue, emphasising child-child relations as ways of developing empathy and showing consideration of each other in the collective (Juul Jensen 2011). The use of humour, the use and appreciation of outdoors and cherishing the free and natural child with the significant term of '*kropslighed*' (embodiment) are other key values expressed in the research; 'the pace, rhythm and atmosphere in day to day life are characterized by being absorbed in activities, encouraging unpredict-

ability and humour' (Ibid, p 146). The focus is on creative processes, play and everyday activities with adults and children living together in a community that are 'places where people get involved with each other in a genuine, intense and emotional ways – like we do in real life' (Ibid p 151). Valuing children's play, rights, the democratic community and the pedagogues' role as cultural bearer bears strong resemblance to the initial values promoted by the early years pioneers and evidences the strong roots and traditions in early years pedagogy in Denmark.

Status and Position in the Welfare State

The pioneering 'pedagogue' colleges that developed in the early part of the 1900s gained a stronghold throughout the century. The college principals led the civic movement promoting a central framework and recognition of the education of the kindergarten pedagogue, which was achieved with a national departmental order in 1948. This resulted in the first law on the education of pedagogues becoming part of the national agenda in 1953 (Schwede 2004; Broström 2004; Tuft 2012, 2010). Despite the tradition of autonomous pedagogical colleges, there has been a strong consensus of promoting the creative *dannelse* processes as essential in democratic communities and crucial in the development of the ECEC workforce (Boelskov 2005). Albeit not collaborating initially, the colleges developed a strong consensus of values of democracy, theory-practice relationship, creativity and dannelse, while respecting each other's autonomy collaborated in an aim of legislative recognition.

A tradition of pedagogical autonomy and self-governance within the profession is thereby long-standing, and the profession is an embedded part of the Danish social-democratic welfare state (Esping-Andersen 1990). Widespread acceptance of a welfare model has guaranteed political and financial support since the pioneering education of the profession and for kindergarten development (Schwede 2004; Borchorst 2000). The social-democratic political party dominance, in government and opposition, throughout the twentieth century has ensured state and/or local municipalities priority of ECEC, supporting children's and parents' rights to quality childcare by providing financial support (Esping-Andersen 1990, 2003; Borchorst 2000). An early push for women's rights and for mothers' participation in the workforce in the post-war years has furthermore been a predominant factor in the expansions of childcare (Borchorst 2000). Nonetheless the expansion has happened in a context of trust in the early years professionals from parents and society and the long held perception of nurseries as being beneficial for children and society (Foss 2007; NIRAS 2008; Tuft 2012).

The priority of a universal ECEC paved the way for a law entitlement of 'guarantee of full time –day care places for all children' in the early 1990, where the local municipality had to provide places for all children from the ages of one to school start. This universal childcare agenda naturally resulted in significant growth of childcare settings. However, due to this rapid growth, it also became a cause for concern in relation to quality and adult-to-child ratio in the settings (Krag-Muller

2013). A commitment to a graduate workforce though remains, and 60 % of staff in nurseries and kindergarten hold a Professional Bachelor Degree of Social Pedagogue. In 2014, the degree was the most popular and largest bachelor degree within Denmark (superseding the education of nurses and teachers; Rothuizen and Togsverd 2013).

Alasuutari's (cited in Einarsdóttir and Wagner 2006) comparative assessment of the Nordic countries' universal ECEC suggests that an institutionalised childhood has become part of the cultural belief system, where many parents take it for granted that public institutions are required for the appropriate upbringing of young children. Although being contested by some, the perception is that the universal ECEC system ensures (e)quality and opportunity in society. Urban et al. defines quality and competence in ECEC as requiring reciprocal relationships between individuals, teams, institutions and the wider socio-political context (Urban et al. 2011). A reciprocal relationship between the Danish state, the colleges for pedagogues and the early years settings (institutions) could be considered as framing the reciprocal relationship between professionals, parents and children, thereby recognising competences and ensuring quality. However, this shared responsibility, trust and democratic negotiation is under threat as decision processes and power are becoming less inclusive, more hierarchical and external (as discussed below and further in Brogaard Clausen 2015).

Changes to the Education of Pedagogues: Reduced Autonomy and Democratic Deliberation in the Education Policy Formation

Throughout the twentieth century, the college principles were influential in maintaining the strong values of autonomy and self-governance, allowing each college to set their own certain values and priorities (Schwede 2004). Kristjansson (2006) describes the democratic negotiation process in relation to ECEC in the Nordic countries, where stakeholders are involved in:

> *an endeavour to reach social consensus on issues with conflict-evoking potentials by creating forums for dialog and consultations where representatives of different interests are to meet and explain their positions [..]. Once decisions are made through this process, all parties are likely to feel a commitment to live up to them. In this process, the State plays a proactive role in reaching constructive agreements.* (Kristjansson 2006 p 24)

Nevertheless, in 1991, changes to the degree were driven by the government (Nielsen 2010; Schwede 2004), and the civic-initiated and autonomous pedagogical education was increasingly redefined by the state (Tuft 2012). Since 1992 the pedagogical workforce has been educated under the framework of one amalgamated degree with some specialisation in ECEC, social, and 'free-time pedagogy'.[1] Johannesson (in Einarsdottir and Wagner, 2007) suggests that the amalgamation of

[1] A degree in free-time pedagogy covers after-school clubs, youth clubs and similar nonschool-based activities.

degrees is a trend in the Nordic countries with the result that the distinct role and tradition of the kindergarten pedagogue/teacher are somehow lost and in this jeopardising traditional strengths and values. However, changes in the educational directive of pedagogues in both 2007 and 2014 strengthened the opportunities for specialism, although still maintaining the initial amalgamation and cross-disciplinary mode of study.

In 2001 the education gained the title of Professional Bachelors Degree, as a part of internationalisation. This change came with increased academic focus and standardisation, where, for example, 'Danish' was awarded a central position as 'Danish, Culture and Communication'. 'Danish' was previously placed together with the activity- and creativity-based subjects, such as music, drama, sport, clay, woodwork and nature, where students engaged in wide range of creative and activity subject for pedagogical use with children. However, as pressure from international comparisons on pupils' achievement increasingly led to a focus on learning in ECEC, 'Danish' and literacy development was prioritised (see further detail discussion in Chap. 5 and Brogaard Clausen 2015).

Since government has centrally set the educational directives, a reduction in creative processes and subjects has caused concern (Tuft 2012). Prior to 2007 students had to take all creative activity subjects with a later opportunity for specialisation; however, from 2007 students chose a 'specialist subject' from a selection of three combined subjects such as 'educational workshop' (*vaerksted*), 'nature and technical skills', 'expression-music-drama' and 'health, body and movement'. This narrowing of the students' access to a range of creative subjects reduced opportunities for the broader creative *dannelse*. A general reduction in teaching hours and the increased academic focus both in admissions, curriculum and assessment raised further concerns about student ability to relate theory to practice (Rambøl 2012).

Although maintaining the initial amalgamation of the degree, the 2014 education change introduced a specialisation in the second year after a shared foundation year – returning to the distinction between ECEC, social and free-time pedagogy. The new directive has reintroduced work with the wider range of creative activities now called practical-musical activities such as music, drama, nature and outdoors, media and physical exercise, though not explicitly the more craft-orientated artistic and creative processes. However, the key change is a move to a modular format, where the previous subjects no longer run independently, but feed into a thematic module, such as 'pedagogical environment and activities', which can include 'physical exercise, music and pedagogy'.[2] The new framework indicates less recognition of the creative activities as essential in the pedagogical work with children, potentially diminishing what has been a strength and benefit of the education of the pedagogue.

The educational aim is to bring the study closer to practice, strengthen multidisciplinary collaboration and to create more flexibility. While this change can have some merit, the education framework moved from stipulating what should be included in the curriculum to stipulating the competences and goals that students have to reach. Together with a decreased focus on creative processes, less time for

[2] http://nypaedagoguddannelse.nu/om-uddannelsen/indhold-og-opbygning/

teaching and group processes, the focus on individual assessment and competition conforms with an international movement of performativity and individualisation rather than strengthening the creative *dannelses* and democratic processes.

In the 'departmental order of the Education of Pedagogues Professional Bachelors' in 2010, the stated aim for the main subject of pedagogy was still rooted in a democratic practice as the 'subject qualifies for pedagogical work focusing on the quality of life, opportunities for action and democratic participation' (Danish Ministry of Education 2010; bilag 1). The main aim of the Education of Pedagogues remained 'to promote students' personal development, including the students' ability to and interest in active contribution in a democratic society' (Ibid § 3). This reiterated the early years curriculum aims of creating democratic environments and not aiming for particular (teaching) actions or methods. However, the changes in the education of pedagogues within the last two decades have been top-down with little evidence or rationale for the changes and little involvement of pedagogues, colleges or other stakeholders and therefore have reduced autonomy and democratic deliberation in the education policy formation (Tuft 2012). This comes alongside a weakened emphasis on democracy as essential to the pedagogical work, where the 2014 framework only includes democratic *dannelse* in the foundation year of the degree, and thereafter it is only mentioned in the context of an optional subject 'Cultural Project'. Such a seemingly weakened focus on creativity and democracy can only cause concern in relation to identify formation, both of the professional pedagogue and the children they work with.

The Identity of the Pedagogue in an International Context: Further Reflection on Pedagogy, Democracy and *Dannelse*

While considering the identity formation of the Danish pedagogue, the contrast to the Anglo-American understanding of pedagogy exemplifies how different values and discourses complicate international comparisons and need clarification. In Denmark pedagogy and pedagogues are embedded in a professional sphere referring to a complex and holistic relationship between people and between 'human and society' (Peeters 2001). Etymologically it traces its origin to the Greek '*Paidagogos*' role as a protector and moral guide following the father's moral view and authority, a role very different to the perceived role of the teacher (http://www.leksikon.org/art.php?n=2003).

The Anglo-American understanding of pedagogy covers appropriate methods for teaching a curriculum using instructional techniques and strategies (Alexander 2010), and pedagogy is often used instead of the more restricted term 'didactics' as describing teaching, instruction and the learning environment. In a discussion of the term, Mortimore (1999:3) defines pedagogy as 'any conscious action by one person designed to enhance learning in another'. This tradition is also prevalent in early years, where it predominantly attends to the effectiveness of teaching in order to

reach predetermined goals, where the drive towards rational and effective means of reaching goals represents a more positivistic tradition (Brehony and Nawrotzki 2011).

In contrast to this Danish early years pedagogy aims to establish relationships, *dannelse* and democracy, in the aim for a good life. Each unique situation and relation requires a professional and personal attention to care, development, learning and a good life. In this context the pedagogue negotiates theoretical, societal as well as their own and others' values in the complex, unique and changeable work with young children (Rothuizen and Togsverd 2013). The Danish title of pedagogue is strongly connected to these values and the historical roots (BUPL 2006), whereas in Norway and Sweden the title kindergarten and preschool teacher is the dominating term used. Despite the differences in priorities of social pedagogical and preschooling discourses a prevailing discourse, research point towards shared values of democracy, where children experience democracy by direct participation (Brostrom and Wagner 2003; Moss 2007; Pramling Samuelsson et al. 2006). However, within the Nordic countries, there are shared concerns regarding a school readiness agenda threatening early years democracy (Pramling Samuelsson et al. 2006; Jónsdóttir and Coleman 2014; Brogaard Clausen 2015). Neglecting creativity and democracy within the educational framework for pedagogues threatens the pedagogical *dannelse* values in Denmark.

Alongside the connection to the Nordic countries and values, the education of the Danish pedagogical profession has continued to draw association with German pedagogy and philosophy. The German *Geisteswissenschaftliche Pädagogik* (Klafki 1974,1998) reiterates a humanistic, critical and constructive pedagogy, and the German term *bildung* is regularly related to the Danish *dannelse* and refers to how you support children's interest in knowledge, well-being, ideology and philosophy (Rothuizen and Togsverd 2013). In the Danish education of pedagogues, pedagogical theory and practice are continually related to developing critical understanding, and this is used to develop pedagogical practice theory, where conditions, opportunities and limitations in the pedagogical practice as well as political, social and cultural influences are recognised, but are also critically assessed. Klafki (1974) distinguishes between *formal* and *material dannelse*, where *material dannelse* emphasises the acquisition of certain quantities and kinds of knowledge. *Formal dannelse* focuses on the general meaning and significance of the activity, if it creates opportunities for actions, for the development and use of competences, creativity and aesthetic sense in an ethical manner. This demand of relative autonomy and independence aims to provide children and adults with opportunities for developing independence and responsibility. Klafki (1998) describes how all phenomena in pedagogical practice and expressions of pedagogical theory have to be understood in their historical context.

In conjunction with the German *Geisteswissenschaftliche Pädagogik*, the heritage from the Danish *dannelses* tradition should be honoured. The values and processes attached to *dannelse* were also advocated by the Danish priest NFS Grundtvig who formed principles for the people's enlightenment and of *dannelse* in the beginning of the nineteenth century. Albeit not developing a pedagogical theory, his

thinking was humanistic and critical, and he advocated critical *dannelse* where creating possibilities for *dannelse* would enable all to become responsible citizens in society. By gaining sufficient insight in society, its construction and development, each citizen would become a critical independent voice in relation to those that held the power in society. Although initially sceptical towards the newly introduced democratic system, his thinking has been a significant part of forming the Danish understanding of *dannelse* and democracy as interlinked. His idea of the high school, originally intended for the farming population, builds on *samtale* (dialogue), 'the living word', exchange of experiences, self-realisation and solidarity. The 'teaching' should never get in the way of the person's curiosity, and exams were objected to, as in Grundtvig's understanding, they took more form of interrogation rather than developing dialogue and exchange of experience and knowledge. As Grundtvig was a priest, it is also significant to mention how he believed that the school should be separate from the church as he placed 'the human first and Christian next', where the human will and sensibility was above objective laws, totalitarian ideologies and absolute power systems. Grundtvig argued the historic-poetic-creative force in the human life and in society was equally as important as logical-scientific knowledge, and a focus only on the latter would stifle society, an emphasis that resembles Danish pedagogical values. Grundtvig was attentive to that *dannelse* both of the individual and the collective identities was based in narrativity. In this way his thinking was not unlike current thoughts on identity formation, where narratives develop and link dannelse, identity and society (structures) (Korsgaard 2014; Mortensen 1989; Giddens 1991).

The history of the Danish pedagogue and traditions of *dannelse* is a narrative about a professional identity developed in the contexts of creative processes, equality, emancipation and democracy. The aim is to involve, support and guide children to be more independent and responsible decision-makers and democratic partakers in their communities. Each member of a society has a right, but also a duty to contribute, in solidarity with and together with others, to the cultural, economic, social and political development. This social responsibility can only be realised if acknowledging equal rights, but also by supporting those whose opportunity for independence are limited or non-existing. Therefore, the pedagogue's knowledge of practice and interest in action and change demand knowledge of preconditions, opportunities and limitation in the pedagogical act.

Final Considerations: Is the Identity of the Danish Pedagogue Under Threat?

The education of the pedagogue is the largest bachelor education in Denmark. As in the other Nordic countries, it is rooted in a social welfare state, with a democratic model that values emancipation and egalitarianism and aims to develop democratic communities. While the state offers universal childcare, the pedagogues share with parents the responsibility of bringing up children.

Over the last century quality state ECEC has become an integral part of the social-democratic welfare state and of cultural belief systems shared by parents, pedagogues and politicians. The pedagogues in Denmark have the role of ensuring caring environments for children and promoting democratic participation, *dannelse*, creativity and the arts, cultural formation, well-being, development and learning and thereby hold central responsibilities in the welfare state (Mommsen 2012). Pedagogues contribute in shaping society and its citizens, both now and in the future. The early pioneers in Denmark were well aware of this democratic responsibility and placed the child's voice and democratic participation high on the agenda. They promoted an education embedding continued personal and professional *dannelse* by linking theory, practice, cultural and creative activities in both education and pedagogical practice. The tradition has been carried forward into the twenty-first century, where research on pedagogical values today replicates values from the beginning of the previous century, such as *dannelse*, democracy, creativity, the free and natural child, free and spontaneous play in the outdoor and equality and emancipation.

The creative activity subjects have been long established as a strong part of the education; however, with the government changing the education, in 1992, 2007 and 2014, less emphasis has been awarded to the artistic and creative *dannelse* processes. The artistic activities provide opportunities for *dannelse* and democracy and develop children's abilities and skills, equally in relation to a range of areas within as well as external to the arts. Creative and cultural processes and expressions are thereby part of a *dannelses* and democracy tradition ensuring children's holistic and versatile development (Economidou et al. 2011).

With the increased priority of academic subjects such as mathematics and language skills, the artistic activities have become under threat and thereby so has the pedagogical *dannelse* domain (Nitecki and Chung 2013). The emphasis on democratic *dannelse* is under pressure from an increased international focus on ECEC with an emphasis on narrowly defined academic skills (Brogaard Clausen 2015). In the context of global competition of educational results, there is pressure on ECEC, which restricts the multiple ways of engaging in democratic, creative processes of *dannelse* and thereby narrows the understanding of what pedagogy is (Krejsler et al. 2014).

International, national, local and institutional constrains and opportunities require the pedagogue to negotiate the different stakeholders' positions and values in a time where ECEC draws great attention in policy formation. The pedagogues' responsibility demands that individuals and groups actively engage and interpret in the world they participate in. Working with children requires an open and inquisitive mind, flexibility, independence and social responsibility and solidarity, as well as autonomy in thinking and acting. Values and knowledge need to be examined in light of what is relevant in the specific context and situation (Brock 2006).

The pedagogical tradition and its strong historical roots require continued discussion on how to educate the pedagogue to deal with such central, but also complex and changeable, responsibilities in society. Therefore, ongoing reflection, discussion and adjustment of pedagogical practice and of the education of pedagogues are continually needed. In this the democratic negotiation process becomes

crucial, whereby stakeholders are involved in a dialogue, where different interests are shared and negotiated and compromises and agreements are sought.

The role of the pedagogue is not to value only what can be measured but to develop, negotiate, interpret and understand what is valuable in society, in context and in specific situations – and to be prepared to negotiate and find compromise, examine and evaluate own and others' experiences and values and consequently examine if things can be done differently. The pedagogues evaluate their professional identity, in light of how they understand and interpret themselves, other(s), their relations and the significant cultural and societal responsibility that they hold. They, and the children they care for, therefore need to have a strong foundation in the democratic and creative *dannelses* processes.

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Chapter 15
Leading Pedagogical Quality in the Context of Finnish Child Care

Elina Fonsén and Janniina Vlasov

Abstract Although there has been much international interest in Finnish early childhood education and care (ECEC) as a result of the country's PISA success, the field is facing significant changes that bring both challenges and opportunities. The country's decades-old Child Care Act is undergoing renewal, the New National Core Curriculum for ECEC is being drafted and child care is currently battling recent unfavourable government decisions. Under these circumstances, Finnish child care needs to focus on maintaining and further developing the quality of its services more than ever. This chapter covers the importance of the quality management of early educational services, a context where strong pedagogical leadership is demanded. By focusing on Nordic values in quality management, this chapter discusses the leading of pedagogical quality and its premises in Finnish child care during these times of change.

Introduction to Finnish Child Care

Finnish child care is based on an integrated approach to care, education and teaching.[1] As in the other Nordic countries, the Finnish "educare" model appreciates learning through play and values basic care situations as pedagogical learning opportunities (National Curriculum Guidelines on Early Childhood and Care in Finland 2005). Children are seen as active learners, and in the draft of the upcoming National Core Curriculum of Early Childhood Education and Care document (2016), children's ownership of their own learning is emphasised. The individuality of each child and the importance of acting as a peer and an equal group member are

[1] In this article, we use the term child care parallel with early childhood education and care (ECEC). In the Finnish context, "ECEC" is more often replacing the use of "child care", as there is a trend to emphasise children's right to professional early education over parents' right to receive child care for their children. When referring to professionals (i.e. Finnish kindergarten teachers or nursery nurses), we use the term pedagogues.

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seen crucial in Finnish child care. As the National Core Curriculum for Pre-primary Education (2010) states: "The purpose of pre-primary education is to promote children's growth into humane individuals and ethically responsible members of society by guiding them towards responsible action and compliance with generally accepted rules and towards appreciation for other people."

The importance of the early educational paradigm has increased since the administration of child care was shifted from the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health to the Ministry of Education and Culture in 2013. After this administrative change, Finnish early childhood education and care (ECEC) was officially acknowledged as part of the lifelong learning path, where early childhood education, the pre-primary year and primary education form an integrated and progressive entity that follows the child's development path (see, e.g., Eurydice 2016). This means that on the policy level, national curriculums from child care to basic education are based on the shared perspectives of comprehensive learning competencies, but implemented age appropriately.

Following the administrative shift, the field of Finnish child care is currently undergoing significant changes; renewal is underway regarding both the law and the National Core Curriculum. The first phase of the new Act on Early Childhood Education and Care (36/1973) was adopted in 2015, and the second phase is being processed. After the new legislation, a national development agency, the Finnish National Board of Education (FBNE), became responsible for the development of child care. The FNBE is answerable to the Ministry of Education and Culture, and its tasks and organisation are determined by the legislation. As part of its task, the FBNE is in charge of implementing national education policies and the current preparation of the new National Core Curriculum on ECEC, which will be launched in the autumn of 2017.

The reforms concerning the Finnish child care policies aim to utilise the latest research in steering and enhancing the quality of the implemented pedagogy. Derived from the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) and modern childhood studies, recent research has focused on the children's right to participate, to be heard and to be taken into account in matters concerning themselves from a child's perspective (Roos 2015; Virkki 2015), from a professional and institutional perspective (Kangas 2016; Heikka et al. 2014) and even from a legal perspective (Pajulammi 2014). Within this framework, the child is viewed as an equal participant in a democratic society. In addition, recent research has taken into account the role of leadership in developing the quality of pedagogical practices and in reflecting on the organisational cultures in child care programmes (Akselin 2013; Heikka 2014; Fonsén 2014; Soukainen 2015).

The new law on Early Childhood Education and Care (36/1973) emphasises the child's right to child care. This is a significant decision, as the roots of Finnish child care have been deeply grounded in social welfare policy (Alila and Kinos 2014). The law is designed to support and enhance the comprehensive development, growth, health and well-being of each child. Finnish child care aims to support the learning conditions of the child and to promote lifelong learning and the implementation of educational equality. Whereas the previous law did not set the national

curriculum and make the children's individual ECEC plans compulsory, the new law does so. The law determines that in addition to the local level curriculums, individual ECEC plans must be drawn up for every child in child care in collaboration with parents and pedagogues. These plans aim to individualise child care and enhance the quality of it, although they are not considered to serve as quality assessment tools as such. According to the previous legislation, there were no official requirements for the quality of child care pedagogy, and the national curriculum was utilised as a steering document; it was not legally binding. This was seen to cause disparity in child care services (Alila 2013; Hujala et al. 2012).

This chapter examines some of the changes, which are currently challenging the field of child care. The renewal of national policy documents, controversial governmental decisions as well as the changed pedagogical ideals about the child and childhood guides the work of the pedagogues and additionally affects the quality of the services. There are traditions that are grounded so deep in the organisational culture, which impede the evolvement of pedagogical thinking. Although the pedagogues who have been in the field for years are well experienced, their personal values might differ from those of the organisation, and this might therefore slow down or even prevent educational practices from developing (Ryzhova 2012). This chapter aims to address a need to re-evaluate how the quality of the Finnish child care services will be guaranteed, led and merged with the ideals and policies that define the work of the pedagogues.

The Impacts of a Changing Society

In order to understand the pedagogical development and hence the quality of Finnish child care, it is necessary to examine and define how the policies guiding the field and the ideals shaping the work of pedagogues have evolved over time. Based on shared Nordic ideals (Karila 2012), the principle of promoting equality among citizens has been a driver of Finnish child care on the policy level. Compared to the other Nordic countries, Finland has had the strongest universal child care system in terms of every child's subjective right to child care (Karila 2012). Until recently, we have had a political consensus and shared view of what is quality in child care, considering the principles of equality and the rights of the child. Due to economic pressure, there now appears discrepancy between the ideals and the decisions guiding the policies. For example, the unlimited subjective right has been restricted by a current government decision, depending on the labour or study status of the parents. If one of the parents is at home, a child may not be entitled to a full day child care, but to 20 h per week. The subjective right for a place in municipal child care is not tied to parents' willingness to pay for the care. The restriction of the subjective right might jeopardise the equal opportunities of children to attend professional early education and thus place them in an unequal position regarding their parent's socioeconomic status. Concerns have been raised that those children in particular who would most benefit from child care are in danger of being excluded (Karila 2016).

In addition to the limitations to universal child care, a governmental decision to increase the adult–child ratio for 3–6-year-old children in child care centres is controversial with what is considered as quality: the importance of individual encounters and interaction. Whereas the previous ratio was one pedagogue for seven children, the new ratio is now one to eight. There might be counter effects to the increase in ratios, as the group sizes can be enlarged significantly.

In addition to the severe structural changes from the macro level, the work of the professionals has transformed during the decades. Kindergarten teachers and the other pedagogues in the field of child care have their own personal professional identities, but they can also be seen to represent the social circumstances, values and perceptions of their own generations. Global and national policies framing child care are never simply adapted. Instead, they are actively shaped by the local professionals, current conditions and prevalent discourses through the domestication processes (Alasuutari 2009; Alasuutari and Alasuutari 2012).

Based on Mannheim's (1952) theory of generations and the shared meaningful experiences that shape human life, Karila (2013) has identified different professional generations in the context of Finnish child care. The professional's engagement with work takes place in different societal circumstances, and the orientation to work and the pedagogical thinking of these professionals varies from one person to another. This creates tension in the working climate, as there may be no shared understanding of the mission of child care. Professionals from different working generations may value various forms of knowledge to a different degree or extent, and even partnership with parents is approached differently. Karila's (2013) study indicated that the older professional generation strongly emphasised the societal task of child care from the perspective of social services and labour force policy, as well as adult centredness as a pedagogical orientation. On the contrary, the perspectives of the youngest professional generation are based on ideals of early education emphasising child's right to child care. Instead of adult-led processes, they appreciate child-initiated pedagogy.

It is therefore essential to acknowledge and understand the multiple perceptions and working cultures of the different professional generations. In line with Karila's (2013) study, Vlasov and Hujala (2016) found similar results in their cross-cultural study of the changing nature of child care in different national contexts. Finnish respondents (i.e. child care centre leaders) emphasised the changes in the working culture and the difficulties in redefining the work of the pedagogues; the view of early learning and the principles guiding pedagogy have changed dramatically (ibid.). The differences can be seen to vary particularly in the practices of planning pedagogy and everyday activities. According to Fonsén et al. (2014), the contemporary way of planning pedagogical practices should be a joint process together with pedagogues and children: children should have an active role, and they should not be seen only as targets of observation and educational operations. The modern planning procedure, in which children are deeply engaged, is challenging to conduct in practice since different professional generations use their own generations' cultural methods in their practices.

The latest research (Kangas 2016) shows that children's initiatives and participation are considered important by Finnish child care pedagogues, but structural and institutional issues seem to restrict the implementation of participatory pedagogy, such as children's opportunities to take part in pedagogical decision-making processes. Virkki (2015) has studied children's agency and participation in the everyday activities of Finnish child care from both the child's and the adult's perspectives. The results suggest a discrepancy in implementing participatory pedagogy in terms of how pedagogues and children view children's opportunities and methods of participating. Child care pedagogues did not always seem to recognise the effects that children's initiatives and interaction with their peers had on the pedagogical activities. Children emphasised communal aspects of participation, whereas the pedagogues seemed to focus on individual elements. Our study on quality of child care across Finland confirms the studies above and suggests that children's participation in daily activities does not occur as expected or as hoped (Hujala et al. 2012).

In addition to the changed role of pedagogues in the pedagogical processes, the role of the parents and guardians as well as parent–pedagogue partnerships has evolved over the decades, and this again challenges the field. According to Vlasov and Hujala (2016), parents' awareness of institutional child care has increased over the past 20 years, which adds to the need to enhance the visibility of child care services, their ideology and educational goals. The customer orientation among parents seems to have increased over the past two decades, and the changed role of parents as clients adds pressure to the enacted parent–pedagogue partnership: today's parents are more demanding and their expectations are higher. Parallel to Karila's (2013) classification of the different professional generations, Vlasov and Hujala (forthcoming) have identified similarities with regard to parents in their study considering partnerships in cross-cultural contexts. Their findings show that modern parents seem to represent the younger generation, while the pedagogues seem to advocate for the older generation.

Pedagogical Quality: Quality of Pedagogy

When assessing the development and leading of the child care services in the Finnish context, it is necessary to describe how the quality of child care and its implemented pedagogy is steered and defined. According to legislation, local authorities and service providers are responsible for the evaluation of the quality of child care. As such, the authorities organising child care, including the municipal and private providers, must evaluate their services and participate in the external evaluation of the provision. The evaluation process and the methods used are decided on the local level in such a way that all the stakeholders involved (i.e. local authorities, pedagogues, and parents or custodians) have up-to-date information about the implementation of the services and their quality. Local assessment is considered pivotal, and it is steered, but not controlled, from the national level by the independent expert body, the Finnish Education Evaluation Centre (FINEEC). With

the help of the evaluation data, the purpose of FINEEC is to support local providers in their legislative task of organising and developing quality services and to offer external evaluation in conjunction with the local providers (see http://karvi.fi/en/fineec/). Instead of measuring outcomes, the focus is directed on supporting children's learning processes. The evaluation in the child care context emphasises pedagogues' self-reflection of the pedagogical processes as well as the role and responsibilities of the child care centre leader.

It can be seen that explicit evaluation of child care's quality enhances the visibility of the services and promotes public discussion about child care, its goals and its practices. On the other hand, it is important to acknowledge that quality evaluation is never value-free; it also determines what is considered important (Jones and Pound 2008; Dahlberg and Åsén 1994). Discourse on quality can never be isolated from the philosophical framework of how we view childhood and what kind of expectations we set for childhood. Therefore, it is necessary to make visible the values (both latent and explicit) and theoretical assumptions of the assessment tool we aim to use. At the end of the 1990s, Finnish ECEC was perceived to be an investment in the future, mainly directed by the sociopolitical guidance of the OECD (Karila 2009). At the beginning of the twenty-first century, the prevalent discourse has been perceived to deal with early intervention and the need for special education support (ibid.).

Theory-based quality assessment aims to take into account the user's perspective and provide information on what is considered important in child care, how children are perceived and what kind of pedagogical practices are carried out. This perspective increases awareness of child care and allows parents to influence and take part in decision-making, which is now specifically emphasised in the new, binding documents. When the indicators of quality are shared with different stakeholders, it allows joint discussion of the goals, strengths and areas to be further developed (Hujala et al. 1998). In addition, Sheridan (2001) highlights the importance of quality assessment in promoting the awareness of different quality indicators among pedagogues.

The concept of quality can be traced back to the paradigm of objectivity, which directs the evaluation perspective from the top down. The objective concept of quality derives from the assumption that there are common core qualities and a shared knowledge of the characteristics that constitute quality (Sheridan 2001). Objective quality is therefore something that can be scientifically and systematically measured and rationalised, and universal standards and quality criteria can be formed (Hujala et al. 2012). Constituting quality solely from the perspective of objectivity justifies overgeneralisation and reduces quality to some universal truth that can be measured with simple checklists (Sheridan 2001). If the steering of child care is conducted by multiple regulations and criteria in order to enhance quality services, they might actually narrow the pedagogic practices and restrict pedagogues from working according to their ideology. In such case, there is a danger of structures suddenly becoming restrictions (Vlasov and Hujala 2016; Fenech et al. 2008). A study (Sabol and Pianta 2015) conducted in the USA demonstrates that the policies aimed to guide and promote child care quality may have good intentions, but they were

shown to have a modest relationship with positive long-term outcomes. Therefore, it is essential to share and acknowledge the premises of quality assessment, the methods used and the way in which the results are interpreted (Pinch 2009). At worst, quality assessment may only lead to the repetition of the prevalent organisational culture or even provide justification not to change it. However, the significance of quality assessment is only actualised if and when it acts as a catalyst for learning and professional development.

The Finnish approach to quality of child care is perceived to be based on the inclusionary paradigm (Pence and Moss 1994; Dahlberg et al. 2007), which aims to simultaneously take into consideration the views of various stakeholders – such as the objectives of child care services and the information of the experts – as well as the cultural context and the subjectivity of quality (Hujala et al. 2012; Hujala et al. 1999; Parrila 2004). Hujala et al. (2012) have studied the quality of Finnish child care by using an instrument, in which the quality factors are defined as structural, intermediate, process and effect factor (Hujala et al. 1999). The emphasis of the instrument is on the stakeholders' subjective views and experiences of quality, but the approach is grounded in theory-based research. Finnish child care is shown to be of good quality when assessed by parents and pedagogues (ibid.), but there appears to be variation when the different quality indicators are examined more closely. Further research is needed, especially in examining and defining the interaction between children and pedagogues (Ahonen 2015; Roos 2015; Kalliala 2008), which is essential in the true implementation of participatory ideals. In addition, the variation in Finnish quality of child care indicates a need to re-evaluate the national quality management system to ensure equality within different programmes (Hujala et al. 2012). As stated above, the national quality management needs to be designed with care, in order to avoid the pitfalls of external assessment.

Leading Development Work and Pedagogical Quality

When the factors steering child care work – in this case both the guiding legislation and core curriculum – are being subjected to a process of change, strong leadership is called for to ensure the domestication of the guiding policies as explicit practices of good quality. The draft of the new National Core Curriculum for ECEC strongly emphasises the meaning and value of organisational culture. In the context of Finnish child care and as highlighted in the upcoming core curriculum, organisational culture can also be referred to as "operational culture" in order to stress its pedagogical aspects. As with other educational systems, child care services are conservative by nature, and the processes of confronting change are usually slow and halting (Rury 2016; Ryzhova 2012). Over a long period of time, organisations develop their own ways of working and functioning that are often based on the general assumptions of the needs and goals set for the organisation (Harisalo 2008). As societies evolve, the challenges and demands of the everyday work carried out in child care services are renewed, but the habitual practices tend to stick. The habitual

practices of the different professional generations (Karila 2013) are often difficult to break, and strong pedagogical leadership is required to further develop the organisation and help the pedagogues overcome old habits. In order to help professionals critically assess the current practices and the implemented pedagogy, leaders must raise awareness of the new challenges among the pedagogues and offer valid tools for evaluation (Fonsén 2014).

Harisalo (2008) notes that organisational culture is so ingrained that the people involved in it are not necessarily aware of the reasoning behind their professional behaviour. The organisational culture may be strong, which can lead to a situation in which there is no discrepancy between the values, beliefs, perspectives and outcomes; rather, these aspects support each other. On the other hand, in a weak organisational culture, things are perceived differently: those involved in the weak organisations have difficulties in committing to the goals and mission set for the organisation. This leads to confusion and conflicts and evidently to the creation of subcultures that begin to compete with each other.

Leading the development processes in educational organisations requires pedagogical leadership. According to Alava et al. (2012), pedagogical leadership has multiple tasks. In addition to the development of the organisational culture, pedagogical leadership should focus on the developing professional development and organisational learning and expertise. In addition, it should lead learning in different networks. Pedagogical leadership in the Finnish context is also perceived to include distributed leadership, where the responsibility for leading and implementing pedagogical improvements is shared and enacted with the pedagogues (Heikka 2014). EC leaders should focus on attitudes, professional behaviour and implemented practices and aim to develop these attributes within the networks of interaction and development processes. The four key processes in which development should be targeted are curriculum work, the development of the organisational culture, the creation of a clear vision and strategy and the establishment and development of the mission, i.e. the core tasks (Alava et al. 2012). It is necessary to lead these key processes systematically and consciously in order to avoid them developing in an uncontrolled way. An organisational culture will always develop, and the absence of leadership is a grave mistake (ibid.).

Fonsén (2014) has further constructed a definition of pedagogical leadership based on the leadership domains proposed by Sergiovanni (1998). Pedagogical leadership requires human capital, which is constructed within the knowledge framework of both the curriculum and the pedagogy pursued. It also requires critical reflection and awareness of the implemented pedagogy, as well as the skills and abilities to lead the pedagogy in the desired direction. Leaders must be ready and able to argue for the chosen pedagogical values that guide the implemented pedagogy. When pedagogical leadership is examined from the point of view of distributed leadership (Harris 2004; Heikka 2014), every stakeholder in the organisation offers human capital. In this manner, the responsibility for maintaining and developing quality practices is equally shared by the whole staff (Hujala and Fonsén 2011).

During times when a recession leads to cuts and pressures on resources – as is currently the case in Finland – there is an inevitable need to focus and invest in

human capital in order to maintain the desired high level of pedagogical quality. Sheridan (2001) has shown that when child care received low ratings in quality assessments using the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS), the pedagogues receiving the low ratings in their settings tended to search for faults outside their own work and blamed the lack of resources for the low assessments. Conversely, pedagogues who received high ratings for their implemented pedagogy were able to reflect on their own professional work and educational habits and were willing to find ways to improve their practices. In high-quality groups, children were invited to participate, and the atmosphere was perceived to be more open to the children's ideas than in the low-quality groups. Therefore, it is essential to maintain a high level of kindergarten teacher training, as research clearly suggests that both the education level and in-service training of pedagogues correlate with high-quality child–pedagogue interaction (Fukkink and Lont 2007).

In order for the development to be successfully implemented, pedagogical development processes should be strategically planned and sustainably led. Fonsén and Soukainen (forthcoming) have studied the principles of sustainable leadership in the Finnish child care context. According to their results, the main tasks of sustainable leadership are constructing a shared vision, mission and strategy, ensuring the organisational structure and focusing on knowledge management. The involvement of the whole staff in the pedagogical development work and the promotion of the staff's motivation to carry out the development were seen as necessary to create leadership with a shared vision, a collaboratively constructed strategy and commitment to the mission. When the child care centre leaders focused on constructing organisational structures for areas of responsibility, compiling clear descriptions about different professional tasks and creating systematic procedures for communication and meetings, these actions were perceived to support both leadership in pedagogy and the implementation of the curriculum. Knowledge management was shown to endorse a high level of pedagogical competence, and it correlated with items supporting well-being at work and the atmosphere of the child care centres. When pedagogues are aware and assured of their pedagogical competences, they can feel empowered through distributed pedagogical leadership (ibid.).

Knowledge management has been commonly connected to organisational learning (Nonaka 1994). Knowledge management aims to enhance not only the learning processes of the individuals but every stakeholders' ability to jointly develop their practices. Raasumaa (2010) argues that knowledge management is an essential part of broad-based pedagogical leadership. His study on pedagogical leadership among school principals points out that knowledge management supports the professionality of pedagogues. Knowledge management can be viewed as consisting of planning organisational structures that support pedagogues' professional learning, helping pedagogues' in decision-making, providing them with learning opportunities and supporting their professional development. Knowledge management empowers pedagogues to develop their teaching and child-raising practices, which again leads to positive effects for the pupils' learning.

Conclusion

This article focused on leading the pedagogical quality of child care in the Finnish context, particularly the premises and development of the pedagogical processes. Because there is no systematic or national steering tool for quality assurance, the Finnish evaluation system emphasises the self-reflection of the child care service providers in maintaining and assessing the quality of their services. With this in mind, effective pedagogical leadership is a key issue in implementing and developing pedagogical processes. In terms of evaluation, pedagogical leadership aims to take into account the various perspectives of the stakeholders, as well as the multidimensional and inclusionary character of quality.

According to Rajakaltio (2012) pedagogical leadership can be considered as a counterforce to managerialism. In particular, strong pedagogical leadership is needed when the political climate produces the risk of undermining pedagogy because of the dominant economic discourse as it can be considered to be the case in Finland. However, we also need to be careful how we define quality. We must target the evaluation primarily at the ability of pedagogues in relation to how adequately they respond to the children's behaviour and needs (see, e.g., Ahonen 2015; Kangas 2016; Kalliala 2008). The cornerstone of Finnish pedagogical quality lies in the process factors of ECEC (Hujala et al. 2012). The sensitivity of the pedagogues, a deep commitment to dialogue and warm interaction with children are seen to promote the quality of child care more than simply measuring the children's learning outcomes.

Paananen et al. (2015) have investigated the concept of quality, and they argue that "the era of the OECD's ECEC networks' right-centred inclusive liberalism is fading and that the organisation has taken a step away from the Nordic tradition". If quality assessments are used as tools of "new managerialism", there is a great danger that they will become a method for external control. As its best, a quality assessment that applies pedagogical leadership is always development oriented and deeply reflective of the operational culture. The challenge is to understand the basic underlying assumptions that are deeply embedded in the organisational culture (Schein 1989). It is notable that this has been acknowledged in the forthcoming National Core Curriculum for ECEC. As stated in the draft (2016): "Reflecting the impacts of the operational culture, and recognizing and rectifying the non-desired characters is a crucial part of the development of the operational culture." The draft stresses the need for collective dialogue in child care communities. It is important that operational cultures are based on dialogue that is appreciative and interactive, promote confidence and involve every stakeholder. It is also essential that all development work is based on the interests of the child. Pedagogues need to understand and be consciously aware of the values, forms of knowledge and beliefs that affect their everyday practices. In addition, they should be able to reflect on them continuously.

Child care practices are not always implemented in line with pedagogical ideals, such as participatory pedagogy, even if our laws and curriculum demand it. The old

organisational cultural habits need to be constantly reflected on and renewed in certain cases. Strong, distributed pedagogical leadership works as a "power transfer"; it produces pedagogues with a high level of competence by empowering them as continuous developers of pedagogical practices (Fonsén 2014). In the draft of the National Core Curriculum of ECEC (2016), the local-level authorities retain responsibility for evaluating the quality of the services. Finnish society places a deep trust in its educational professionals, allowing teachers a great level of pedagogical autonomy. Coupled with strong, distributed pedagogical leadership, this can be seen as a strength of the pedagogical quality of Finnish child care.

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