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Valerie Margrain
Annica Löfdahl Hultman *Editors*

Challenging Democracy in Early Childhood Education

Engagement in Changing Global Contexts

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International Perspectives on Early Childhood Education and Development

Volume 28

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Foreword: Democracy as a Political Choice

Democracy as a fundamental value, relational ethic and pervasive practice of education has a long and important history. It has been a defining feature of progressive education, alongside criticism of traditional education, the nature of knowledge, human nature and the development of the whole person (Darling & Norbenbo, 2003), a product of the late nineteenth century that achieved its greatest influence in the middle part of the twentieth century. Democracy in education was espoused by great educationalists from that century, including John Dewey, Janusz Korczak, Célestin Freinet and Loris Malaguzzi.

Malaguzzi's name is a reminder that the place of democracy in education has included not only primary, secondary and higher education but also early childhood education. Democracy is at the heart of the world-famous municipal schools in the Italian city of Reggio Emilia. This commitment to democracy was a deliberate choice following the dark days of authoritarian fascism suffered by Italy from 1923 to 1945, an experience that 'had taught them that people who conformed and obeyed were dangerous, and that in building a new society it was imperative … to nurture and maintain a vision of children who can think and act for themselves' (Dahlberg, 2000, p. 177).

It can readily be agreed that 'democracy' is a complex and multi-layered concept, not easily defined and packaged. One approach is to adopt a dualism, to say (as I have done myself) that there is a formal side to democracy, about governing and policy making, including therefore political decision-making by national or local governments and an informal side, which is about a way of being and relating in everyday life and institutions. Dewey's definition is often cited for the latter take on democracy: that democracy is 'primarily a mode of associated living embedded in the culture and social relationships of everyday life'; it is 'a personal way of individual life:… [I]t signifies the possession and continual use of certain attitudes, forming personal character and determining desire and purpose in all the relations of life' (1939, p.2). This is democracy understood as an approach to living and relating, a culture and a relational ethos, that can and should pervade all aspects of everyday living, not least in the school, where it is 'a way of being, of thinking of oneself in relation to others and the world … a fundamental educational value and form of educational activity' (Rinaldi, 2006, p.156).

But while this dualistic approach may have its place, it may also (as with all dualisms) have its drawbacks. Democracy is a way of life and calls for the practice of listening and dialogue, confrontation and negotiation and recognition of diversity, multiple perspectives and the partiality and provisionality of one's own knowledge and understanding, in short an acknowledgement that there are always alternatives, other understandings and narratives, and that these should be treated respectfully and seriously. But, arguably, the same qualities should form as part of formal governing and decision-making, be it by government ministries, parliaments, local councils or other bodies involved in the business of shaping policy and practice. These are essential conditions for a democratic politics of education, a politics based on recognising education as first and foremost a political practice organised around political questions and political choices, political questions defined by having no one right answer but, instead, alternative and often conflicting answers, requiring choices to be made by citizens through democratic practices. Some of the questions are as follows: 'What is our image of the child? 'Of the teacher'? 'Of the early childhood centre'? 'What do we mean by knowledge?' 'What are the purposes of education?'

At the same time, governing and decision-making reach down into the very fabric of education, into the everyday life of the early childhood centre, especially in a polity that believes in and enacts strong decentralisation, for example, giving municipalities and centres or schools wide scope for interpreting and developing the national curriculum or for engaging in experimentation, in particular what Roberto Unger terms 'democratic experimentalism':

> an innovative collective practice, moving forward the qualitative provision of the services themselves. That can no longer happen in our current understanding of efficiency and production by the mechanical transmission of innovation from the top. It can only happen through the organisation of a collective experimental practice from below…Democracy is not just one more terrain for the institutional innovation that I advocate. It is the most important terrain. (Unger, 2005b, pp.179,182)

So perhaps we should think of democracy as on a continuum, running from the profoundly democratic, in which democracy as a value, a relational ethic and a practice pervades all aspects and all levels of education from classroom to government and from teacher to politician to the minimally democratic, where education at all levels is instead pervaded by technical practice, managerialism and a belief that there is only one right answer – that there are, in fact, no alternatives, and that democracy is of little or no value or concern.

This book focuses on challenges faced by democracy in early childhood education, exploring a wide range of 'contemporary issues such as migration, refugees, and changes in teacher education, early childhood regulations, transition and assessment expectations'. For me, one of the main challenges is posed by the hegemony of a particular politico-economic regime, neoliberalism and its attendant mindset or paradigm, neopositivism. Under neoliberalism, everything (including the political and social) has collapsed into the economic, so that everything becomes conceptualised, rationalised and practised in economic terms. The image of a child and an adult are essentially economic: the child as potential human capital and the

adult as 'homo economicus', an autonomous individual, flexible and calculating. The role of the early childhood centre is to realise the child's human capital, hence enabling child and society to survive in a ruthless, dog-eat-dog world of markets and hyper-competition. To this end, ever more powerful 'human technologies' are applied to the child and her teacher, to ensure high returns on early intervention. In this scenario, democracy has no value, no place and no purpose; political questions are ditched for technical questions, including the manager's insistent 'what works?' (For further discussion of neopositivism and neoliberalism and their relationship to contemporary early childhood education, see Moss, 2013, 2018.)

The onwards march of a neoliberal narrative of early childhood education – instrumental, technical and economistic – can be illustrated by the approach taken to the field by the Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). Between 1996 and 2006, under the leadership of the much-missed John Bennett, OECD conducted a landmark comparative study of early childhood policies in 20 countries, distinguished by the richness and depth of the material garnered from each country, and then expertly worked with to produce two important reports, *Starting Strong I and II*, which remain an essential reading even up to this day (OECD, 2001, 2006).

Both reports are inscribed with a commitment to the importance of children's rights and also of democracy as a value and practice. Indeed, the whole project is framed in terms of democratic purpose: the project's first report, *Starting Strong I*, observes that ECEC policies reflect mainly implicit assumptions:

> which are deeply embedded in how societies are organised and in cultural and social views…While different views may co-exist within countries, they are rarely made explicit in policy discussions. Recognising these diverse perspectives can help shed light on why countries make certain choices with regard to early childhood policy and provision…Our objective is to make these complex political and ethical issues more visible so that *they can be subject to critical and democratic debate.* (OECD, 2001, p.39: emphasis added)

On several subsequent occasions, *Starting Strong I* highlights actual or needed democratic practices in early childhood services: 'establishing a democratic system of checks and balances, in which genuine decision-making, access to information and some powers of supervision are given to parents' (ibid., p.75); 'in democratic ECEC institutions, the approach of professionals is to share responsibility for young children with parents, and learn from the unique knowledge that parents from diverse backgrounds can contribute' (ibid., p.117); 'defining, ensuring, and monitoring quality should be a participatory and democratic process that engages staff, parents, and children' (ibid., p.126); and 'creating a forum for discussions about the social constructions of childhood, the goals of ECEC policy and provision, and the roles of different stakeholders would be an important starting point toward developing a shared vision for the future' (ibid., p.136).

The theme is picked up again in the second report, *Starting Strong II*, where frequent reference is made to democracy, and in particular to a notion of participatory democracy. Devolved management of services (to local areas) is an issue of 'democracy, community responsibility for children, parental rights, participation and ownership' (OECD, 2006, p.50); 'learning to live together (within the early

childhood centre, in a democratic way, respectful of difference)', should be a goal of education (ibid., p.127); the effectiveness of regulation is greatly assisted, *inter alia*, by 'a participatory and democratic approach to standards definition, implementation and quality improvement' (ibid., p.129); '[p]ost-modernists point out that other scenarios for young children are possible and valid…[including] conceptualising the school as a space for child participation and inter-culturalism, where young children and their families acquire democratic and positive attitudes' (ibid., p.195); and a 'major underlying lesson from the OECD reviews is that sound policy cannot be a quick fix from outside but more a matter of democratic consensus generated by careful consultation with the major stakeholders' (ibid., p.206). The culmination of this sustained commitment to participatory democracy is expressed right at the end of the *Starting Strong II*, where this commitment is linked with another: to a broad approach to education and learning. This important OECD report ends by urging governments to consider '[aspiring] to ECEC systems that support broad learning, participation and democracy'.

What has happened since? OECD, an international organisation that exerts great influence over the whole field of education, turned its back on the precious legacy of *Starting Strong I* and *II*, including its focus on and advocacy of democracy in early childhood education. Instead, it took a very different techno-managerial direction, producing a 'quality toolbox' for early childhood education and another report on 'monitoring quality in early childhood education and care', before, most recently, launching the International Early Learning and Child Well-being Study (IELS), an international standardised assessment of children aged 5 years old across four 'early learning domains' (early literacy and numeracy skills, self-regulation and social and emotional skills). This seems to be an attempt to replicate, for young children, what the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) has become for 15-year-olds. True, the first round of testing has only recruited three countries to participate (England, Estonia, the United States), but the suspicion might be that OECD hopes to sign up an increasing number of countries for future rounds, hoping eventually to gain the global reach achieved by PISA, which now includes '72 countries and economies'.

Democracy finds no place in this new venture. There is no mention of it on the IELS website (http://www.oecd.org/education/school/international-early-learning-and-child-well-being-study.htm); and the implementation of IELS has eschewed any attempt at democratic engagement with the early childhood community: there has been no effort to inform or consult, no willingness to respond to the extensive criticisms of the IELS and no recognition of diversity and multiple perspectives. The richness and openness of the earlier *Starting Strong* study has been replaced by the poverty and insularity of the IELS, part of a global web of OECD educational measurements intended to ensure increasing uniformity and conformity to a universal norm of education – with OECD as the keeper of the norm (for some critical responses to IELS, see Carr, Mitchell, & Rameka, 2016; Moss et al., 2016; Moss & Urban, 2017; Urban & Swadener, 2016).

Depressing as this all is, we should not despair. There is a growing, global resistance movement that contests the dominant narratives of neoliberalism, what I have

termed ‘the story of quality and high returns’ and ‘the story of markets’ (Moss, 2013). This book is yet more evidence that the resistance movement is alive and kicking, exploring a great diversity of theoretical and cultural perspectives, creating new narratives and, above all, putting them to work. In these narratives, democracy as a value, as an ethic and as a practice plays a major part. Moreover, as our world moves deeper into multiple crises, a flourishing and inclusive democracy is needed more than ever, providing a framework within which we can come together to address the daunting prospects confronting us.

But how do we create a flourishing and inclusive democracy? Both generally and specifically, as regards early childhood education, we need to ask the following question: Under what conditions can democracy spread and succeed? Like Loris Malaguzzi and the schools of Reggio Emilia, we need to combine utopian goals with intense practicality. We can learn much from the sort of cases and other examples discussed in this book and elsewhere. But we also need to move from the individual centre to the overall system, analysing and discussing what conditions would promote and sustain a democratic system of early childhood education. This raises issues about the education and support of the workforce; about the management of services, for example, through elected committees consisting of representatives of parents, citizens and educators; and about developing forms of participatory evaluation, including tools such as pedagogical documentation. Again, it calls for political choices in response to political questions, starting with explicit commitment to democracy itself as a fundamental value of education, followed by other political choices commensurate with democratic values, ethics and practices. And it involves how the system is conceptualised and organised: I would argue that an early childhood system that relies heavily on private providers competing for parent-consumers in ‘childcare’ markets is unlikely to be compatible with a democratic system. For all these, and other reasons, Sweden is far closer to having a democratic system than my country, England, where democracy is largely invisible in the system.

So I welcome another instance of the resistance movement, with the contributions to this book of people and places doing democracy. Such contributions can and should provoke thought and new understandings. But I hope we can also use this rich material to help our thinking about how to move towards more democratic systems bearing in mind the wise words of the neoliberal guru Milton Friedman, written in 1962:

> Only a crisis – actual or perceived – produces real change. When that crisis occurs the actions that are taken depend on the ideas that are lying around. That, I believe, is our basic function: to develop alternatives to existing policies, to keep them alive and available until the politically impossible becomes politically inevitable. (Friedman, 1982, p.ix)

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Part I
Introduction

Chapter 1
Introduction: Content and Context

Valerie Margrain and Annica Löfdahl Hultman

Abstract This book is an edited text of chapters, connected by a focus on contemporary democracy and on what challenges democracy in early childhood education of today. Contemporary issues such as migration, refugees, changes in teacher education, early childhood regulations, transition and assessment expectations provide both opportunities and challenges for early childhood education (ECE). Sociopolitical influences may mean that there can be a gap between democratic aspirations and experiences, including tension, dissent and power relations. These are challenges we are all aware of and often speak about as influencing implementation of democratic aims, children's rights and agency espoused in curriculum and policy. As Peter Moss stresses in the foreword of this book, one of the main challenges to democracy is largely invisible and deals with political and economic regimes. From this view, the image of the child is a potential human capital, and the aim of ECE is to realise and fulfil sociopolitical ideas and images. A liberalist agenda manipulates the role of the ECE teachers from an adult focused on relationship to a technical implementer of human capital development. Such challenges need to be more visible.

1.1 Rationale and Context for This Book: Challenging Democracy in Early Childhood Education

This book is an edited text of chapters, connected by a focus on contemporary democracy and on what challenges democracy in early childhood education of today. Contemporary issues such as migration, refugees, changes in teacher education, early childhood regulations, transition and assessment expectations provide both opportunities and challenges for early childhood education (ECE). Sociopolitical influences may mean that there can be a gap between democratic

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aspirations and experiences, including tension, dissent and power relations. These are challenges we are all aware of and often speak about as influencing implementation of democratic aims, children's rights and agency espoused in curriculum and policy. As Peter Moss stresses in the foreword of this book, one of the main challenges to democracy is largely invisible and deals with political and economic regimes. From this view, the image of the child is a potential human capital, and the aim of ECE is to realise and fulfil sociopolitical ideas and images. A liberalist agenda manipulates the role of the ECE teachers from an adult focused on relationship to a technical implementer of human capital development. Such challenges need to be more visible.

Being aware of these more or less hidden challenges when reading the different chapters in this book can bring new insights to the kind of images of the child we can find in surrounding discourses and also what political economic regimes surrounding the discourses. We might reflect on why some countries and its citizens are more privileged than others and why we need to pay explicit attention to speak about marginalised groups of people, such as the Roma population in Europe, gifted children or Indigenous peoples around the world. This book follows a constructive and transformational approach in which active contestation to disempowering discourse is both possible and urgent. We support the previous democratic reconceptualisation publications which focus on hope and transformation (Apple & Beane, 2007; Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 2013, Moss, 2015, 2017) and here add new empirical examples.

Our view is that democracy has two aspects. The first aspect is a formal one, relating to decision-making, ensuring the voice of the majority to vote and people's citizenship rights (semantic meaning relating to ancient Greek democracy origins). The second aspect is more practical, holding values and process oriented. It is about talks, discussions and negotiations. It is this second aspect of democracy that our book explores. Democracy is not a fixed concept, and we reject a single or simple definition, but it has certain core values that apply in educational practice. These core values include equity, children's rights, participation and influence. As stressed by Dewey in his seminal 1938 work *Democracy and Education* (1938/2012), education is a cornerstone in order to achieve and uphold democracy in society. Following this tradition, Biesta (2007) argues young citizens will learn democracy not only or not even formally – as in instrumentalist views on democracy education – but especially through participation in democratic practices. Such democratic practices view the child as a democratic person, given opportunities to democratic actions. However, how practices for early childhood are arranged differs, as do understanding and application of core concepts and values. This book provides examples linking democracy to ECE and researching diverse cultural contexts across five continents. We celebrate cultural and contextual diversity in the book as a reflection of the richness of global democracy and a reiteration that there is no single sociocultural definition of what democracy means or looks like. Underlying values such as respect and opportunity globally connect democratic practice.

We expect the readers of this book to benefit from the knowledge and insights shared on a range of perspectives and contextual aspects. The chapters include research from all over the world, from marginalised and from privileged countries

and from differing scientific angles, but all chapters focus on issues of importance for democracy in ECE. Accepting that democracy means different things in different contexts necessitates respect for diverse research approaches, theories and methodologies. Readers will meet up-to-date empirical research findings, contextual issues and contemporary application of theory. A range of methodological perspectives are included, from traditional data collection methods and interventions, to recently developed post-humanistic views. Some chapters will explicitly focus on democratic values such as diversity, inclusion and equity, while other chapters will elaborate knowledge on what democracy and citizenship (as big concepts) look like in lived experience. Readers will meet an awareness of what kind of issues might be affecting practice, encouraging professional reflection and advocacy as well as aspirational examples of what democracy may be and what it may become. Altogether, the contributing chapters are challenging ideas and assumptions about democracy as a fixed concept and definition.

The genesis of this book arose in discussion at a research meeting of colleagues connected to the *Centre for Child and Childhood studies* at Karlstad University, Sweden, in May 2017. There was a recognition that diverse topics of study could be connected to a model for democracy in ECE, borrowed from sociology of childhood (James & James 2004), and further elaborated by Hägglund, Löfdahl Hultman and Thelander (2017). The use of this model as a framework for interpreting democracy in ECE provides a key point of difference between this book and other texts. A commitment to internationalisation led to recruiting contributions from a range of international colleagues, which in turn have enriched our reflection on the model and understanding of democracy, and our various work in early childhood and teacher education.

1.2 Globalisation and Change Influences

We write this book in a time of globalisation, change, opportunity, and challenge affecting ECE. Children's lives are influenced by changes in family composition, for example, the United Nations reporting declining rates of marriage, increasing age of marriage and increasing rates of divorce. Parental work patterns are changing, with increasing numbers of women working, regardless of whether they are in two-parent, sole parent and other family compositions. Child poverty remains disparate in the world, with one in seven children raised in poverty, although this statistic differs hugely according to location (United Nations, 2017a). Poverty statistics remind us of the urgency and necessity of work that promotes democracy and supports empowerment and social conscience.

Increasing global migration results in ECE settings with culturally and linguistically diverse families. This migration is maybe because of international companies, refugees, asylum-seeking or intercultural interest in global communities. United Nations' data record almost 258 million (257,715,425) migrants and refugees in 2017 (United Nations, 2017b). Consequently, ECE teachers need interpersonal and intercultural skills in working with diverse peoples. Equally important, the outcome of globalisation

can be culturally rich communities that share and learn from one another. ECE has a pivotal opportunity and social responsibility to foster democratic values of respect and opportunity for interaction. As a practical example, we can reposition the 'problem' of being a second language learner to focus on the value of multilingual competencies.

Globalisation is also affected by our increasing awareness of global media, the Internet, and technological innovation in communication. These media influences can support intercultural understanding and information sharing. Conversely, some global trends and media focus can be polarising or xenophobic. The value of large-scale international assessment studies, along with governments' competitive interest in the results, continues to be debated. We hope that readers of this text will debate some of the globalisation challenges raised in the various chapters, for example, how minority and Indigenous languages should be supported, how children engage with digital media and how children negotiate migrant friendships.

ECE implementation is responsive to change, and change always presents both challenge and opportunity. Some of the contemporary Western trends in early childhood, though by no means the same for every country, include introduction of curriculum or learning frameworks for ECE; credentialisation of ECE, for example, with degree qualified staff; and increasing regulations. Research from the OECD (2017) and a variety of longitudinal and international studies indicate many examples of increasing child participation in ECE, increasing hours of attendance and increasing enrolment of younger children, and attention to quality standards. Statistical evidencing 'progress', 'improvement' and 'quality can be analysed as reflecting social values and implementation of political and social agenda. For example, one democratic driver supporting women's empowerment is quality ECE and childcare; concurrently changing social expectations and work patterns affect the traditional patterns of family life and childhood. Some of these competing democratic challenges and opportunities in early childhood practice are recognised in this book within chapters that explore of use of pedagogical documentation, teacher talk, inclusion, and critically evaluating student teachers' professional experiences. These kinds of examples influence how ECE is interpreted in any particular context. However, we recognise that all of these examples vary within and between international and national contexts. Thus, we especially value the diversity of contributions in this text to help us discuss and reflect on what democracy means in our various ECE roles.

1.3 Democracy Model as Structure for the Book

To address the notion of challenge, we aim to begin the book with a strong theoretical and conceptual discussion of democracy, as relevant to young children and childhood and the adults who support ECE. In Chap. 2 of this book, Hägglund, Löfdahl Hultman and Thelander elaborate on a dynamic model of democracy in order to explain not only how different parts of societal aspects will influence the way ECE can support democracy and citizenship but also how the same societal aspects might challenge democracy work. A theoretical model, based on the work

of Hägglund et al. (2017), with four dimensions, will be outlined and form a wholeness to which the different chapters in the book will relate. The four dimensions of model are, firstly, historical views of children, childhood and their rights as citizens; secondly, curricula, *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* (United Nations, 1989) and other formal documents; thirdly, what teachers and other adults do in ECE settings as intentional/didactic activities; and fourthly, children's arenas, including peer culture and friendship. The model takes the position that democracy in ECE is influenced from the ideas and actions in all four dimensions in the model and is challenged by the content in these same dimensions. These dimensions are all influencing each other, which the different chapters will provide elaboration on. As Chap. 2 provides an essential model and analysis of democracy for all the subsequent chapters, we have positioned it as part of the introduction section.

The chapter contributions numbered 3–17 in this book were mapped to the model of democracy, which we provide in Fig. 1.1 as a 'sneak peek' prior to its full discussion in Chap. 2 and to illustrate the range of chapter topics and challenges discussed. Analysis of the chapters against the model enabled us to identify the strongest match between dimensions of the democracy model and the chapter contributions. Chapters were aligned to one or two dimensions of strongest connection from the four-dimension model, but, of course, some chapters are connected to three or all four dimensions. This analysis and mapping enabled us to create a valid structural framework for Chaps. 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16 and 17, foregrounding dimensions B, C and D of the democracy model, with Dimension A – historical views on childhood, children and their rights as citizens – connecting to all sections of the book.

Part II of the book includes chapters that connect to curriculum, the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* and other formal documents (Dimension B of the democracy model). Chapters 3, 4 and 5 are at the intersection between these formal documents and historic views on childhood and the rights of the child, with discussion on research ethics, talent development and parent decision-making on school start age. Chapters 6 and 7 are at the intersection between policy and practice, with differing contributions to the challenge of addressing Indigenous and migrant language support.

Part III of the book shares five chapters (numbers 8–12) which are at the intersection between espoused and realised early childhood practice (Dimension C of the democracy model). These chapters explore such topics as discourse in pedagogical documentation, parent-teacher-child communication and advocacy, early intervention, conflict, digital citizenship and perceptions of quality.

Part IV includes chapters that highlight children's arenas (Dimension D of the democracy model). Chapters 13, 14, 15 and 16 include a range of discussions connecting children's agenda with teacher support and facilitation, and Chap. 17 provides a bioecological analysis of children's resilience.

The final chapter of this book brings together a discussion on the challenges illuminated in the different chapters and provides some conclusions on each of the three conceptual themes: *Reciprocity*, *Togetherness* and *Empowerment*. These terms are derived from our analysis of definitions of democracy, as applied to early child-

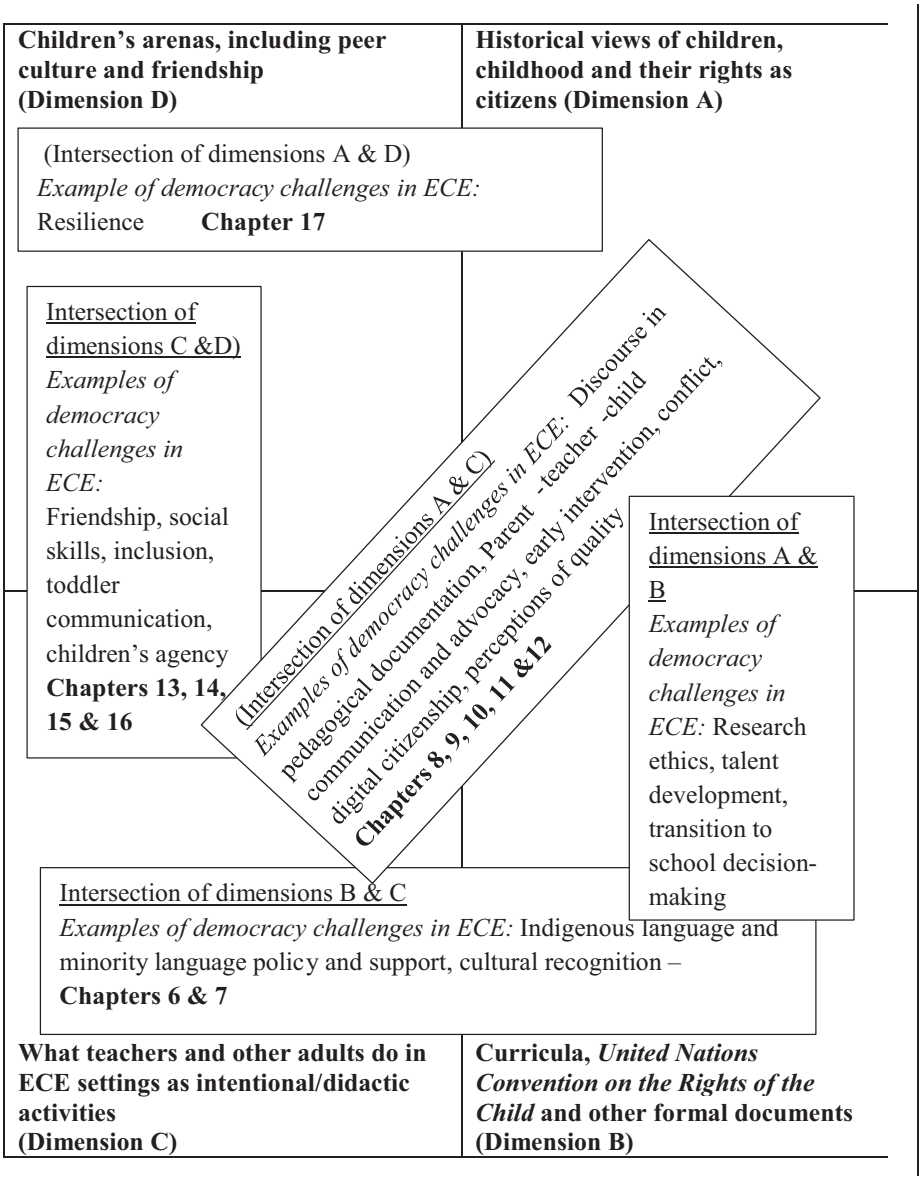

Fig. 1.1 Democracy dimensions and examples of challenges in early childhood education. (Based on Hägglund, Löfdahl Hultman & Thelander's 2017 model)

hood practice and discourse. *Reciprocity* recognises existing practices, strengths, theories and considerations for democracy in ECE and childhood, highlighting democratic participation of children in cultural contexts. *Togetherness* illustrates how democracy may be evident (or absent) in early childhood practices and interactions across a range of curriculum contexts and perspectives, noting that it can take

many forms. *Empowerment* considers ways in which practices can further advance and sustain, with positive transformational opportunities for the future benefit to children and wider ecological systems. While the concepts of reciprocity, togetherness and empowerment are constructive, the discussion will address challenges and tensions such as dissent, conflict and power relations. There is opportunity to reflect on what we can learn for future development on democracy in ECE and how we can positively influence children's democratic engagement.

1.4 Diversity

1.4.1 Diverse Contributions and Perspectives

As editors, we are proud that this book includes author contributors across a range of career stages: nine professors or associate professors, nine lecturers or senior lecturers, a specialist researcher and six doctoral students (although these roles changes across the life cycle of the book). This mix ensures that we are sharing new lines of empirical study and supporting early career researchers. The process of engaging in the book has provided professional learning and mentoring/mentorship for some contributors, new content learning for others and many collaborative writing opportunities. Some of the contributors currently work in schools and early childhood settings, for nongovernment agencies, in teacher education, research or private practice. During the life cycle of the book, some of us changed roles and affiliations. Our collective work bridges theory and practice. The work is a contribution we hope is resonant, and challenging, to the wider early childhood community across many contexts.

We recognise a range of adults who contribute to ECE: teachers, educators, assistants, student teachers, parents, directors, language specialists, early intervention specialists, researchers, governments and policymakers. We illustrate within the book that democracy is learned by doing (as stated by Dewey in his main work *Education and Democracy in the World of Today* from 1938/2012); one can both teach about democracy and learn by engaging in a democratic arena. This engagement is emphasised in our subtitle *Engagement in Changing Global Contexts*. Various empirical work shared is connected by a storyline of democracy being enacted, negotiated and redefined. The specific content of the book *applies* the concept of democracy, as connected to the model shared in Chap. 2, to diverse settings and contexts, with consideration of diverse topical issues.

The book benefits from contributions from five continents: Europe (Sweden and Bulgaria), Australasia (Australia and New Zealand), North America (USA), Asia (Taiwan) and Africa (South Africa). It is also pertinent to note that cultural and contextual diversity is included *within* texts from particular countries. For example, Chap. 13 shares narratives of Swedish migrant children who originally come from African and Middle Eastern countries. The contextual narratives from any single chapter are not generalisable to all ECE settings and do not claim to universally represent their country of origin, but it is important that we include cultural diversity.

Finally, the book has a birth to age 8 focus, which means that it bridges context of prior-to-school, transition classes and the early years of school, reflecting diverse country contributors and education systems. We acknowledge that childhood has diverse cultural constructs and that ECE refers to different age groups in different countries. Sometimes older children provide their reflections of their earlier experiences as younger children, and this too is a valid early childhood research. In a similar way, the specific terms some writers use to describe ECE contexts in their individual countries necessarily differ to reflect their local discourse. Individual chapter authors variously refer to preschools, kindergartens, schools, ECE services and ECEC (early childhood education and care) services and to children or students, teachers, caregivers and educators.

1.4.2 Diverse Theories and Methods

Diversity is also evident amongst the contributions, with chapters that explore such topics as children's communication, participation, language learning, Indigenous knowledges, migration, inclusion, rights, friendship and resilience. There are also chapters that probe diverse areas of children's curriculum interest (e.g. mathematics and humanities), teacher ethical practice, parental engagement and decision-making. The chapters articulate empirical research findings, related to these issues, with recommendations for early childhood practice, understanding of children and childhood and child advocacy.

The chapters draw on a range of methodological approaches relevant to ECE, enabling the foregrounding of young children's engagement and voice. Empirical approaches that particularly align with ECE practice include the use of observation (Chaps. 2, 7, 10, 15, 16 and 17), interviews and narratives (Chaps. 5, 8, 11, 12, 13, 14 and 17). We have deliberately included additional research methods to reflect our stance on valuing diversity. These valid research methods include document analysis (Chaps. 2, 4 and 6), ethical use of educational assessments, pre- and post-intervention (Chap. 9) and surveys (Chap. 9). This breadth of method shows that early childhood research is diverse and informed by a range of methodological perspectives. It is, however, important to note that within each generalised methods, there is great diversity. For example, interviews can be with parents, teachers or children; they can be semi-structured or drawn on life narrative approaches; they may be conducted individually or in groups such as a focus group. This text reinforces the richness and validity of empirical qualitative studies in contributing towards understanding and meaning-making.

The chapters in this text draw on an extensive range of theories, concepts and theoretical and methodological perspectives. Key theoretical and methodological terms used by authors in this book include (listed alphabetically) bioecological systems theory (BEST), bioecological model of human development, child perspective paradigms, communicative event analysis, consensual democracy, cultural production, funds of knowledge, human capital accumulation, institutional events of

democracy, peer culture, phenomenology, posthumananistic theories, poststructuralism, social and cultural identity, social competence, social constructionism, social investment, social learning theory, sociocultural theories, sociology and sociopolitical theories. This breadth of theory evidences the rigour and value of early childhood empirical research.

1.5 Conclusion

People are diverse but have basic needs and universal rights. A democratic society needs to be well grounded, firmly rooted and well nourished. How we support and nurture our youngest citizens is a critical aspect of democratic society, but there is no one "right" way to teach democracy in ECE. Diverse cultural philosophies and values have influenced the examples within this book of how children are enculturated into society and empowered to be democratic citizens and how adults grapple with challenges. Our connection to ancestors (past and present), wisdom passed across generations and new growth and possibilities inherent in ECE practice and research support us all to ensure that challenges are also opportunities for new learning and reflection.

We hope you enjoy the content of this text and the richness of chapter contributions and that it sustains your work. Some of you may work through the chapters sequentially; others will be drawn first to particular areas of focus or dimensions of democracy. As you read, we also hope you draw connections from the model of democracy in ECE and the content of chapters to your own cultural contexts and reflection on challenges and that the book sustains your aspiration for democracy in early childhood.

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Chapter 2
The Preschool as an Arena for Democratic Education: A Framework for Teacher Roles and Child Outcomes

Solveig Hägglund, Annica Löfdahl Hultman, and Nina Thelander

Abstract This chapter presents a conceptual framework, helpful when implementing, communicating and practising democratic education in educational contexts. The framework illustrates democracy in early childhood education as integrated in a dynamic context where political, structural, cultural, professional and personal ideas on democracy inevitably are involved. Four distinct dimensions are outlined, influencing the preschool practice, directly and indirectly through interplay with each other. The framework is assumed to rest on a definition of democracy as a complex, dynamic concept carrying values such as justice, equality and rights. Further, as a learning object, democracy calls for interpretation and concretisation, done in formal steering documents but also in everyday interactions between teachers and children. Democratic education takes place in social, political and cultural contexts, related to local, national and global circumstances. Finally, social and interactive aspects of education are essential in children's individual and collective learning when practising democracy.

2.1 Introduction

Early childhood education (ECE) is formed and organised in institutions designed for activities aiming at young children's learning and development. There are national differences in how this is specifically interpreted and implemented, but the underpinning common ambition is to provide professional competence, physical space and material equipment for this to be achieved. Following the overall theme for this book, we will direct our focus in this chapter on a particular area of young children's learning, namely, their growing insights and abilities related to democracy, more specifically on democratic values and human rights. Even though national policies and practice may differ, the presence of global challenges in the wake of

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armed conflicts, poverty, famine and climate change will, in one way or another, have an echo in the daily life of preschools around the world. No doubt this means tough demands on the teachers to embrace its consequences for their professional role. Aiming at supporting this task, this chapter outlines a cohesive, theoretically anchored understanding of democratic education in preschool and its professional challenges as inevitably involved in a changing global, and thereby also a local, society. A conceptual model is presented in which democracy in ECE is linked with societal structures and political agendas as well as with day-to-day practice and children's play. In this introductory section, we will make some notions on definitions of democracy and an overarching perspective on democracy and education. Thereafter, the main part of the chapter is devoted to a presentation and discussion of the model.

2.2 Defining Democracy in Education

A common definition of democracy refers to two distinguished aspects. One is about forms and rules for (political) decision-making, for example, how citizens' constitutional rights to vote in general elections are to be exercised. The other concerns the complex and necessary communication processes between citizens and institutions that take place, not only when applying formal rules but also when questioning them. One may say that these two aspects mirror the dynamics of the concept as involving both structural forms and the social and cultural responses they initiate. In an overview of how democracy is defined in literature, Biesta (2007) concludes that the meaning of the concept seems to be "…constantly challenged and disputed, *not* because people cannot agree upon its definition, but because the very idea of democracy calls for a continuous discussion about and reappraisal of what it actually means and entails" (Biesta, 2007 p. 3). Such a statement stresses the dynamic quality of the concept at the same time as it opens for reflections on by whom and where the changing properties of democracy are to be decided. With reference to Dewey and his emphasis on the social and associative aspects of democracy, Biesta argues that democracy essentially has to do with social participation and the "… inclusive ways of social and political action" (Biesta, 2007 p. 4). In brief, this means that when searching for a definition of democracy, we cannot expect it to be found in a once-and-for-all formulation, but as embedded in ongoing political and cultural discourses. However, this does not mean that democracy is an empty and valueless concept. In most definitions democracy is spelled out as holding values such as human rights and freedoms (Hägglund, Quennerstedt, & Thelander, 2013). When searching for a meaning of democracy, it has been argued that democracy rests on human rights and vice versa. Such a close and mutual connection between democracy as a structure and the more "soft" values justice, equality and freedom is stressed by, for example, Benhabib (2004). These values are pointed out as basic values of democratic political systems around the world as well as in international declarations and conventions. In sum, our definition of

democracy thus is based on an understanding of the concept as dynamic, socially communicated, questioned and confirmed and as closely connected with human rights and freedoms.

Drawing on the above notes on definition of democracy, some key meanings with relevance for democracy in ECE are discerned. One is that democracy as a learning object does not come with an exhaustive, predefined content but is object for continuous interpretations and redefinitions. Another is that in the preschool context, this is outlined at a political level and left to teachers and children to materialise, communicate and practise. Democratic values, such as justice, equality and rights, are conceptual guidelines serving as content anchors in planning and implementing such processes.

Our general perspective on democracy and education is in line with the tradition of educational philosophy, represented, among others, by Dewey (1938/2012) according to which the two concepts are closely interrelated. In his work Dewey emphasises the social role of education and links education strongly with democracy. Education is viewed as a process of growth where children learn in relations and activities with others, in environments, institutions and practices based on democratic values and communication. Biesta (2010) brings Dewey's ideas further and argues that democracy is a social and political situation where all people, also children, are to be included and to participate in the society. In this tradition, educational arenas, such as the preschool, are seen as most important for political socialisation, including issues related to democracy and democratic values (Biesta, 2007, 2010; Moss, 2007). In short, this view is based on two key assumptions. One concerns the fact that learning and socialisation in formal educational settings are embedded in societies where current ideas about knowledge, learning and the role of education are reflected in steering documents that regulate content and predetermined outcomes for the educational institutions. According to this view, neither educational arenas nor their didactic practice operates in a political, cultural or social vacuum. A second assumption is that day-to-day interaction over time between children and teachers constitute a learning context with particular relevance for social and ethic norms and values. The social dimension of education therefore is seen as essential for learning democracy.

This means that value concepts related to democracy, such as justice, human rights and equality, are given meaning when interpreted and adapted in concrete situations where children and adults communicate, make judgements and act with and towards each other in mutually formed relationships. For example, the "universal standard" for equality, stated in Article 1 of the *UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights …" (United Nations, 1948), does not make sense for children until translated into a day-to-day life where the organisation of play and shared activities demand dialogue and interaction. When this takes place, be that involvement in negotiations to prepare a play activity or in handling conflicts, children act upon complex, collectively held social logics including aspects of another human being's value. According to our core assumption here, situations like this contribute to children's individual and collective learning and experience of democracy. When discussing democracy and

education, it should be noted that education is stipulated as a human right, in the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (United Nations, 1948) as well as in the *UN Convention on the Rights of the Child* (United Nations, 1989).

In these introductory remarks on the role of the preschool setting and its actors for learning and practising democracy, we have highlighted that educational institutions, no matter where and by whom they are organised, are closely linked to structures and values embedded in political and cultural contexts anchored in time and place. Accordingly, preschools constitute a part of a complex and dynamic global and local context, which in turn inevitably becomes a part of life in preschool. This means that when ideological currents influence agendas concerning, for example, migration policy or educational budgets, an impression is made in the preschool. These impressions are not only in terms of steering documents but also as norms and values based on life experiences in families, cyberspace, media and society at large and brought to preschool everyday life by teachers and children. Such a perspective, according to which preschool is seen both as a part of a changing world and as an arena where this is to be interpreted into educational practice, calls for professional tools to encounter, handle and even confront and question conditions and space for democratic education to be carried out. In the following sections of this chapter, we will elaborate and conceptualise such a perspective.

2.3 Democracy in ECE: A Conceptual Framework

Above we have presented democracy as a complex concept and democratic education as a task, as least as complex, to be fulfilled in educational institutions including preschools. We also have claimed that democratic values such as justice, equality and human rights form the core content in children's democratic learning. The step from the institutional level to the arena where this task is expected to be fulfilled takes us to the preschools' everyday life where the teacher and the children are the actors. The preschool teacher's professional role includes to define the task in didactic/teaching terms and to consider conditions and challenges in carrying it out. Not only is this a matter of planning what has to be done; it also demands dealing with the task and its prerequisites as such in a prudent and critical way.

The aim of the conceptual framework presented in Fig. 2.1 is to visualise and conceptualise this in a broad perspective, including conditions outside the here-and-now context of the preschool (Hägglund, Löfdahl Hultman, & Thelander, 2017). It has been elaborated from a conceptualisation originally presented by Allison James and Adrian James (2004) in the book *Constructing Childhood*: *Theory, Policy and Social Practice*. In their version, the aim was to show how children and childhood can be viewed in relation to society, politics and family. Their aim was to identify conditions that influence identity and growth in the individual child but also to make visible the fact that the individual child belongs to a specific social category, childhood. Defining childhood as a category in which children are members makes it possible to describe and analyse relationships between children and adults as

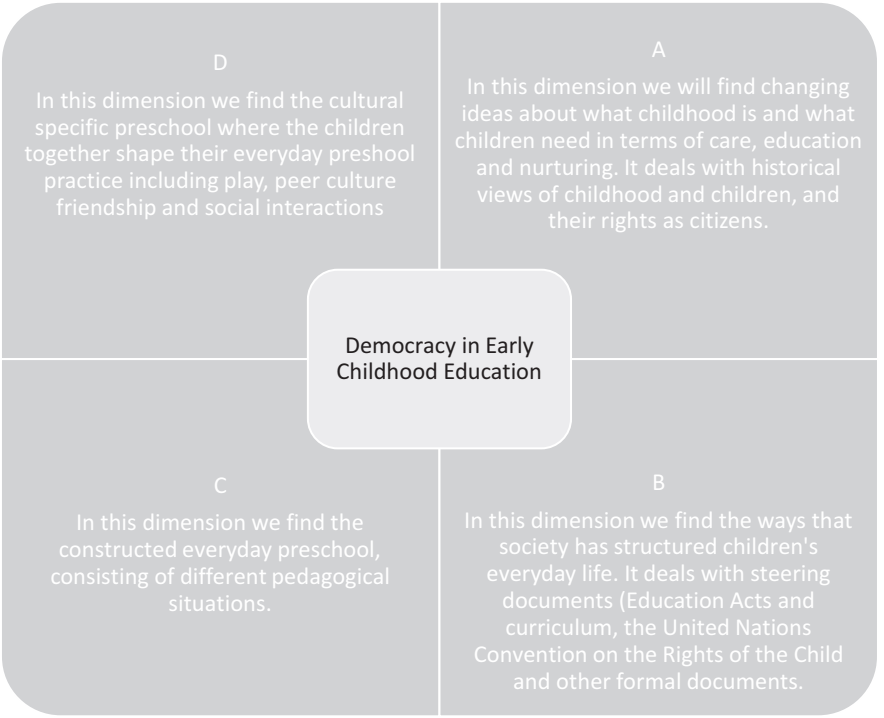

Fig. 2.1 Democracy in early childhood education. (Adapted from Hägglund et al., 2017)

collective units, a theoretical approach developed within the tradition of childhood sociology (Qvortrup, 2009). In our conceptual framework, we suggest a shift in focus, from children and childhood, to the preschool as an educational arena with a democratic mandate. While keeping the theoretical core assumption from the original model, i.e. that there is a continuous, mutual interaction flow between society, institution and actor, we thus wish to put the preschool in the centre. This does not mean that the children are out of sight; rather they are assumed to contribute as actors in implementing the democratic mission. The model should be regarded as a framework illustrating democracy in ECE as integrated in a dynamic context where political, structural, cultural, professional and personal ideas on democracy inevitably are involved when implementing, communicating and practising democratic education.

Four distinguished dimensions are outlined as having an impact when democratic education in the preschool is to be carried out. These dimensions influence what happens in the preschool both directly and indirectly through interplay with each other. Let us take a look at each dimension and further elaborate their meaning.

Although all four dimensions are linked with contexts related to time and space, C and D are particularly related to local, specific, here-and-now preschool activities and their actors.

2.3.1 Ideas About Children and Childhood (Dimension A)

No matter where and when preschool activities are being organised, such a project rests upon ideas about children, their social position and value. A basic assumption in this dimension is that children always are seen as having a minority position in relation to adults, not in terms of number, but power. This may have various consequences, but generally speaking it means that the last say and the final decision are in the hands of the adult, or in an extended meaning, the adult society. Such a perspective on the relationship between children and adults involves both power and responsibility from the side of the adult. In turn, the way this is handled, both by individual adults and by the collective adult society, rests upon ideas of the child and children's value.

One way of looking at children's value concerns what a child means for parents. Across cultures and times, a child has, for example, been regarded as a guarantee for the parents' welfare when getting old, as confirming a grown-up identity or as a symbol and carrier of honour (Lee, 2005). When it comes to a society's view of children and their value, the young generation can be looked upon as an investment for future economic wealth, as an assurance of growth and development and as a promise for a better world. In relation to our focus here, it is interesting to note that ideas of children as carriers of democratic values to be kept and carried out in a troublesome future are expressed when motivating democratic education in schools and preschools. In this way, we may say that children, although upholding a minority position in relation to adults, are valued as a link between today and an unknown future.

When trying to get a picture of children's value, interesting information is to be found in a historical perspective. According to James, Jenks and Prout (1998), we can refer to three images of children: the evil child born with a hereditary sin, the innocent child who needs protection and the immanent child, who needs adult guidance to learn. Reflecting on these images, believed as passed into history, Hägglund et al. (2017) suggest that they may still exist as images of preschool children but in somewhat revised versions. The evil child can be traced underneath the image of a child who needs fostering in order to learn how to behave towards others. The innocent child seems allied with the idea of a child in need of protection from dangerous and violent situations, like traffic, deep water or even wars. The immanent child corresponds well to ideas that learning means mastering a defined set of facts, transferred from adults to children. Although this has been challenged by the image of a competent child, able to learn and understand from their own life experiences and through their own motivation, we still recognise the view of knowledge, learning and teaching as being linked with an immanent more passive learner.

In contemporary international research on education, the presence of a market and its impact on societies, institutions and learners are addressed (e.g. Löfdahl & Perez Prieto, 2009; Löfdahl & Folke Fichtelius, 2015). Very briefly, without going into a more thorough analysis, we suggest that in the wake of marketisation, images where children and their childhoods are expected to learn and adjust to what is required from market logics are discerned. In sum, images and values of the child

who enters the preschool and its democratic education are complex and sometimes even contradictory. For the teacher, it is a professional responsibility to sort out and identify what image of the young learner of democracy is at hand and how it corresponds to the democratic education mandate.

2.3.2 Documents and Policies Structuring Children's Lives (Dimension B)

The second dimension in our framework concerns how societies formally structure children's lives. This is being done through national documents, such as educational acts, social service acts and various rules and acts related to parental support. The structural dimension in our framework is linked with political structures. This means that we can expect different underlying ideologies concerning the relationship between a state and its citizens in different countries. Various political traditions also mean various views on how responsibilities for the young generation's education should be distributed between family and state. The democratic mandate given to a preschool and its teachers therefore is not formulated in the same way across countries.

Although we do expect various ways of defining the role of the preschool and its teachers for children's democratic learning, there is one document which we count as a kind of steering document with international reach, namely, the *UN Convention on the Rights of the Child* (United Nations, 1989). The Convention was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly 1989, and, after being ratified by a required number of nations, it came into force in 1990. The Convention had early forerunners, the first already in 1924 after the First World War followed by somewhat extended documents in 1948 and 1959 (see https://un.org for more information about United Nations documents on Human Rights). The Convention from 1989 contains more than 50 articles which specifically outline children's civil, political, economic, social, health and cultural rights. The document is ratified by all but one country (the United States) in the world, meaning that, basically, there is a global agreement to consider children's rights and to see to it that they are fulfilled. Having said this, we note that several countries have claimed and been allowed to make exceptions from some of the rights, mostly referring to particular cultural traditions.

The *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (CRC) and its articles have initiated numerous interpretations and discussions over its nearly 30 years of existence. When ratifying it, a country not only accepts to implement a policy in line with its content but also to regularly report to the Committee on the Rights of the Child in Geneva about progresses and challenges in this work. These reports fairly often are met by controversial and critical comments from the committee as well as other readers. In political and research texts, critical voices have also been directed to the document itself for being Western-oriented, too individualistic and for not paying attention to collective aspects of children's life conditions. For example, Smith (2016) argues that when children's rights are to be implemented in day-to-day con-

texts, social and cultural aspects, such as the meaning of indigeneity, must be considered. She stresses social justice as a necessary conceptual tool when practising and analysing children's rights and criticises the Convention for lacking this dimension. As for critics related to the Convention being too individualistic, this has been commented upon by Alderson (2017). In an overview of criticisms of children's rights in *the International Journal of Children's Rights*, her conclusion is that the individualistic perspective on human rights, including children's human rights, is the only way to guarantee that all individuals are included and that "Paradoxically, mention of each individual is the only way to transcend individualism by ensuring universal and equal inclusion" (p. 8). In short, the *UN Convention on the Rights of the Child* has been criticised for having shortcomings, yet still it serves as a globally spread and used document aiming to describe and evaluate children's human rights in concrete places in our time.

Without going deeper into the content of the Convention, it is important for the focus of this book to mention that there are specific articles with relevance for democratic education. In Article 28 the right to education is stated, and in Article 29 it is specifically stipulated that education shall aim at developing knowledge and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms and for "… the principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations". Other articles with democratic education relevance concern the right to express own views on matters that affect the child and also to be provided opportunities to do so (Article 12). Further, it is stated in Article 13 that the child has the right to freedom of expression and to "… seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds …" These articles relate to a view on the child as an active, competent and information-seeking person, a notion that we can connect to the issue of children's value, discussed in relation to the (A) dimension above.

When ratifying the Convention, individual nation states have agreed upon that they will regularly report to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child on what measures have been taken to implement the Convention and how effects of the work have been followed up. The reports are critically commented upon by the Committee with recommendations on what aspects of child rights work can be strengthened and more efficient.

Even though we regard the Convention as an important document in itself, its most crucial impact is to be found in terms of national strategies to strengthen children's rights that has followed in its wake. For democratic education in preschools, we find two significant lines of potential influence. One concerns content, that is, whether, at a national level, democracy is at all present in steering documents such as education acts and curricula and, if so, how it is defined. The other is related to who has the right to democratic education. For example, is preschool education available for all children? Will children with a refugee or immigrant background have access, or will they run the risk of being discriminated against in times of shortage of economic resources?

With this dimension in mind, the professional role of the preschool teacher involves being aware of the legal and political conditions for working with democracy, including a critical eye on where formal documents rule out certain issues.

2.3.3 *Everyday Life in Preschool: Emphasis on Pedagogical Situations (Dimension C)*

This dimension takes us to the everyday life in the preschool with a specific attention towards the teacher's pedagogical work. When teachers plan and carry out the pedagogical work with the children in the preschool, they face a series of challenges related to the prerequisites and opportunities to create an arena for democratic education. We want to highlight one of these challenges that deals with educational experiences for individual children versus the group of children. Teacher-led activities are often used to gather the whole group for shared experiences. One example of such common activity is the game "The farmer's in his den" (Swedish: *En bonde i vår by*), a typical ring game accompanied with a song. One child is chosen to be the farmer standing inside the circle and is invited to take a wife, that is, to pick one of the peers in the circle. The wife, in turn, must choose a child, and then the child chooses a dog, which picks a cat, which picks a mouse, and, finally, the mouse will pick a cheese. The cheese is left to be the next farmer as the ring game goes on. There are seven different roles available in the game.

When observing this game in a Swedish preschool setting, we noticed how, despite the teacher's striving to involve all children, they are challenged by the children's own choices of friends (see Löfdahl & Hägglund, 2007 for a more detailed description). The game went on like this: (G/B=girl/boy, numbers 3, 4 or 5 indicate children's age).

> In the first turn Ester (G5) chooses her friend Linn (G5), who in turn chooses Emma (G5). They look very happy and smile towards each other. Emma chooses Anna (G3), who chooses Sandra (G4). Before Sandra gets the chance to make a choice herself, Ester calls out "Ella", one of her same-age favourite playmates and the only girl left to be chosen, and Sandra repeats "Ella". Ella (G5) finally chooses Teo (B5) to be the cheese.
>
> In the second turn, Teo (B5) is the farmer and as in the first turn, Linn (G 5) is chosen as the wife. Now the teacher steps in and reminds the children that they should try to include all the children in the game. Despite this, Linn now chooses Ella (G5) as her child. Ella, in turn, chooses Peter (B5), Peter chooses another same-age boy, Erik (B5) and he, in turn, chooses his best friend, Bob (B5) who chooses Anna (G3) as the cheese to be left.
>
> In the third turn the teacher begins by saying "And now we must think of letting all the children join in." Anna (G3), the farmer, chooses Bob (B5) who in turn chooses Peter (B5). Now the teacher stops the game and reminds the children again saying, "Now we must let all children have a chance to join in." Then William (B5) says that he has not been chosen, which causes Peter to choose him. William chooses Jimmy (B4), Jimmy chooses Linn (G5) and, finally, Linn chooses Ester (G5) as the cheese to be left.

The challenges the teachers met were how the children, by making their own choices, be made visible to all children who were the most popular child (Linn) and at the same time – by stressing that everyone must be chosen – who were less popular (William). The children gave the ring game another meaning than that their teacher had intended, and the "democratic" ring game turned out to be a situation that made possible exclusion of children within the group. We want to emphasise the importance of taking into account such aspects as children's own preferable agenda when planning and carrying out an activity. In this particular ring game,

children's rights to education were definitely challenged. The shared experiences from this activity can be seen as children's learning of the impact of status hierarchies. The individual learning is very different for Linn and for William, as we can expect Linn to strengthen her high status and William to be even more aware of his low status within the group.

2.3.4 Children's Everyday Preschool Practice (Dimension D)

Like the third (C) dimension, the fourth (D) concerns daily life in concrete, everyday preschool settings. Here our focus is on the children's contribution to democratic learning and practice in the context of friendship cultures. Democratic values such as solidarity, justice, equality and human rights can be spelled out in political strategies and legal rules, but ultimately, they concern qualities in interaction between humans. When children play, make agreements on sharing toys or initiate a quarrel, this is guided by collectively held ideas of social hierarchies, norms and behaviour rules which in fact can be viewed as democracy in practice.

Several studies have contributed with empirical observations showing how children in their everyday cultures establish patterns of friendship. For example, it has been reported that age, ethnicity and gender are likely to contribute to norms with bearing on social exclusion and inclusion (Löfdahl & Hägglund, 2007). Even though a teacher is present during a large part of the day, situations where the children are left to handle social situations themselves occur frequently and serve as collective learning contexts. However, as the previous example of "The farmer's in his den", studies also have shown that even if the teacher is leading activities aiming at training the children to be fair towards each other, for example, taking equal turns for participation in a game, children's collective norms of social exclusion tend to dominate and take over.

Thus, the core assumption in this dimension is that social norms and conventions that are established and practised in friendship cultures are essential for processes of collective learning about what democracy means and what it looks like in concrete daily interactions. Professionally, this means that the role of a teacher whose ambition is to see to it that the democratic mandate is fulfilled involves knowledge about what images about each other's value are at hand in the children's culture.

2.4 Final Comments

In this chapter, we have presented a conceptual framework aiming at making visible four dimensions, all essential and present when democratic education is to be carried out in the preschool. Our framework rests on a definition of democracy as a complex, dynamic concept carrying values such as justice, equality and rights. As a learning object, democracy calls for interpretation and concretisation, something

we assume is being done in formal steering documents but also in everyday interactions between teachers and children. We have underlined that democratic education takes place in social, political and cultural contexts, related to local, national as well as global circumstances. Further, we have emphasised the social, interactive aspects of education as essential in children's individual and collective learning and practising democracy.

In sum, the message we wish that the reader has got from this chapter is that the role of the teacher includes a professional responsibility to map the four interacting dimensions in our model and their meaning for implementing democratic education. Added to this, our model also emphasises the child as a learner in a contemporary society and culture, a context of which the preschool is an important but not a single contributor.

So, what about challenging democracy in ECE? When continuing to read the chapters in this book, bear in mind the different dimensions surrounding the concept of, and the idea of, democracy in ECE settings. Try to place the content of each chapter into one or more of the dimensions, and try to see what is challenging democracy – and even more important – how can teachers, researchers and other important adults in children's everyday life, being aware of the challenges, act in a more democratic direction? A huge challenge – but definitely worth the effort!

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Part II
Democracy in Early Childhood Curriculum and Policy

Chapter 3
Ethical Issues in Child Research: Caution of Ethical Drift

Ann-Britt Enochsson and Annica Löfdahl Hultman

Abstract The background for this study is the emphasis on ethical considerations in child research during the last decades. We have found ethics to be more and more acknowledged and regulations to be strengthened. Based on this, the aim of the study is to review the ethical issues in child research to find out how ethical considerations are dealt with in this respect. Four important journals, representing three important editors were selected. Through reading 707 abstracts from volumes 2016 and 2017, empirical studies focusing on children under the age of 8 were found in 95 articles and were further analysed regarding ethical issues. The result shows that regardless of requirements in journal guidelines, about one third of the articles lack any ethical reflection. Further, it is also shown that just over half of the articles merely stated compliance with regulations and standards and just a few of articles presented a deeper reflection on the ethical considerations including occurring dilemmas. The shift towards stronger ethical regulations is discussed as if it might encourage the tendency of just doing what is necessary according to laws, and when doing so, the risk of ethical drift is elaborated.

3.1 Introduction

In a conference proceeding 15 years ago (Enochsson & Löfdahl, 2003), we took a closer look at possible ethical problems when children participate in research studies. At that time, we found the area poorly examined, and our main findings then showed that despite a more common focus on children as active participants in research, methods and ethical considerations were based on the adult researchers' perspectives. Our results from 66 empirical studies published in 8 different journals during the years 2001–2002 showed examples of what we might assume, as it was not visible in the articles, children that had not been asked to participate, in spite of

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the ethical guidelines stating voluntariness, and only in a few articles this was discussed. We found ethical dilemmas to be largely invisible and poorly dealt with in the scrutinised research articles. Our conclusion then was that there was an incongruence in research reports regarding intentions and realisations of a perspective where children are seen as active participants.

As young and eager child researchers in the new millennium, based on our own experiences with many dilemmas during our research processes, we found it hard to grasp the fact that child research seemed to show a lack of descriptions of ethical dilemmas. We were as confused that journals did not require more detailed statements of ethical considerations, failures and procedures. Today, ethical issues are more acknowledged, and there is more awareness of social aspects than merely the specific purposes that fit into a single research project. In its most recent updated version, the *Declaration of Helsinki* (World Medical Association, 2013) illuminates the role of the socioeconomically poor countries and vulnerable people in research. Children as a group can be considered a vulnerable group as they are dependent on their guardians. If research is conducted with vulnerable groups, this group should stand to benefit from the knowledge, practices or interventions that result from the research, and further "research subjects that are not able to give consent themselves, must be asked for assent" (§ 29). In a similar way, we argue that child research should benefit children's spaces and places and that children's assent should be sought in addition to legal guardians' consent, to respect the children. Over the years, we have continued to ask ourselves how ethical issues are being addressed and the importance of such issues when dealing with aspects of democracy, influence and child perspectives in research. Our aim with this study is to review the ethical issues in current child research and to find out more about how ethical considerations are dealt with.

3.2 Ethical Considerations: A Brief Overview

In 2003, we found it more and more common that children acted as participants, research subjects or even co-researchers. The concerns then were about congruence between methods and ethical considerations were based on the adult researchers' perspectives. Johansson (2003) discerned three different themes in how children were viewed in various articles and pedagogical practice. These were "children as fellow beings", "adults know best" and "children are irrational", reflecting a range of ethical considerations. Based on such images of children, we assumed the methods (participants, subjects and co-researchers) and ethical considerations mostly to be incongruent and to be based on the adult's perspectives. However, there were exceptions, for example, Backe-Hansen (2002) who pleaded for the use of concepts more suitable when small children are participants. Instead of the concept "informed consent" which is somewhat difficult when dealing with preschool children as participants, Backe-Hansen called attention to "assent" or "accept" as an alternative. Such concepts represent children's positive confirmation, indicating they want to

participate, or if this positive confirmation is lacking, when children do not protest, the interpretation of their behaviour as acceptance. From our point of view, children's assent means to take aspects of democracy, participation and influence seriously. When dealing with assent, researchers cannot ignore, quickly pass or just check off ethical considerations. To be able to find out about children's assent, one must ask the children, listen to their voices and interpret how the children, from their point of view, express their views on participating or to refrain from attending. When dealing with consent, we also learned from David, Edwards and Alldred (2001) to discuss this in terms of "educated consent" in contrast to "informed consent" if the research was conducted in a preschool/school setting, where children can find it hard to decline participation. Then, in 2003, we found approaches as "being a fly on the wall" or "to take the least adult role" to become rarer when entering children's spaces. Instead, approaches connected to "the new images of children" (James, Jenks, & Prout, 1998) were a common standpoint among ethnographers and thereby to be engaged in dialogues and conversations with children were focused (Corsaro & Molinari, 2000; Enochsson, 2001; Löfdahl, 2002; Mayall, 2000). What struck us then was the absence of ethical aspects in quantitative research methodology as if ethics were a concern only in qualitative methodology.

So, what has happened in 15 years? Well, we can find more emphasis being put on children as participants in research in analytical talks and presentations of results, with the children seen not only as informants but also as contributors (Harcourt & Conroy, 2005; Harcourt & Einarsdottir, 2011). Several researchers describe an increasing interest in research that involves children and even acknowledge the occurrence of ethical dilemmas. These researchers plead for the need to learn more about how to deal with unanticipated dilemmas (Morrow, 2008) and to be attentive and to use the researcher's "ethical radar" (Skånfors, 2009). When discussing the ethics in research design, Harcourt and Quennerstedt (2014), and from the same project Quennerstedt, Harcourt, and Sargeant (2014), conclude in a similar way as Johansson (2003) that ethical views are related to images of children. Quennerstedt et al. distinguished in their overview two different and simultaneously needed views on research ethics: *ethics as research practice*, which means that ethical considerations must continue during the whole research process, and *ethics as risk management*, which is closely related to a juridical regulation on information and consent in the entrance of the research process.

In addition to reflecting on issues related to images of children and ethical dilemmas, there is an increased awareness of the need to problematise children's participation in research and to show the need of continuous critical reflection (Palailologou, 2014). Morrow (2008) highlights the problem with adults as gatekeepers when asking for consent among the children and the way it might be the gatekeepers' agenda that will be steering participation rather than the children's. When researchers have to be guided by the school staff they are working with, it will place the researchers "… in an awkward situation" (p. 54). Palailologou (2014) warns us about the illusion of participation coming along with the image of children as social actors having agency. We might even be suffering "… an epidemiology of children's voices …" (p. 690) which might lead to approaches that do not allow for plurality.

Participation as elaborated here shows the need among researchers to reflect on if children's participation will strengthen aspects of democracy – or if participation only becomes a lawsuit concept without real anchorage in the research design. In relation to such warnings, we also find an increased awareness when planning to involve children in research to make extra efforts to achieve informed consent involving children with learning difficulties and cognitive challenges (Samuel, Parks, & Aduak, 2016), aiming to let *all* children's voices to be heard irrespective of variations in function.

A very recent article stresses the multiple contexts and web of relationships children are involved in and how these contexts contribute to the complexities in negotiating ethical processes (Bourke, Loveridge, O'Neill, Erueti & Jamieson, 2017). In their overview, they found practical difficulties seldom being addressed in research even if it is frequently recognised that ethical issues are negotiated with children throughout the process, though this is seldom done with children across different local cultural contexts such as family, school, church and so on. A conclusion from Bourke et al. is that different cultural contexts need reflective, dynamic and culturally situated ethical approaches as children do not live as isolated individuals but as embedded in relationships with immediate and extended families, peers and teachers. Just like Nind, Wiles, Bengry-Howell and Crow (2012), we can see how innovation of new research designs like child-led research might create tensions between ethics and the methods developed to empower the participating children. Altogether we agree with McCarry (2011), who considers the issue of participation and participatory methods to be a wider ethical issue regarding to what extent we should expose children to research. McCarry also questions whether children's participation in research will bring benefits for those who participate and whether it will lead to better research – or to more democratic research practice.

To sum up, the knowledge of ethical issues in child research including practical dilemmas, contexts regarding sensitive approaches and complexities when asking children for consent are presented in articles debating methods and theoretical perspectives. Among those cited authors, there seems to be an awareness of the lack in current journals of discussing and problematising the ethical issues further than the regulated ethical codes.

From this brief overview of methodological research, the questions that will guide us further will be:

- Are ethical considerations included in articles on child research?
- If so, how are they dealt with?

3.3 Theoretical Framework

We consider the more explicit ethical guidelines and regulated ethical codes concerning all research with humans and research with children in particular (Swedish Research Council, 2017), in recent policy. More explicitly, it means ethical rules

and regulations must be considered during the whole research process and will be enacted in relation to local circumstances. A policy, from this perspective is both static, as stated in what the law demands (SFS, 2003:460), but also something that is "done" in the local research practices. These local policy enactments are like what Braun, Maguire and Ball (2010) often discuss in relation to local school practices. Policy is not only "done" to people, but something that "pose problems to their subjects, problems that must be solved in context" (Ball, 2006, p. 21). We consider ethical dilemmas – the issues beyond the regulated codes – to hold such problems that must be solved in context. In a similar way, Bourke et al. (2017) discuss ethics from a sociocultural perspective and argue in accordance with Barbara Rogoff's work that children's development is part of a changing participation in an activity. We agree and stress that such a perspective means that the initially ethical approach must be reconsidered again and again during the research process, as children's participation also means children develop their understanding of their participating role and of their emerging democratic awareness.

3.4 Data Collection and Analysis

Our choice was to review recent articles from research within our research areas. The review was therefore limited to articles from two important journals from each of our fields of expertise: early childhood and computers in education. It is not a complete review of the fields, respectively, but the four journals represent three of the most important scientific journal publishers. The guidelines for the specific journals were studied. This was done as a background study to find out whether or not, and in which way it was required, to include information about compliance with ethical standards.

One further demarcation was to choose the two latest volumes available for each journal, e.g. 2016–2017. We read abstracts from 707 articles available in *Full Text* at our university library and found 95 articles describing empirical studies focusing on children under the age of 8. This means that articles with a focus on older students, teachers, parents or curricula were excluded (see Table 3.1), but we included studies with participants from different age groups, as long as there were children

Table 3.1 Number of articles by journal publication

Journal volumes 2016–2017	Total number of articles	Empirical studies focusing on children
Early Childhood Education Journal	145	46
Early Years	55	18
Education and Information Technologies	196	10
Computers & Education	311	21
Total	707	95

under the age of 8 in those studies. Each of these 95 articles focusing on child research was analysed regarding the ethical issues discussed above.

To start with, only abstracts were read, to find articles that fulfilled the requirements. For many abstracts, it was not possible to see the exact focus of the article, and a read-through of the remaining articles in full text was carried out to find the articles fitting our criteria, empirical studies involving children under the age of 8. This means that children have been participating directly, but also studies where children have been involved in other ways like, for example, being filmed when teachers are studied or children's works – texts, drawings, etc. – have been collected.

As a complement to reading, a search throughout the 95 selected articles for the keywords *ethics*, *ethical*, *consent*, *assent* and *participants* was carried out to ensure nothing was missed.

From the theoretical framework described above, our specified questions to the empirical data – the ethical considerations described in the reviewed articles – are the following: "How do the researchers deal with the ethical guidelines; are the ethical considerations directed towards regulated ethical codes?"; "How do they describe the process that goes beyond these codes?"; and "How are participating children viewed during the process?", i.e. "What does the researcher's local enactment look like?"

3.5 Results

In the results section, we start out with presenting the ethical guidelines we found in the journals, and after, there are three different approaches to ethical considerations.

3.5.1 Journals' Ethical Guidelines

All included journals welcome articles reporting research concerning early years. All journals require information about compliance with ethical standards, but it is highlighted in different ways. This type of guideline is displayed differently, and we had to search for a long time to find it in one of the scrutinised journals. Although there are differences, we found the guidelines in general to be quite similar and choose not to point out any of them. One of the journals requires a separate section on ethics. It is not made clear whether this section has to be part of the published article or not. We found accepted articles with the required header without any content in the body text underneath. One of the journals stresses that appropriate consent is important if the author wishes to include images, which we found in some articles. Another journal specifies that "for example, masking the eye region in photographs of participants is inadequate protection of anonymity".

Table 3.2 Approaches to ethical considerations in reviewed journals

	Nothing mentioned about ethics	Statements about regulations	Reflective discussions about ethics
Early Childhood Education Journal	14	29	3
Early Years	5	9	4
Education and Information Technologies	7	3	–
Computers & Education	8	12	1
Total	34	53	8

3.5.2 Approaches to Ethical Considerations Used in the Articles

In the 95 articles, we found three different approaches to ethical considerations. Our aim is not to compare the journals, but to give a picture of the field. Nevertheless, we have chosen to present a table where the articles are split up on the four journals. The first group of articles does not mention anything regarding ethical issues, the second group makes statements that ethical regulations has been followed, and the third group discusses ethics to varying degrees and gives examples of what they have done in the specific study. The numerical findings are shown in Table 3.2, followed by a discussion of each of the three approaches to ethical considerations found in the analysis.

3.5.2.1 Nothing Mentioned About Ethics

In spite of the requirements from the journals – as we understand them – 34 articles do not have any statement about ethics, not even a single sentence about compliance with the regulations. This makes 36%, about one third, of the articles. One of these articles was published in the journal which required a separate section with a specific header and is mentioned in Sect. 3.5.1 of this chapter. Four of these articles have published photos of participating children. In three of these articles with photos, the eyes of the children are masked, but the town where the study is conducted is mentioned. In the fourth article, a face of a child is visible. None of the images is commented on from an ethical perspective.

3.5.2.2 Statements About Regulations

The main body, 53 articles (56%), states compliance with regulations and standards but in very different ways and to different extent. The most typical statements were short descriptions of what was done, for example: “Parents/legal guardians were asked to provide consent for data collection on individual children and for the use

of photographic images in disseminating the results of the study" (Seifert & Metz, 2017 p. 415). We also found explanations that an ethical board or committee had approved the project, for example: "This study was approved by the Human Subject Committee of the researchers' university; all students included in the study and their parents were fully informed and provided written consent to participate" (Kuhn, Rausch, McCarty, & Montgomery, 2017 p. 295). We found three articles reporting on two or three connected studies, where children participated in one part and adults in another part. The procedure with informed consent is described for the adult participants, but not at all for the study on the children – not even that their caretakers have given their consent. Some of the articles are less clear, an example of this is where it says that the parents had shown interest for their children to participate, or "the schools were asked…".

In 14 of the 53 articles within this group which provided statements about regulations, the researchers showed they had ensured that the young students agreed on being studied, for example: "With teacher and student permission, the observers documented classroom activities with photos, short videos, and time indications of when events happened. The observation involved short conversations with students and teachers to ensure meaning-making of the data and to report the data correctly" (Jahnke, Bergström, Mårell-Olsson, Häll & Kumar, 2017 p. 5). A few articles had more details in their descriptions about ethical considerations:

> We carried out the experiment reported in accordance with the guidelines published by the American Psychological Association following the general *Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct* (2002). First, we applied for approval for participation in the study from elementary school principals who were familiar with the purpose and description of the research. We then obtained agreement from teachers who were willing to participate, having had the requirements of the experiment explained to them. Before the experiment commenced, parents of all participating students provided written consent. Students were not taken out of their normal classroom environments and all students in one class received the same treatment, which in the EG was tablet based cross-curricular teaching, while in the CG there was no intervention in teaching approach. Students of all groups received a pre-participation test and post-participation test. We assigned numbers to all students participating in the study to provide anonymity. All students received all the necessary information about the experiment before participating in the study. (Volk, Cotič, Zajk & Istenic Starcic, 2017 p. 14)

To sum up, in this group we found articles with short statements, and also articles describing the procedures in more detail, but without any further reflections.

3.5.2.3 Reflective Discussions About Ethics

The remaining eight articles (8%) discuss ethics to varying degrees. What they have in common is that they describe an awareness that ethics is not just about regulations but also about sensitivity to participants, not to harm them in any way, and that children's views have to be taken into account. We will share four examples in which we argue the researchers' ethical considerations allow us to understand the context in which the children participated and thereby also gaining a deeper

understanding of the results from these studies. Our first example shows how the researchers in a project about social media documentation that involved families (parent-child dyads) used a dialogic approach to ensure all family members understood what it means to be part of their research project. Children's assent was specifically stressed.

> A dialogical approach [- - -] was used in this research to ensure that the ethics process was respectful of participants. For example, parent queries regarding Edmodo use were shared with consent with other parents in the group as part of an ongoing dialogue to ensure all participants understood the nature of research. (McLean, Edwards, & Morris, 2017 p. 204)

Our next example shows how the researchers initially strived to establish rapport with the children and the way each child could choose to participate or not. The researcher also reported on children who did not want to participate in interviews or to be observed.

> Previous to conducting the interviews, we visited each kindergarten and introduced ourselves to the children. We told them we were researchers who wished to investigate how it was to be a child in kindergarten, and that we needed their help. Subsequently, the interviewing researcher spent 1 day in each kindergarten, to better get to know the children. When we came to conduct the interviews, we allowed each child the freedom to participate or to say no. One child did not wish to participate in the focus group interviews. For the individual interviews, one child wished for the kindergarten manager to be present during the conversation. One child was also exempt from the observations. (Helgeland & Lund, 2017)

In a similar way, Koivula and Hännikäinen (2017) asked the children in their study if the researcher was allowed to observe and video tape their play. Even though serious consideration was taken to noting children's initial as well as episode-specific verbal consent, these regards proved insufficient. Koivula and Hännikäinen (2017) stated: "On some occasions, despite their verbal consent, the children's bodily movements and facial expression subsequently revealed discomfort and reluctance about being observed. In these situations, the children's cues were respected by terminating the observation session" (p. 130).

Our last example shows how the researchers considered the fact that not all children would necessarily fully understand what it means to be a participant in research. In their international study on children's perspective on learning, Sandberg et al. (2017) argue the need of a careful and extended information.

> The child has to be informed about 'the nature of the search' and about 'what will be expected of them', in order not to be overwhelmed. The children included in the study did this voluntarily and confidentially and they could leave the group at any time. The children were informed of their rights to withdraw from the research. However, when preschool teachers and researchers ask for their participation, they may feel reluctant to decline. Researchers have to be aware if a child feels unsecure or afraid in the process of being interviewed. A research design which is based on an understanding of equity between researcher and participants has to respect the children's individual needs. Dockett et al. (2012) point out that not only children's body language but also children's verbal, behavioral and emotional signals are indicators of consent or not consent that should be noted. This attracted the attention during the interviews. (Sandberg et al., 2017)

Even though we argue such examples to improve a better understanding of the research results, we are aware of the possible limitations of the processes of

consent. We can never know for sure whether the examples reflect David et al. (2001) term "educated consent" or how optimal the researchers' strivings were. What we know for sure is that such examples provide us with possibilities to reflect on ethical considerations and to add valuable insights to our common cumulative ethical epistemic portfolio.

3.6 Discussion

In our review of articles, we have shown that about one third of the articles lacked any ethical reflection regardless of guidelines instructing that there *must* be statements in the manuscripts confirming that all procedures were performed in compliance with relevant laws. Furthermore, it is also shown that just over half of the articles only stated compliance with regulations and standards, some very briefly, and just a few of articles presented a deeper reflection on the ethical considerations that were made including occurring dilemmas. These findings may be a consequence of the journal guidelines, where the ethics part has two sections: one concerning researchers' responsibilities towards the journal and the other researchers' issues about plagiarism, copyright, etc. This latter section in the guidelines is much more visible and detailed than the other section, which concerns the researchers' responsibilities towards the research participants.

As child researchers, we are not proud of our findings. Despite stricter national and international regulations and an increased awareness among scholars, we found the discussions on ethical research issues including children's participation to be even rarer in journals today than in 2003 when we first started studying this topic (Enochsson & Löfdahl, 2003).

What struck us in 2003 was that ethics seemed to be of greater concern in qualitative research methodology and were often missed in quantitative studies. Today we can find information about ethical procedures even in the quantitative studies but mostly in brief descriptions that rules have been followed. Referring to the two sides of research ethics described above, *ethics as research practice* and *ethics as risk management* (Quennerstedt et al., 2014), there seems to be an overbalance of the latter in all the scrutinised articles, irrespective of methodological approach. On one hand, we can say that ethical awareness has been stretched out to embrace all kind of child research – but on the other hand, the whole field seems to have been narrowing towards juridical regulations on consent, and mostly parental consent, in the entrance of the research process.

Our results do not show what is actually done in the research process, what we have found is that ethical issues in child research are not *discussed or problematised* in the selected articles. In the articles we read, we can see more statements about compliance with regulations and less reflections on how the researcher can be sensitive to the research persons' wishes, for example, the needs and wishes of children. We can speculate about possible reasons, such as increased juridification in the whole society and/or increased demands among researchers who get "speed blind"

and leave the moral aspects behind when striving for more and faster publication rates. We do not know if this is a trend, but we can see a risk in regulations dominating methodological approaches and governing aspects becoming reduced to checklists. Reflections might become sparse; researchers' sensitivity towards research persons might disappear from the published articles and become invisible to the readers, including other researchers; and there may be nothing contributed to our common cumulative ethical epistemic portfolio.

Sternberg (2012) points at this risk when writing about *ethical drift* in research and describes how we, little by little, can lose our ethical compass. He uses the scenario in the Hitchcock film *Lifeboat* as a metaphor. Survivors from a sinking passenger vessel are drifting away in a lifeboat, and as their supplies run out, they act in ways none of them ever thought was possible. Sternberg describes how easy it can be to move the limits for what is morally acceptable, little by little, and how we start to drift away from our ethical and moral standards. In relation to our results, we ask ourselves if we are witnessing an ethical drift from the ambition to see children as respected, active participants in research, to a checklist showing adherence to regulations.

Our interest in this study has not been to check if regulations are followed. We take them for granted, but there is a risk that the competence within the area will not be discussed openly and instead become a matter only for ethical committees and individual researchers. Instead, we are interested in further studying how ethical considerations are dealt with in journals which report results on children's lives and learning. Also, we are interested in learning more about how to best deal with children as participants in research. It is of great concern how child research benefits children, their spaces and places, and it is of utmost importance that researchers consider how children can decide on, or at least give assent to, their own participation in research projects. Using one's "ethical radar" in these situations is definitely a consideration of democracy and influence with regard to the children we meet as participants in our studies. Similarly, it is a consideration of democracy and influence to be sensitive to the children we meet as participants in our studies, to show them that their voices and their opinions matters. Unfortunately, our results contribute knowledge of another kind and of lacking ethical considerations and mismatches between intentions in journal guidelines and ethics presented in the articles, as well as they contribute challenges to democracy in ECE. Fortunately, we have the opportunity to point at the possibilities for journal editors to challenge the challenges and to avoid further ethical drift by more explicitly asking for ethical considerations in published articles.

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Chapter 4
Talent Development in Preschool Curriculum and Policies: Implicit Recognition of Young Gifted Children

Valerie Margrain and Johanna Lundqvist

Abstract In this study, we provide analyses of a convention, a declaration and preschool curriculum texts (from Australia, Estonia, New Zealand, Norway and Sweden) relating to talent development, giftedness and gifted children's rights. The analyses indicate a commitment towards children's rights and needs, empowering children's agency and fostering the learning and development of all children as well as some but few explicit mentions (mentioned one, two, three or four times) of talent development, giftedness and rights of gifted children. Further, there is an absence of explicit attention (five or more mentions) of giftedness or talent development. This largely implicit attention in international and national macro policies may be applied with good intentions. However, when being considered in relation to lived experience reported about in media and research studies, gifted children do not always seem to be recognised within the aspirations of children/*all* children having the democratic right to learn and be supported towards their individual capability. Thus, implicit attention or few mentions in macro policies do not seem sufficient; the risk is that gifted children are unseen.

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, we present the result from a study about talent development, giftedness and young gifted children's right in an international convention, a declaration and national preschool curriculum texts. There are several rationales for conducting such a study: There is limited knowledge about the recognition of talent development, giftedness and gifted children in macro policy documents. Review of

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curriculum and other formal documents is important. Curriculum and other formal documents are related to Dimension B of Hägglund, Löfdahl Hultman, and Thelander's (2017) model of democracy in ECE. There are narratives of gifted children and families showing that preschools do not always provide gifted children with rich opportunities for learning. For example, when Vile, an 8-year-old gifted child, and his mother were interviewed on Swedish television (Nyhetsmorgon TV4, 2016) about Vile's gifts and preschool experiences, they said something like this: "We usually say that he has a quick brain. |…| Preschool was problematic. |…| He wanted to help the teachers [instead of playing with peers]. |…| He was not allowed to do what he wanted [in preschool]. |…| He became aggressive [in preschool]" (mother of Vile). "It [preschool] wasn't enjoyable. I did not know what else to do [than mess with peer]" (Vile). Vile's and his mother's reflections highlight issues of democracy because, for gifted children, preschools are not always places in which they feel happy, engaged in learning or respected. Yet another rationale for this study can be found in research: Research on experiences of intellectually gifted students in the context of Sweden (Persson, 2010), and in many other countries, has shown that students do not always thrive during their education. Less research is available on the context of early childhood.

4.1.1 Central Concepts of the Study

The concept of *democracy* utilised in this chapter, and more widely in this book, relates to values, practices and processes. Core values include equity, children's rights, participation and influence. The model of democracy in ECE by Hägglund et al. (2017) includes four dimensions, one of which (Dimension B) refers to curriculum and other formal documents.

In this study, we recognise that *curriculum* is both a specific national document and a lived experience. The former New Zealand preschool curriculum document defined curriculum as "the sum total of the experiences, activities, and events, whether direct or indirect, which occur within an environment designed to foster learning and development" (Ministry of Education, 1996, p. 99). Thus, we use the term "curriculum documents/texts" even when a document self-titles itself as a framework.

We have chosen to primarily use the term *preschool* as this is a term used in many international publications and national curriculum documents, but we acknowledge that in some countries, more acceptable terms include early childhood education and care, kindergarten or early years education. We are also aware that school start age varies, from age 4 to age 7, and that there are differences of formality across settings and countries; some 3- or 4-year-olds might be in preschool but have formal didactic teaching, whereas some 6-year-olds might be at school but have play-based learning opportunities. The term *gifted* relates to children with advanced developmental capability demonstrated by an exceptional ability or exceptional performances in one or several areas. Numerous definitions of *giftedness* exist, highlighting

diverse concepts of intelligence, creativity, capacity, processing, performance and outstandingly high mental ability (Freeman, 2010; Porter, 2005). Definitions can be narrow and quantitative in nature, such as 5% of the students (Stålnacke, 2015) and the top 10% in each aspect of a wide range of human capabilities (Gagné, 2015), or broad: Some people have such a broad view of competence that they state that every child is a gifted child (as cited Margrain and Farquhar in their 2012 survey of New Zealand ECE professionals). Any definition is influenced by culture, context and individual circumstances and mediated by the purpose for which identification occurs (Harrison, 1995). Gifted children exist in every location and every socio-economic community. While all children have the right to provisions that support their learning, social and emotional support, for gifted children this learning and support usually needs to be different. A useful definition for the preschool sector, provided by Harrison (1995), draws together performance, potential and the need for differentiated support:

> A gifted child is one who performs or who has the ability to perform at a level significantly beyond his or her chronologically aged peers and whose unique abilities and characteristics require special provisions and social and emotional support from the family, community and educational context. (p. 19)

Gagnè (2015) differentiated between gifted and talented in his model of talent development, noting that although giftedness has genetic and hereditary influence, teachers play an important role in supporting future talent development (for both gifted and non-gifted children). The realisation of talent is influenced by environment (e.g. family and preschool), intrapersonal factors (such as motivation and personal interests) and chance (e.g. being in a particular community with certain resources or exposed to an inspiring event). Because we are concentrating on preschool children in this study, talent will not yet have been fully developed or realised; therefore we use the term gifted to refer to the children and the term *talent development* to refer to the work of teachers in supporting gifted children to develop their potential and future capability.

While each gifted child is unique, with their own constellation of characteristics, some of the typical indicators of giftedness in the preschool years are of children who are usually self-motivated with a voracious appetite for learning, have particular interests, are good communicators and problem-solvers, are insightful and good at remembering and reasoning, are curious and creative, pick up on humour well, are intense and sensitive and need little sleep (Margrain, Murphy, & Dean, 2015; Silverman, 2016). Margrain's (2005) research documented a wide range of gifted children's abilities, including precocious fluent reading and comprehension, skill with computers, music, content knowledge and problem-solving abilities. For example, 4-year-old Alistair engaged in self-reflection as he described that he had his own laboratory in his head, he said: "not everybody has a laboratory" (p. 1). He went on to draw the laboratory, including "the place where creative things happen" (p. 1). In Axelsson, Lundqvist, and Sandström's (2017) research about children in preschool and preschool class, a mother to a gifted young child called Benjamin was interviewed. In her description of Benjamin, she used expressions such as

learns easily, is on a high intellectual level, is good at remembering, learned to read by himself, read very early, has fine and gross motor difficulties and is sensitive. In the interview, she shared that Benjamin's preschool teachers did not seem to understand his characteristics and need of intellectual stimulation. According to her, the preschool teachers provided Benjamin with opportunities to improve his social, fine and gross motor skills, but not his academic strengths and interests. This example of challenging authentic experience indicates that democratic intent of curriculum is not always realised for gifted children.

Gifted children do not always achieve highly, despite a common assumption that they have advantage. They may have associated learning difficulties alongside their giftedness leading to difficulties in learning and one or other conditions being unrecognised (Brody & Mills, 1997; Porter, 2005). Gifted children frequently have heightened sensitivities (Jackson, Moyle, & Piechowski, 2009), such as being distressed by world problems and frustration at injustice in their own learning contexts. Gifted children often need more and/or other support and stimulation than their peers in order to thrive and develop according to their potential in educational setting. They usually experience boredom and frustration at the pace of curriculum content and may "dumb down" to the level of their age peers or to meet teacher expectations. Margrain (2005) observed 4-year-old David, with a 10-year reading ability, pretending that reading an emergent one-line-per-page book was difficult because he was in a group with peers and the teacher said that the book would be hard for them. This example suggests that social pressure and normalisation negatively impact on democracy in educational practice.

When adults do not recognise the needs of children, gifted or not, the children can miss out on opportunities for learning and develop stress symptoms and other unwanted behaviours. Rydelius (2006) reported a range of negative outcomes for children whose needs are not provided for, including overactivity and aggressiveness amongst boys or withdrawal amongst girls. Both boys and girls also risk developing sleep disorders and food problems and increased rebellion. In Sweden, unstimulated children or children given too high demands have been estimated to be overrepresented in child and adolescent psychiatry (Rydelius, 2006). These negative outcomes are compounded with loneliness when there are no like-minded peers and when members of society actively reject or disparage gifted children and families.

4.1.2 Preschool Contexts and Curriculum Information

In this section, we present contextual information about preschools and preschool curriculum in Australia, Estonia, New Zealand, Norway and Sweden as background to the analyses. We recognise that access to ECE can be influenced by socioeconomic, geographic, ethnicity, disability and other factors and that quality of provision is variable. However, the purpose of this section is to inform readers of specific information relevant to the document text review such as curriculum documentation, the age of children in ECE and participation figures.

In Australia 76% of 4-year-old children attend some preschool, though often part time and typically in a privately owned service. The document guiding curriculum decision-making in Australian preschools is *Belonging, being and becoming: The early years learning framework for Australia* (Australian Government Department of Education, 2009). Quality ECE is a focus of attention from the Australian Children's Education & Care Quality Authority [ACECQA]. Most children in Australia start school age 5 years old, though the requirement is by the age of 6 years.

In Estonia, children aged between 1.5 and 7 years old can attend preschool services (Minister of Education and Research, 2018). The proportion of children who attended preschool between the ages of 4 and start of school (7 years) was 91.4% (European Commission, 2016). Preschools in Estonia aim to support children's individuality and creativity to support learning through play and to "value humane and democratic relations" (Government of the Republic, 2008, § 4). The document reviewed for this study is termed both curriculum and regulation: *National Curriculum for Pre-school Child Care Institutions*: *Regulation of the Government of the Republic* (2008).

New Zealand children do not need to start school until their sixth birthday, but there is a cultural tradition of children starting school on the day of their fifth birthday, involving an individualised start date for all children. 96.7% of new-entrants attended ECE in the 6 months prior to starting school, though this is most often part time (Education Counts, 2017). Underpinning the New Zealand early childhood curriculum, *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 2017), is "the vision that children are competent and confident learners and communicators, healthy in mind, body and spirit, secure in their sense of belonging and in the knowledge that they make a valued contribution to society" (p. 6). Values and traditions of New Zealand's bicultural and multicultural heritage have influenced the development of curriculum and democratic ideals. For example, the early childhood curriculum draws on indigenous Māori values and perspectives and acknowledges Pacific traditions.

In Norway, preschool education is termed Kindergarten (Barnehager). Kindergarten is a right for every child between 1 and 5 years old but is not compulsory (Engel, Barnett, Anders, & Taguma, 2015; Holte Haug & Storø, 2013). Ninety percent (90%) of children between the ages of 1 and 5 attended kindergarten in 2013, including 97.5% of 5-year-olds (Engel et al., 2015). In the year the children turn 6 in Norway, they start compulsory school. The English language translation of the Norwegian kindergarten curriculum document reviewed in our study uses the term "framework plan" (Ministry of Education and Research, 2006) and is retained in the recently updated version (NDET, 2017.

In Sweden, children may attend a preschool and a preschool class before they start compulsory first grade in the autumn the year they turn 7 (Educational Act, 2010:800). From the autumn of 2018, the preschool class is compulsory. Approximately 77% of all 1 to 3 years old and 95% of all 4 and 5 years old attend preschool, and 98% of all 6-year-old children go to preschool class (Swedish National Agency for Education [SNAE], 2017). In preschool, children should be provided with opportunities for playing and for learning knowledge, skills and

democratic values such as "inviolability of human life, individual freedom and integrity, the equal value of all people, equality between the genders, as well as solidarity with the weak and vulnerable" (SNAE, 2011, p. 3). The English title for the Swedish preschool curriculum (*Läroplan för förskolan Lpfö 98,* in Swedish), provided by SNAE, is *Curriculum for the preschool Lpfö 1998.*

4.1.3 A Bioecological Frame and Macro Policy Influences

The bioecological model for human development (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006) is a theory about intellectual, social, emotional and moral development. It is a widely used theory for understanding influences on human development and is used as a theoretical and conceptual frame in this study. The theory describes that human development is influenced by the *biosystem* (e.g. a child's abilities), the *microsystem* (e.g. a preschool), the *mesosystem* (e.g. family-professional partnerships), the *exosystem* (e.g. resources), the *macrosystem* (e.g. the content of laws) and the *chronosystem* (e.g. the time). These systems apply to all children, but the theory is useful to help reflect on talent development, gifted inclusive education and rights of gifted children. In this study, giftedness, with genetic and hereditary influence, relates to the biosystem, preschools to the microsystem and convention, declaration and national preschool curriculum documents (policies) to the macrosystem. The content of macrosystem policies reflects national and international beliefs about power relationships, respect, democratic rights of children and the role of the preschool in engaging with democracy (Sumison & Wong, 2011).

4.2 Selection and Analysis of Macro Policies

The aim of this study is to consider commitment to gifted children and talent development in macro policies, with a particular focus on curriculum as macro policy in early childhood curriculum. Our research question is as follows: What do preschool curriculum texts and related policies say about gifted children and talent development? Behind this question is a larger one beyond the scope of this study: Does the lived experience of gifted children and their families reflect the rights and discourses articulated within preschool curriculum?

The macro policy documents selected for this study were the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* (United Nations, 1989), the *Salamanca Declaration and Framework* (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation [UNESCO], 1994) and the national preschool curriculum texts from five countries. The two first mentioned were chosen because they are relevant for the education of young children, international and well-known. The five national preschool curriculum texts (Australian Government Department of Education, 2009; Government of the Republic, 2008; Ministry of Education, 2017; Ministry of

Education and Research, 2006; SNAE, 2011) were chosen since they represent the authors' homelands and examples from their neighbouring countries and were available in English. All five countries are signatories to international conventions and in doing to make a commitment to the democratic principles espoused in these documents.

Content analysis (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008) and text analysis (Frey, Botan, & Kreps, 1999) inspired the analyses of macro policies and their recognition of talent development and gifted children. First, the macro policy documents in terms of the extent to which they pay attention to gifted children and talent development were analysed via content analysis. Figure 4.1 presents descriptions of our categories of attention

Levels of attention	**Descriptions of the levels of attention**	**Macro policies**
Implicit attention	The term gifted or talent are not being used, but there are rights expressed related to children/all children. The notion of children/all children does not exclude gifted children.	• The Australian *Early Years Learning Framework* • The Norwegian national preschool curriculum • The Swedish national preschool curriculum
Some but few explicit mentions	There are one, two, three or four mentions included that can be directly related to talent development and/or gifted children.	• The Estonia national preschool curriculum • The New Zealand early childhood curriculum, *Te Whāriki* • The *Salamanca Declaration and Framework* • The *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*
Explicit attention	The term gifted and/or talent are employed ample times: There are five or more explicit rights included that can be directly related to talent development and/or gifted children.	

Fig. 4.1 Levels of attention to talent development and gifted children (giftedness) in macro policies and descriptions of these levels

to gifted children and talent development across three levels: implicit attention, some (but few) explicit mentions and explicit attention. These categories emerged during readings of macro policies selected. The word search function tool (i.e. Find) was used in the content analysis as well as search techniques from Margrain (2017); the text terms gift∗ and talent related to talent development and giftedness were taken on. Second, the national preschool curriculum texts were analysed via text analysis. Text analysis aligns to social constructivist epistemology (Burr, 2015; Crotty, 1998), an interpretive paradigm and aims to describe the content, structure and functions of messages contained in one or several texts (Frey et al., 1999). In textual analysis, more than words on a page are examined; meanings and relevance of words in terms of socio-cultural-political issues of power and negotiation are also examined (Gee, 1990).

The specific method applied to this text analysis was informed by a previous text analysis conducted by Margrain (2017). The 2017 text analysis scrutinised *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 2017), the revised early childhood curriculum in New Zealand, for examples of explicit and implicit text connecting to giftedness and talent development. Because of that work, a list of key text terms had already been constructed and used. In this study, this list of words was applied to preschool curriculum text analysis documents from a purposive selection of four other countries: Australia, Estonia, Norway and Sweden. While reviewing the four additional country documents, notes were taken of additional text terms, and these were added to the sample/list, and New Zealand data added, for example, the term formation (form∗), which was strongly used in the Norwegian preschool curriculum in a developmental context. The text terms used in this study were the following: gift, talent, compet(ant)∗, abilit∗, capab∗, strength∗, capacit∗, succe∗ develop∗, learn, expect∗, right/s, respect, stimulat∗, equal, equity, challeng∗ and competiti∗. Throughout the process of completing the text analysis, frequency count and decision-making needed to occur regarding inclusion criteria:

1. Reference sections, sections with a primary school focus, and contents lists were excluded from analysis. The specific pages analysed are noted under Table 4.1.
2. Root text was used for clusters of words with a similar core meaning, for example, the text terms capable, capability and capabilities are all connected in Table 4.1 with the Boolen term capab∗. The use of root word was not sufficient, and the meaning behind each use of text was needed. For example, there was a difference between children's "right to support" and the request that children return things to "the right place". The root text "-able" led to being able or capable (included in the analysis) or to the words table or sustainable (excluded from the analysis).
3. Who the text applied to was important, for example, children's learning or teacher learning. In the result section, lines 3–11 in Table 4.1 has a specific focus on children, describing them or their engagement, and the following eight lines (lines 12–19) counted all relevant examples of rights and opportunities, for example, a child shall be stimulated and a teacher provide stimulation. The text analysis did not involve human participants, only public documents.

Table 4.1 Text term and frequency count of preschool curriculum text with reference to talent development and gifted children and to rights and opportunities, by country

Text term	Frequency count, by country				
	Aus	Est	NZ	Nor	Swe
Gift	0	0	2	0	0
Talent	0	1	2	0	0
Compet(ant)∗	12	0	13	17	0
Abilit∗	14	14	48	23	35
Capab∗	9	0	18	1	0
Strength∗	10	2	18	2	0
Capacit∗	12	1	11	0	1
Succe∗	20	4	4	0	0
Develop∗	58	61	142	102	103
Learn	370	21	296	125	56
Form∗	1	4	4	44	4
Expect∗	13	9	28	4	2
Right/s	19	0	18	34	5
Respect	48	1	46	36	14
Stimulat∗	2	1	6	7	17
Equal	3	0	3	28	6
Equity	9	0	12	0	0
Challeng∗	23	0	21	28	9
Competiti∗	0	2	1	0	0

Australia (Aus), *Belonging, being and becoming: The early years learning framework for Australia* (Australian Government Department of Education, 2009, pp. 5–44). Estonia (Est), *National Curriculum for Pre-school Child Care Institutions: Regulation of the Government of the Republic* (Government of the Republic, 2008, pp. 2–32). New Zealand (NZ), *Te Whāriki*, Early *childhood curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 2017, pp. 5–50, 60–65). Norway (Nor), *Framework plan for the content and tasks of kindergartens* (Ministry of Education and Research, 2006, pp. 4–51). Sweden (Swe), Curriculum for the preschool Lpfö 1998 (SNAE, 2011, pp. 5–18). Part of the New Zealand result has been obtained from Margrain (2017)

Ethical guidelines provided by the Swedish Research Council (2017) and the *Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research* (NHMRC, 2017) were carefully followed in the study. We maintain respect towards policymakers as we investigate both what is being stated explicit and implicit in their policies. The text analysis addresses the ethical issue of beneficence, by advocating for gifted children to be more visible in curriculum documents and their right to a meaningful learning experience addressed through lived curriculum which meets their individual needs and capabilities. In the case study, children from our previous research have their names replaced with pseudonyms; ethical procedures for those studies have been reported in the original research.

4.3 Results

In this section we report on our analyses of attention to giftedness and talent development in the macro policies selected for this study. Our report considers three levels of attention: implicit attention, some but few explicit mentions and explicit attention.

The level of attention to talent development and giftedness varied in the macro policies investigated (Fig. 4.1; Table 4.1). The *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (United Nations, 1989) has few explicit mentions related to talent development though without explicit mention of the terms gifted children or giftedness. In the convention, it is stated that States Parties "agree that the education of the child shall be directed to: (a) The development of the child's personality, *talents* and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential" (Article 29, our italic). Conversely, the *Salamanca Declaration and Framework* (UNESCO, 1994) has few explicit mentions related to gifted children (giftedness), though without explicit mention of talents or talent development:

> The guiding principle that informs this **Framework** is that schools should accommodate **all children** regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic or other conditions. This should include disabled and *gifted children*, street and working children, children from remote or nomadic populations, children from linguistic, ethnic or cultural minorities and children from other disadvantaged or marginalized areas or groups. These conditions create a range of different challenges to school systems. (UNESCO, 1994, p. 6, bold in original, our italics added)

Both the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* and the *Salamanca Declaration and Framework* encompass rights and proclamations related to children/all children that do not exclude gifted children. For example, the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* states that States Parties "shall ensure to the maximum extent possible the survival and development of the child" (Article 6). The Salamanca Declaration and Framework proclaim that "every child has unique characteristics, interests, abilities and learning needs" and that "education systems should be designed and educational programmes implemented to take into account the wide diversity of these characteristics and needs" (p. viii).

There are two explicit instances of the text terms gift and two of the term talent in the New Zealand preschool curriculum, the *Te Whāriki* (Fig. 4.1; Table 4.1), for example: "[I] bring with me the gifts, talents and strengths of my family, tribe and ancestor" (Ministry of Education, 2017, p. 15). Few explicit mentions were also found in the Estonia Curriculum (Table 4.1): "Fostering the development of a child with special needs, including a talented child, in a nursery school is a teamwork for which the head of the child care institution shall be responsible" (2008, §8.3).

The Swedish national curriculum for the preschool (SNAE, 2011) pays implicit attention to talent development and gifted children (Fig. 4.1; Table 4.1). It does not explicitly mention rights of gifted children or talent development but states that children/all children should enjoy and learn new knowledge and skills in preschool. In Sweden, the preschool should be "enjoyable, secure, and rich in learning for all

children" (SNAE, 2011, p. 4), preschool teachers and other staff members should work "in co-operation with parents so that each child receives the opportunity of developing in accordance with their potential" (p. 4), and "activities should be carried out so that they stimulate and challenge the child's learning and development" (p. 9). Children's right to a talent development in Sweden can be seen in the following statement:

> Pedagogical activities should be related to the needs of all children in the preschool. Children who occasionally or on a more permanent basis need more support and stimulation than others should receive such support in relation to their needs and circumstances so that they are able to develop as well as possible. (SNAE, 2011, p. 5)

An implicit attention to talent education and giftedness was also identified in the preschool curriculum documents from Australia and Norway (Fig. 4.1; Table 4.1).

Due to the few explicit mentions and the use of expressions such as children/all children, the *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, the *Salamanca Declaration and Framework*, the preschool curriculum from Estonia and the New Zealand national preschool curriculum can be described as largely implicit with some but few explicit mentions about talent development and giftedness.

Our results also show an absence of explicit attention to giftedness and talent development, as defined by our criteria of five or more explicit rights included that can be directly related to talent development and/or gifted children in any of the convention, declaration and curriculum texts which we reviewed. Figure 4.1 shows this outcome.

The use of alternative terms with reference to giftedness and/or talent development in the macro policies investigated (e.g. competence, abilities, capabilities, strengths, capacities, success, development, learning and formation) varies, but there are similarities (Table 4.1, lines 3–11). The predominant alternative terms used in the curriculums are develop∗, learn and abilities. Variations and similarities are also the case for the terms with reference to children's/all children's rights and/or opportunities in the macro policies investigated (Table 4.1, lines 12–19; e.g. positive expectations for all children, rights of all children to contribute and be heard, respect towards children, stimulating experiences in preschool, being considered an equal in preschool, application of equity to support disadvantage, positive challenges in preschool and constructive competition). The predominant word used in the curriculums investigated is respect, such as the children's/all children's right to respect.

4.4 Discussion and Conclusion

The aim of this study was to consider commitment to gifted children and talent development in macro policies. The *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (United Nations, 1989), the *Salamanca Declaration and Framework* (UNESCO, 1994) and

the five national preschool curriculum documents, from Australia, Estonia, New Zealand, Norway and Sweden, were considered in this analysis.

The results indicate a commitment towards children's rights and needs, meeting children's rights and needs, empowering children's agency and fostering the learning and development of all children as well as some but few explicit mentions of talent development and gifted children (giftedness). The results also indicate an absence of explicit reference to giftedness and talent development.

There are several circumstances that can explain the application of a largely implicit attention and an aspirational and responsibility discourse. If a macro policy is implicit, it does not mean that it has been written that way with bad or undemocratic intentions. The general terms of "children" or "all children" could have been deliberately chosen to include all and forget no one. It may also be to promote inclusion and hold back unnecessary exclusion: Through an implicit attention and an aspirational and responsibility discourse, gifted education does not become something else or extra and is instead something included and embedded in preschool practice. Some other explanations for few mentions/absences of explicit attention can be limited knowledge about talent development and giftedness, certain attitudes and the fact that policymakers can choose to focus on the needs and rights of children who are typically developing or intellectually weak and not the gifted. In Sweden, it is not always seen as positive to state that someone is smarter or more gifted than others in academic domains; this is an egalitarian social attitude. In New Zealand although there is a body of research on gifted education, there has also been a negative attitude towards precocious individuals termed "the tall poppy syndrome", in which it is typical to "cut one down to the level of others".

From our perspective, children are at risk through the lack of visibility or few explicit mentions of talent development, giftedness and rights of gifted children within macro policies. The risk for gifted children of being unseen is that being invisible equates to not having worth and thus lacking the democratic recognition, understanding, support and intellectual stimulation they need. This was the case for the examples of Benjamin, Vile and David in preschool, presented earlier in this chapter. It is the democratic right of all children to be respected for who they are in preschool, to enjoy learning new knowledge and skills and to be able to develop their capabilities. The contents of macro policies play a role for human development (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006) and thus talent development. Curriculum discourse matters.

The results, and the fact that the policies investigated in this study were having implicit and/or few mentions related to talent development and giftedness, indicate connections and similarities between international and national macro policies. National curriculum intents and texts encompassing terms such as respect and rights of children/all children seem to reflect as well as honour contents of both the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* and the *Salamanca Declaration and Framework* that can be more or less directly related to talent development and giftedness.

This study reinforces the value of searching for meaning within texts, alongside documenting numerical evidence. In this chapter we have shared critical findings: frequencies and analysis of explicit text terms used (e.g. gift∗ and talent), analysis

of alternative texts terms such as respect and certain considerations such as the fact that references to children/all children should not exclude gifted children.

This study has international and national relevance for policymakers, teacher educators, teachers and leaders in preschools and schools and parents. One implication to policymakers, who choose a largely implicit attention towards talent development and giftedness, is to clarify within macro policies that terms such as "children" or "all children" should include children who are gifted. For example, national curriculum texts can encompass specific connections to international policies such as the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* and the *Salamanca Declaration and Framework* (UNESCO, 1994) that mention talent development and giftedness and can explicitly clarify that the term children includes children who are gifted. This convention and declaration illustrate to policymakers how talent development and gifted children can be mentioned within a macro policy document to support democratic intent. An implication to teacher educators is to explicitly provide learning opportunities about talent development and giftedness. We advocate that without professional learning to support teachers with understanding characteristics of giftedness and principles of differentiation, teachers may not be aware of gifted education issues, recognise gifted children, know how to provide appropriate support in preschools or conceptualise attention to this area as connected to democracy. Many teachers still state that they do not believe giftedness exists in preschool, or at all, or say that they lack confidence in working with gifted children (Margrain & Farquhar, 2012). Yet definitions such as 5–15% of the population mean that all teachers must be encountering gifted children. Conversely, all gifted children are encountering adults who are failing to recognise and understand them. This reality contradicts the democratic aspiration of responsive preschool education articulated in curricula and other macro policies. Thus, we conclude with the recommendation for practitioners and leaders working directly in preschool contexts that responsiveness to giftedness is a democratic endeavour. This is operationalized through being alert to the existence of gifted children and considering talent development in the planning of educational activities, routines and children's play. Gifted children may have associated learning difficulties or unique emotional needs also requiring extra support. This extra support contributes to the curriculum aspiration that all children have the right to receive high-quality and meaningful preschool experience and gifted children need to be explicitly recognised within the discourse of "all".

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Chapter 5
Parental Decision-Making About School Start Age in Australia: Democratic for Whom?

Kirsten MacKinnon

Abstract Variance in school starting age policies across Australia offers *some* parents flexibility of choice. As a result, an increasing number of children in Australia with birthdays between January and July now commence school a year after the child is first eligible, a practice known as *academic redshirting* (Edwards et al., Aust Rev Public Aff 10:41–60, 2011) or delayed school entry. The purpose of the study was to explore the lived experience of parents who were in the process of deciding whether to academically redshirt their child to determine main influences on decision-making. The study adopted a qualitative approach, using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). Data was collected through semi-structured interviews with ten parents who were making decisions as to whether their preschool child should start school in the following year. Analysis of results revealed many parents reporting feelings of stress and anxiety, especially if making the decision for the first time. Decision-making was influenced by four superordinate themes: characteristics of individual children, readiness, own experience and advantage. Parents' plans for the year before school were also examined because this has been shown to affect *human capital accumulation*, or skill attainment, which can impact on overall achievement at school and beyond (Elder and Lubotsky, J Hum Resour 44:641–683, 2009). Significant disparity of early childhood education and care (ECEC) quality exists, alongside limited understanding from parents of how ECEC services are rated. Whilst many parents reported perceived advantages with delayed school starting age, their decision was influenced by high childcare costs and disparity of family socioeconomic circumstance. These inequities mean that the notion of choice is not democratically just for all and the decision not determined by children's readiness.

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5.1 Introduction

> The rollercoaster ride of anxiety. Going up and down. Should I? Shouldn't I? You know? I don't want to disadvantage him. (Kaitlyn, Mother)

The academic school year in Australia typically begins in late January each calendar year. Transition to school is a significant milestone in a child's life (Dockett & Perry, 2013; Edwards, Baxter, Smart, Sanson, & Hayes, 2009), yet it can also be a stressful time for parents. Some Australian children currently start school from as young as 4.5 years (Early Childhood Intervention Australia [ECIA, NSW Chapter], 2017). However, an increasing number now commence school a year after the child is first eligible, a practice known as *academic redshirting* (Edwards, Taylor, & Fiorini, 2011) or delayed school entry.

Academic redshirting is named after the American notion of redshirting in sport, whereby an athlete is given an extra year on the sideline to develop and mature. The result is that the athlete is more competitive the following year (Graue & DiPerna, 2000). Children who are academically redshirted are more likely to excel academically and in the sporting arena, in comparison to younger peers (Deming & Dynarski, 2008).

To date, there has not been a large amount of research undertaken into academic redshirting in Australia. National statistics suggest that whilst approximately 15% of Australian children are academically redshirted each year, the figure of 31.3% for the state of New South Wales (NSW) in Australia is remarkably higher (Edwards et al., 2011). Both the national and NSW state statistics are high in comparison to international research which approximates that between 4% and 9% of children are academically redshirted across the globe (Bassok & Reardon, 2013; Dhuey, 2016).

This study aimed to explore parental decision-making concerning starting school age to determine why NSW rates of academic redshirting were more than double the national average in Australia. The findings reported in this chapter are part of a larger doctoral study. Analysis was guided by the following research questions: Which factors influence parental decision-making regarding whether a child is academically redshirted? What is the lived experience for parents of decision-making concerning academic redshirting of their children? Why are particular experiences for the academic redshirted year valued?

It was suggested by Peter Moss in the Foreword to this book that democracy begins in early childhood, before a child commences school. Given children are our youngest citizens, it is important to ensure that all children have access to quality ECEC. Offering wide variation in starting school age may be beneficial for some children and to the detriment of others. I argue current policies concerning school starting age in Australia are inequitable as only *some* parents are offered the choice to delay school entry.

5.2 Background Context and Literature

This section includes some background information relating to the following topics: starting school age in NSW, Australian education context and inequity.

5.2.1 Starting School Age

Data from the World Bank (2018) indicate conflicting ideas and opinions globally concerning the age children should commence formal education. Table 5.1 provides examples of variance in primary school starting age for different countries. Bedard and Dhuey (2006) claim most countries have policies which stipulate a single, mandatory cut-off date for school entry. These countries are considered to have *clean* education systems, whereby most children commence schooling on schedule and progress through grades with similar aged peers. For example, England, Iceland, Japan and Norway are examples of countries which have clean education systems.

Table 5.1 Primary school starting age and years of compulsory education by country

Country	Official entrance age	Years of compulsory education
Australia	5	11
Belgium	6	12
Canada	6	10
China	7	9
Denmark	6	10
Finland	7	10
Germany	6	12
Hong Kong	6	9
Hungary	7	8
Indonesia	7	9
Ireland	5	10
Kenya	6	8
Malta	5	11
New Zealand	5	10
Philippines	6	11
Poland	7	12
Russian Federation	7	10
Sweden	7	9
Thailand	6	9
United Kingdom	5	11
United States (most states)	6	12

Data sourced from the World Bank (2018)

Interestingly, these countries show little or no evidence of delaying school entry or *retention* (repeating a year) (Bedard & Dhuey, 2006).

Other education systems around the world offer greater flexibility by providing both a minimum entry age and a mandatory deadline for school entry. Bedard and Dhuey (2006) refer to countries such as Australia, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, the Netherlands, Switzerland and the United States of America (USA) as having *ambiguous* rules concerning school entry because cut-off dates vary across jurisdictions. For example, children in NSW, Australia, can start school in the year they turn 5 (July 31st deadline) or must be enrolled by their sixth birthday (NSW Government, 2018). This results in single school year levels having an age range spanning 18 months.

5.2.2 Australian Context

Australia's schooling system is complex, with each state or territory determining its own governing policies concerning school starting age. Figure 5.1 shows the varying terminology used to define the first formal year of school despite the implementation of *the Australian Curriculum*, which refers to the 1st year as *foundation* (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority [ACARA], 2013). These alternative terms for the foundation year are kindergarten, preparatory, reception, pre-primary and transition. There is also variance in minimum age cut-off dates. NSW has the latest minimum age cut-off when compared to other states and territories (see Fig. 5.1). This may explain why academic redshirting rates are higher in NSW.

It is proposed that variance in school starting age policies across Australia results in some parents having choice through provision of both a minimum entry age and a mandatory deadline for school entry. It can also be argued that such policies increase inequity because only *some* parents have choice, namely, parents of children born between the months of January and July. Parents of children born outside of these months generally have no choice but to send their child to school at the

State	Year Before Year 1 (Local Terminology)	Minimum Age Cut Off	Mandatory Age
New South Wales	Kindergarten	5 by 31st July	6
Australian Capital Territory	Kindergarten	5 by 30th April	6
Queensland	Preparatory*	5 by 30th June	6
Victoria	Preparatory	5 by 30th April	6
Tasmania	Preparatory	5 by 1st January	5
South Australia	Reception	5 by 1st May	6
Western Australia	Pre-Primary	5 by 30th June	6.5
Northern Territory	Transition*	5 by 30th June	6

*Not compulsory

Fig. 5.1 Variance in primary school starting age and local terminology across Australia

earliest opportunity. For example, a child who turns five in October in NSW must commence schooling the following year, but a child with a July birthday could start either 6 months before or 6 months after turning 5. The exception would be requests for special consideration to delay entry for a child with a development delay.

5.2.3 Inequity

Academic redshirting or delaying school entry has been found to be more prevalent in higher socioeconomic status (SES) families (Bassok & Reardon, 2013). This leads to inequity, as some children from lower SES families are forced to start school younger than their more affluent counterparts because school incurs lower cost than ECEC services. This has the potential to widen the gap between rich and poor for children who commence schooling at the earliest opportunity, within classrooms and across different school systems.

Academic redshirting can disadvantage children who commence schooling at the earliest opportunity (Bassok & Reardon, 2013; Deming & Dynarski, 2008). Oshima and Domaleski (2006) found that children who are more than 12 months older than their peers may affect the social and academic achievement of younger children. Elder and Lubotsky (2009) linked achievement on test scores and entrance age; children from high SES backgrounds had the highest scores, and this was linked to *human capital accumulation* or skill attainment prior to entering school. These children had often attended higher-quality ECEC services (Edwards et al., 2009). Younger children, on the other hand, were more likely to repeat a grade or be referred to special education services (Dhuey & Lipscomb, 2010; Mendez, Kim, Ferron, & Woods, 2014).

Within classrooms, there is concern that academic redshirting changes the composition of the foundation year cohort by increasing the expectations for all children (Bassok & Reardon, 2013; Deming & Dynarski, 2008). Academic redshirting has resulted in more 6-year-old children in the foundation year, bringing with them additional skills and knowledge gained from being a year older than the traditional starting age (Bassok, Latham, & Rorem, 2016). Younger children may struggle to keep up with their older, more experienced peers. This potentially places younger children at an extreme disadvantage, as the curriculum may no longer be developmentally appropriate for children who start at the earliest opportunity of 4.5–5 years of age (Jaekel, Strauss, Johnson, Gilmore, & Wolke, 2015; Norbury et al., 2016). Human capital accumulation for all children in the class may also be impacted as teachers are required to alter the curriculum or resources to meet the needs of younger children (Bassok et al., 2016; Bedard & Dhuey, 2012).

Inequity is also prevalent across different school systems. Independent schools in Australia, which are often private and fee-paying, have some potential to influence starting school age because they stipulate their own school entry cut-off dates (Dockett & Perry, 2006). For example, one independent school for boys located in Sydney, NSW, introduced a policy for their 2019 foundation year cohort, requiring

all boys to have turned 5 years of age by January 31st (Baker, 2018). This cut-off date is 6 months earlier than the NSW minimum age cut-off of July 31st. Earlier cut-off dates result in younger children being forced to delay school entry or face being retained prior to entry to independent schools.

5.3 Current Study

This section includes a discussion of methodology, participant selection, method, analysis and results.

5.3.1 Methodology

A qualitative approach using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was the chosen methodology for this research. IPA involves exploring lived experiences of a phenomenon, with an emphasis on how individuals make sense of such experiences (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). The chosen phenomenon was *parental decision-making* regarding whether to academically redshirt their child. IPA is a more recently developed phenomenological approach (Smith, 2016) which draws upon three major theoretical underpinnings: phenomenology, hermeneutics and idiography.

Smith et al. (2009) argued IPA is phenomenological because it involves participants exploring their experiences on their own terms. IPA is influenced by hermeneutics as demonstrated by its interpretive nature (Smith et al., 2009). The focus was on the meaning of the experience, both the story and the participant's interpretation (Larkin & Thompson, 2012). This was hermeneutic because I wanted to explore beneath the surface of each parent's experience to explore any real or hidden influences (Grant & Giddings, 2002) which may have impacted decision-making. IPA is considered idiographic due to its focus on individual experiences of a phenomenon (Smith et al., 2009). This study focused on particular parents who were in the process of deciding when to send their child to school. The aim was to try to capture the *essence* of the experience for each parent (Starks & Brown Trinidad, 2007).

5.3.2 Participant Selection

Participants were recruited using purposeful selection. Specifically, participants were required to live in NSW; have a child born in the months between January and July; and be in the process of deciding whether their child should start school at the end of January 2018 (on time) or wait until the end of January 2019 (academically

Pseudonym	Ethnicity	Location	Family Structure	Decision	Child's Gender	Birth Month	Starting School	Older Siblings
Sarah	Australian	Sydney	Single Parent	On-Time entry	Boy/Girl twins	February	2018	Yes
Linda	Australian	Sydney	Nuclear	Undecided	Boy	March		No
Cindy	Malaysian	Sydney	Nuclear	On-Time entry	Boy	June	2018	Yes
Yvonne	Australian	Mid North Coast	Nuclear	Delaying Entry	Boy	January	2019	No
Natalya	Russian	Sydney	Single parent	On-Time entry	Girl	July	2018	No
Kaitlyn	British	Sydney	Nuclear	Delaying Entry	Boy	February	2019	No
Hannah	British	Sydney	Nuclear	Delaying Entry	Boy	July	2019	Yes
Ashini	Sri Lankan	Sydney	Nuclear	On-Time entry	Boy	April	2018	No
Brett	Australian	Sydney	Nuclear	Delaying Entry	Girl	July	2019	Yes
Craig	Australian	Sydney	Nuclear	Undecided	Boy	February		Yes

Fig. 5.2 Participant characteristics

redshirted). Permission from site administrators to advertise on online parenting groups for potential participants was obtained following the granting of university Human Research Ethics approval. Figure 5.2 illustrates that a range of family ethnicities were represented. Parents of both boys and girls participated, though more parents of boys volunteered. Prior to participation, parents were provided with information letters describing the study, and they were provided written consent as well as verbal consent for audio recording. The participants also had the chance to ask questions about the research prior to participating and to withdraw their participation (none did so). To avoid any research bias during the selection process, participants who met the criteria were accepted in order from when consent forms were returned. In total, ten participants were involved in the study (see Fig. 5.2). It was hoped that by investigating the phenomenon of parental decision-making from multiple perspectives, a more detailed insight into the decision-making process would be revealed (Reid, Flowers, & Larkin, 2005). In terms of decision-making, the study included:

- Four parents who were favouring academic redshirting or delaying school entry for their child
- Four parents who were favouring on-time entry[1] for their child
- Two parents who were undecided[2]

[1] On-time entry referred to parents who were favouring sending their child to school at the earliest opportunity once eligible to enrol.

[2] Parents who were undecided at time of interview were contacted shortly after the commencement of the 2018 school year. Both parents had since opted to delay school entry for their child until 2019.

To protect the confidentiality of participants, education services and children, pseudonyms have been applied and identifying information deleted.

5.3.3 Method

IPA focuses on exploring participants' lived experiences and understandings of a given phenomenon (Larkin & Thompson, 2012; Smith et al., 2009). Two stages of in-depth, one-on-one semi-structured interviews (Palmer, Larkin, de Visser, & Fadden, 2010) were deemed appropriate for this study, along with focus group discussions. This chapter shares data from the first stage of interviews only. The main objective of each interview was to elicit the participant's personal story regarding decision-making (Starks & Brown Trinidad, 2007). Each interview was between 30 and 70 min duration.

5.3.4 Analysis

Each interview was digitally recorded and then transcribed using *Trint* transcription software. Minor corrections were made, and real names substituted for pseudonyms before each transcript was imported into *NVivo 11* software. Analysis of interview data followed an IPA procedure put forward by Smith et al. (2009) which included reading case data multiple times, use of memo notes on NVivo 11 and theme generation from the data. Tentative nodes (codes) were refined, and then similar nodes were grouped together in order to develop superordinate themes, as shared in the results section of this chapter. After each transcription had been reviewed and superordinate themes created, patterns across cases were explored.

5.4 Results

This section reveals the results of the study specific to this chapter focus on the three research questions listed previously (see Sect. 5.1). It includes influences on decision-making, lived experience and why particular experiences for the academic redshirted year are valued.

5.4.1 Influences on Decision-Making

Analysis of qualitative data revealed four superordinate themes influencing decision-making: characteristics of individual child, readiness, own experience and advantage.

5.4.1.1 Characteristics of Individual Children

The majority of parents in the study expressed concern about specific characteristics of their child including gender, birth month and physical size. Most referred to what they perceived as a growing trend in NSW to delay school entry for boys and a wider concern about boys' readiness for school. Cindy, a mother who was favouring on-time entry for her son, recalled her experience and the reaction of other parents to her intention:

> Everyone was just 'Oh but he's a boy'. You know, 'But he's a boy. It would be alright if he was a girl. But he's a boy.' So, my feelings are kind of like, oh… I'm a bit nervous about sending him because everyone say [sic] 'But he's a boy and he's young.' (Cindy, Mother)

Parents in the study who were less decisive typically had boys born in February or March. With more parents of children born between April and July delaying school entry in NSW, children born between January and March would now be considered "young" in a cohort if sent to school at the earliest opportunity of entitlement, even though this age had earlier been considered "typical". Some parents specifically mentioned earlier cut-off dates for independent schools, in comparison to government schools, which influenced their decision-making. Pondering the choice, Linda recalled:

> That constant thought about if he is the youngest what does that mean? But equally if he is the eldest what does that mean? Which is better? Is there a better? (Linda, Mother)

The concern about physical size supported some parents to consider delaying school starting age. Most parents who were favouring on-time entry mentioned concern about the physical size of their child in comparison to other children who were starting school.

> And you know, he's still small. He's still physically little. That hasn't changed, but to be honest I think he's always going to be little. Some kids are little. (Ashini, Mother)

5.4.1.2 Readiness

When questioned about school readiness, most parents had clear ideas about readiness skills. The majority of parents believed their child's social-emotional development was more important than academic ability. Most felt it was the school's responsibility to teach the child skills such as reading and writing. Parents were more concerned about independence and self-care skills when determining readiness.

Some parents alluded to a development issue or behavioural concern which leads to them favouring delaying school entry:

> I've never felt that he's ready. I know he could start next year but it's been my feeling for a long time that he wasn't ready and that he wouldn't be going in 2018. (Yvonne, Mother)

The amount of advice or feedback to parents concerning their child's readiness for school from ECEC services varied. Most parents valued the ECEC teacher's

opinion and considered them an expert on determining readiness. Advice from ECEC teachers tended to encourage the retention of children, particularly boys, in ECEC for a further year. Some parents recalled receiving advice which they considered to be helpful and felt supported when making the decision, whilst others were disappointed with little or no direction offered.

5.4.1.3 Own Experience

Several parents referred their own schooling experience when making decisions for their children. Those who had positive experiences with their own delayed school entry valued being able to offer their own children a similar opportunity:

> I was actually really happy about being an older student and you know being on July 31st, I was one of the first people to get my license and have a car and have a motorbike license and be able to drive and buy a beer and all that sort of stuff which was good. It's a good thing. It gave me more freedom and independence and opened up lots of other social opportunities as well. (Brett, Father)

Parents who felt their schooling experience had been negative wanted to offer their child a different opportunity. Natalya shared the reasoning behind her desire to send her daughter to school at the earliest opportunity:

> I remember when I was in high school, it was quite painful because I felt like I'm so grown up and I'm still at school. You know? I'm 18 and I want to go and explore the world and (laughs) I'm still really sort of … tired of still being at school when I felt [sic] like an adult already. You know? So, I thought finishing school a year early will [sic] be great. (Natalya, Mother)

5.4.1.4 Advantage

The majority of parents in the study believed there were advantages to delaying school entry. Some spoke of the benefits of being older, bigger and more mature. Others felt confused about the decision and wanted to research what other parents were deciding with similar aged children.

> I felt like the question was, [have] I given him the leg up? Or others could have the leg up. Do you know I mean? And so, I chose to give him the leg up. (Kaitlyn, Mother)

Several parents mentioned that older children were more likely to cope better with the demands of school. Older children were perceived to be more likely to be considered for leadership roles.

> So, I really think she could go this [sic] year and she would be okay. But I just think it's better for her to have that higher level of maturity and confidence and give her a chance to be a leader in the social scene in her little day care so that when she gets to kindergarten [foundation] she could also do that in her class. (Brett, Father)

5.4.2 Lived Experience

The decision concerning when to send their child to school was an extremely difficult one for most parents in this study. It has even been suggested that this is perhaps the hardest decision parents must make (Mergler & Walker, 2017). The metaphor of a roll-ercoaster ride of anxiety to describe Kaitlyn's feelings of indecisiveness and uncertainty (see opening quote) helped to convey the inner turmoil experienced by some parents.

Whilst the majority of parents valued having choice, some parents reported feeling incredibly stressed, anxious or worried about the impending decision. As Kaitlyn revealed:

> So, I think part of the part of the problem is the anxiety on my part of when and what the best decision is. (Kaitlyn, Mother)

Some parents felt unqualified or uninformed to decide, and levels of support or recommendations from ECEC services varied. Several parents expressed concern regarding the enormity of the decision, expressing worry about the long-term impact of the decision made on future milestones for their child such as performance in final examinations at end of schooling; participation in after-school experiences including drinking; age commencing university or work; and obtaining a licence to drive. As one father explained:

> Because it's, you know something that can potentially affect their whole life I think. (Craig, Father)

Half of parents in the study were making this important decision for the first time (see Fig. 5.2). The other half of parents had previous experience from older children to draw upon. Parents who were making the decision for the first time reported higher levels of anxiety and stress when compared to the parents who already had older children in the school system. These parents with older children seemed more confident in decision-making the second time round. This may be due to previous knowledge and familiarity with the school system.

> If I didn't have an older child like Adrian, I'd probably not send Jeremy because he would be my first. And I would listen to all the 'but he's a boy' people and say, 'Okay he's a boy, let's keep him back.' (Cindy, Mother)

Referring to the decision regarding her twins, Sarah reflected:

> I think already having Matthew in the school, they [twins] know the routine, they know the school, they know the teachers, they know the environment. So that was probably a big plus and I think for me as well, I do as well. With Matthew I was terrified about how we would handle it but because I know how it works, I know what they do, that's put me at ease a little bit more. (Sarah, Mother)

Several mothers referred to the use of online parenting groups on *Facebook* as a tool to survey large numbers of parents, to seek advice or reassurance regarding the decision. Hannah spoke of the extra burden she felt was placed on females, in particular, to make the right decision.

> Like every decision you make has to be checked with 20,000 people to make sure that it's the right one. (Hannah, Mother)

Some parents felt pressure from others when making their decision. Several referred to a trend in their geographical area to delay school entry, pressuring them to follow suit.

> I would probably have held him back a year just because everyone would have told me to. So, yeah that's probably the biggest influence. (Cindy, Mother)

One mother, Natalya, mentioned the school she intended to send her daughter to at the earliest opportunity requested three meetings prior to accepting enrolment to try to persuade Natalya to change her mind:

> I didn't expect that there will [sic] be so much push back from the actual school. I'm not sure if it's just our school or if it's a common thing. (Natalya, Mother)

5.4.3 How Are Particular Experiences for the Academic Redshirted Year Valued?

The prospect of having an additional year before school was challenging for some parents. Some parents felt that their child had progressed through each room at their ECEC service, and therefore the only option was to send their child to school the following year, or they believed that their child may be bored. Other parents who were favouring on-time entry felt that their child needed more stimulation than what was currently offered in the ECEC setting. When queried about the National Quality Standard (NQS) rating of the service, most parents were not aware of the rating system, despite all ECEC services that have been assessed and rated being required to display the ratings certificate (ACECQA, 2018a).

Some parents were happy to delay school entry so that their child could continue to enjoy learning through unstructured, informal play experiences. As one father shared:

> You only get a chance to be a kid once. So, it's nice that she gets to, you know, have an extra year of just enjoying herself and playing and having that fun learning rather than structured learning. (Brett, Father)

Most parents who were undecided or favouring delaying entry believed their child would be involved in similar experiences to those currently undertaken, for example, staying at the same ECEC service/s and engaging in similar activities. Some parents explained that their choice of ECEC reflected their working need for childcare with extended hours, rather than the education opportunities that they thought different types of services offered.

5.5 Discussion

It has previously been found that many parents who have choice prefer to send their child to school at the latest opportunity (Edwards et al., 2011). Many parents in this study seemed aware of a trend in NSW for delayed school entry, and several had conducted some research to investigate benefits. Some parents revealed feeling pressured to delay entry because others with children the same age were doing it. These parents felt their child would be at a disadvantage starting "on time" because the children would be a year (or more) younger than other children in the cohort whose parents had chosen a delayed school start. The majority of parents would prefer their child to be the oldest, amplifying the problem as the birth month where parents choose to delay shifts earlier and earlier. The connection between school start decision-making and democracy for children's rights can be connected to the model of democracy in early childhood education by Hägglund, Löfdahl Hultman and Thelander (2017) through historical views (Dimensions A) and contemporary policy (Dimension B).

5.5.1 Hidden Influences

After listening to each story and analysing the experiences shared, I have formed my own interpretation of some of the hidden or real influences on parental decision-making based on the stories shared.

5.5.1.1 Ethnic Background

Previous research into academic redshirting has shown that children who delay school entry are often male, Caucasian and from higher SES families (Bassok & Reardon, 2013; Edwards et al., 2011). The ten parents in this study came from a variety of ethnic backgrounds including Australian, Malaysian, Russian, Sri Lankan and British. Upon analysis of data, it became apparent that the ethnic background of these particular participants greatly influences start school age decisions. Families from immigrant backgrounds tended to send their children to school at the earliest opportunity. Differing historic influences and contemporary values concerning education need to be explored further. A possible explanation is parents from immigrant backgrounds value academic education and therefore send their child to school at the earliest opportunity. A tutor may later be engaged to help the child if they struggle academically.

5.5.1.2 Socioeconomic Influences

Some families may have limited choice when deciding between ECEC options. This could be due to a number of factors including parents' employment situation, location of service, availability of places and cost. Approximately 15 h per week at an

ECEC service is considered sufficient for the majority of children (O'Connell, Fox, Hinz, & Cole, 2016). Traditional preschools, which generally operate on a part-time basis and close during school holidays, may not be accessible to working parents. Long day-care centres generally operate for longer hours than traditional preschools, however, may be more expensive.

Whilst few parents believed it was an influencing factor, both single-parent families involved in the study favoured on-time entry. Others who favoured on-time entry spoke of the changes to Australian Child Care Subsidy which would make ECEC more expensive for some families from July 2018. The average cost of childcare in Australia is approximately $90 (equivalent to 57 Euro) per day (Goodstart Early Learning, 2017). The means-tested *Child Care Subsidy* provides increased financial support to low and middle SES families (Australian Government Department of Education & Training [AGDET], 2018). The previous system was not means tested which meant all families were able to receive some financial assistance from the government towards childcare costs regardless of household earnings. The changes mean some dual-income families may no longer be able to afford ECEC services. One of the parents in the study, Ashini, revealed that her family would lose the rebate. This may have been a determining factor in sending her April-born boy to school at the earliest opportunity. The impact of this policy is an example of Dimension B of the democracy in ECE model by Hägglund et al. (2017), and it will be interesting to observe any effect on starting school age decisions in 2019 and beyond because of changes to child care subsidies.

5.5.2 Issues of Equity Affecting Prior to School Experiences

Children from various social backgrounds often have varying levels of skill when they start school (Burger, 2010). In NSW, Australia, around one in seven children does not attend ECEC services (Brennan, 2012). For parents who decide to academically redshirt or delay school entry for their child, the individual experiences from that year may differ markedly. Before starting school, parents need to consider whether they will send their child to an ECEC service or provide home-based learning and the amount of time spent at each. Decisions about school entry are often influenced by parents' beliefs about ECEC. That is, what will happen in the year a child spends when they are not at school influences parental decision-making.

The quality of ECEC services provided in Australia varies. To reduce this disparity, the *National Quality Framework* (NQF) was developed, to regulate staff-child ratios and staff qualifications (ACECQA, 2018b) and improve quality. This is a further example of policy aspiring to connect to democracy in ECE. However, Siraj and Kingston (2015) propose quality is also influenced by the physical environment, curriculum, staff turnover and interpersonal relationships between teachers and children in their care. Significant disparity of ECEC quality exists in Australia, with 23% of services currently assessed as below minimum standards of quality (ACECQA, 2018c).

The quality of the experiences provided at either ECEC services or home has been shown to impact on human capital accumulation or skill attainment prior to starting school. This has been shown to be more likely to influence achievement, rather than being older for a cohort (Elder & Lubotsky, 2009). Future outcomes for children, including important milestones such as finishing school, tertiary studies and employment prospects, are also impacted by quality of experiences prior to starting formal education.

5.5.3 Issues Concerning Readiness

The determination of a child's *readiness* for school is another factor which affects school starting age decisions. There are different definitions of what readiness means, in addition to various methods of assessing it (Dockett & Perry, 2002). According to Dockett and Perry (2013), most definitions use the term readiness "to describe characteristics of individual children or populations" (p. 169). Therefore, the focus is clearly on the child and whether they are ready, rather than schools, families or communities. There appears to be a growing expectation by schools for children to be ready when they come to school rather than acquiring readiness in the 1st year (Graue & DiPerna, 2000) or on schools being ready to accept children. Morrison and Hindman (2008) described readiness as "a two-way street". Whilst children should be ready, schools also need to be ready for children with individual differences (Dockett & Perry, 2002).

5.6 Conclusion

Results of the study revealed that whilst several of the parents interviewed were struggling with the decision concerning school starting age, the majority were grateful to have a choice. Nevertheless, inequity exists with current starting age policies in Australia, because only *some* parents (those with children who have birthdays January to July) are offered choice to decide when to send their child to school. For parents who technically have choice, the results of this study highlighted that the democratic right to choose is influenced by socioeconomic and cultural factors, and more support is needed for parents to be able to make decisions based on their child's readiness.

Review of starting age policies in Australia is recommended, as currently an 18-month gap or more between children in a year level can exist. Academic redshirting or delaying school entry is more prevalent amongst affluent families (Bassok & Reardon, 2013) leading to an issue of social justice, with some children from lower SES backgrounds being at a disadvantage from the time they commence formal schooling. A system needs to ensure equity across different schooling systems and family SES.

Children from disadvantaged backgrounds are less likely to have attended ECEC services prior to school (Brennan, 2012). The means-tested *Child Care Subsidy* was introduced in Australia to help make ECEC services more affordable for low to middle SES families (AGDET, 2018). This is important, because the experiences a child is exposed to in the year before school affect human capital accumulation or skill attainment. Children who attend high-quality ECEC services can increase their human capital accumulation, which helps improve academic and socio-behavioural outcomes (Gottfried, Le, & Datar, 2015).

Significant disparity of ECEC quality continues in Australia, however, with 23% of services currently assessed as below minimum standards of quality (ACECQA, 2018c). Whilst 67% of services rated *Working Towards* (the rating below "Met") National Quality Standard (NQS) improved at reassessment, more is needed to increase this percentage and the initial quality assessment. This issue of inequity of EC experience is a democratic concern. Opportunities to increase awareness of the quality rating system and to understand the learning that children experience at both early childhood and school would enable parents to make a more informed decision.

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Chapter 6
Democracy and Multilingualism in South African Primary Education: Implications for Early Literacy Development

Vuyokazi Nomlomo

Abstract South Africa is a country of rich cultural and linguistic diversity. As a result, multilingualism has received much attention in South African education and research over the past two decades. In part this has been in response to the inclusive and democratic Language-in-Education Policy regarding 11 official languages (Department of Education (DoE), Language in education policy. Government Gazette, 17997 (383) Pretoria, South Africa, 1997). By promoting additive multilingualism in education, the Language-in-Education Policy advocates the maintenance of learners' home languages within the framework of human and linguistic rights. This is necessary because in the current situation some children begin their schooling in a second or third language (O'Carrol, S, Hickman R, Narrowing the literacy gap: Strengthening language and literacy development between birth and six years for children in South Africa, Wordworks, Cape Town, 2012). Yet research shows that the mismatch between learners' home languages and the language of learning and teaching often results in unequal opportunities for learners' epistemological access to learning, especially in early schooling where they start reading and writing, in an unfamiliar language (Bloch C, Theory and strategy of early literacy in contemporary Africa with special reference to South Africa, PRAESA occasional papers, no. 25. University of Cape Town, Cape Town, 2006; Prosper A, Nomlomo, V, Per Linguam, 32(3):79–94, 2016).

This chapter is a critical policy review and is not a report of empirical research. The aim of this chapter is to advance the debate on democracy and multilingualism in relation to early literacy development in South Africa. The chapter argues that while the language and literacy curriculum is underpinned by social justice and democratic principles, classroom practices counteract this by reinforcing inequality and exclusion, thus affecting learners' access to meaningful learning.

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Given the current literacy crisis in many South African primary schools, there is a need to reassess the meaning of democracy and linguistic rights in the process of searching for appropriate pedagogical strategies that might support early literacy development in multilingual contexts.

6.1 Introduction and Background

Of the 5000–7000 languages spoken in the world, more than 2000 are spoken in Africa (Prah, 2006) and 50% of them are African languages. In part, this may testify to a reality that many societies in the world have become linguistically diverse and heterogeneous due to political and economic movement resulting from conflicts and wars (Burcu, Fannin, Montanera, & Cummins, 2014; Chumbow, 2013; Kerfoot & Simon-Vandenbergen, 2015; Snow, 2014; UNESCO, 2006). Hence references to multiculturalism and multilingualism have become a norm in the research debates of many countries in both the northern and southern hemispheres (Kerfoot & Simon-Vandenbergen, 2015).

Despite the fact that multilingualism is regarded as a societal and linguistic resource in democratic and heterogeneous speech communities, linguistic inequality still persists, resulting in the formation of minority and majority languages according to language status (Alexander, 2005; Bamgbose, 2005; Chumbow, 2013; Skuttnabb-Kangas, 2000). This imbalance has led to the revival of debates on which language(s) to use when the aim is to accommodate all citizens and to foster social cohesion and inclusion in multilingual and democratic societies across the world (Biseth, 2009; Heugh, 2003; Skuttnabb-Kangas, 2000).

While Africa is rich in cultural and linguistic diversity, only 25% of African languages are used in secondary education and only 5% in higher or tertiary education (UNESCO, 2010). As languages of instruction, African languages (70–75%) are used in preschool and lower primary (Grades 1–3) schools only. This inequality is attributed to the hegemonic status of colonial languages such as Arabic, English, French, Portuguese and Spanish, which are dominant languages in education on the African continent decades after colonial independence (Alidou, 2004; Bamgbose, 2005; Prah, 2006). As a result, the question of which language to use in teaching and learning remains a contentious one, both in primary and tertiary education in Africa. The use of colonial languages in education is despite continuous research results which show the negative effects of these languages for teaching and learning on children's epistemological access to education in Africa, reflected in high failure and dropout rates (Brock-Utne, 2005; Molosiwa, 2005; Nomlomo & Vuzo, 2014; Prah, 2006). Consequently, many scholars have reported epistemic injustice and deficiency in education to be associated with the mismatch between children's home languages and languages of teaching and learning, both in basic education and in higher education (Bloch, 2000; Gambushe, Nkomo, & Maseko, 2017; Heugh, 2003;

Kamwendo, 2017; Madiba, 2010; Nomlomo, 2007; Ntombela, 2017; O'Carrol & Hickman, 2012).

The ideals of democracy, social justice and equal human rights have formed part of the discourse on transformation in democratic South Africa since the demise of apartheid in 1994 (Alexander, 2005; Heugh, 2003). Simultaneously, the matter of quality education and learners' equal epistemological access to it has also received attention in the democratic South Africa (Allais, 2003; Chisholm, 2004; Gamede, 2005; Kanjee, Sayed, & Rodriguez, 2010; Kwenda & Robinson, 2014; Morrow, 1994; RSA Constitution, 1996). Multilingual education too has become part of the popular discourse in efforts to embrace linguistic diversity in the classroom (Alexander, 2010; Heugh, 2003; Makoe & McKinney, 2014; Prah, 2006; RSA Constitution, 1996; Webb, 2004). Thus, the precept of human rights, including linguistic rights, is captured in many official and educational policies, including the *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa* (RSA) (RSA Constitution, 1996) and the Language-in-Education Policy (Department of Education, 1997). Yet despite the democratic and inclusive Language-in-Education Policy, linguistic inequality along racial and social class lines remains a concern in South African education, from early childhood to tertiary education.

In light of the foregoing discussion, the aim of this chapter is to contribute to the ongoing debates on democracy and multilingual education in South Africa. The purpose of this chapter is to highlight the relationship between democracy and multilingualism and the tension between democracy and Language-in-Education Policy and practices in South African primary schools. Its special focus is on the Foundation Phase (Grades R-3) which forms part of early childhood development (ECD) for children from birth to 9 years old in South Africa. Early childhood development programmes are prepared for children from birth to 4 years old to provide children with a stimulating environment in the form of play in which they can learn and grow. In other words, early childhood education (ECE) forms part of ECD, and its curriculum is designed for different age groups. For example, a child can be admitted to Grade R (also known as reception year) if he/she is 4 years old and will be turning 5 or older by June of the following year. Admission to Grade 1 starts at the age of 5 years old (or older), if the child will be turning 6 by June the following year. At Grade 3 level, many children turn 9 years old.

This chapter also explores the nexus between children's linguistic rights and literacy, as political and social constructs that underpin agency and social transformation in democratic societies (Freire & Macedo, 1987). Informed by the conceptual framework on democracy, language ideology and multilingualism, the chapter argues that while the South African language and literacy curriculum is underpinned by principles of social justice and democratic conduct, classroom practices continue to reinforce inequality and exclusion. Such practices, the curriculum suggests, have a direct impact upon learners' epistemological access to learning. As a point of departure, the relationship between democracy and multilingualism is considered in this chapter, noting that these concepts characterise post-apartheid South Africa.

6.2 Democracy and Multilingual Education in South Africa: What Are the Connections?

Democracy is a multidimensional and hybrid concept associated with social practices shaped at both local and national levels by factors that include politics (Ansah, 2017). Cummins (2000) recalls the definition of a democracy as a society ruled by and for the people. This definition is associated with people's equal rights within that society, for example, freedom of speech, equal treatment and legal rights and equal access to healthcare facilities, irrespective of gender, ethnicity, colour, language, religion and political affiliation (Biseth, 2009; UNESCO, 2016). Democracy is also referred to as a set of principles, procedures and practices that encompass human rights and equality before the law (Bennis, 2017). It reflects a mode of living together which entails equal participation of citizens, sharing and negotiating opinions and perspectives – thus it is viewed as an ethical and political relationship that underpins citizens' collective decision-making and the choices that affect their daily lives (Biseth, 2009; Moss, 2011). There is thus no universal definition of democracy.

While positive collective aspirations to democracy are an asset in any democratic country, linguistic inequality is often experienced as a challenge in multicultural and multilingual settings as languages may not be afforded equal status (Biseth, 2009). In other words, shared beliefs about equality between people and the contingent equality of opportunity for their participation in societal matters do not guarantee similar approaches to equality between languages within a democratic state (Biseth, 2009). This trend can be associated with many African countries which have democratic language policies but which experience inequality and stigmatisation of local languages despite their official status. An illustration of this phenomenon is that in Africa colonial languages, namely, English, French and Portuguese, are more dominant than indigenous languages, especially in formal domains such as business and education (Alidou, 2004; Brock-Utne, 2005; Prah, 2006; UNESCO, 2010; Vuzo, 2007). Similarly, in South Africa English and Afrikaans, which were official languages under apartheid, are still the only languages used for teaching and learning, from pre-primary to university level despite the inclusive and democratic language policy which is directed at developing all the 11 official languages of this country (Alexander, 2005; Desai, 2016; Heugh, 2003; Nomlomo, 2007; RSA Constitution, 1996).

Itself often underpinned by democratic principles, education is also used as a vehicle by which to sustain democracy (Moss, 2011). When such reciprocity exists, democracy in education should entail equal access to inclusive and quality education (RSA Constitution, 1996; UNESCO, 2016). Then education would include respect for diversity, especially regarding multiple perspectives and the stimulation of learners' curiosity and critical thinking (Moss, 2011). This scenario indicates that individual human and linguistic rights must be acknowledged and respected in democratic and multilingual classroom environments where

many languages co-exist (Biseth, 2009). There is thus an interrelationship between democracy and education.

However, due to the discriminatory apartheid history of South Africa from the 1940s, it has been necessary to formulate democratic and inclusive policies which emphasise equality, equity and social justice for transformation and which also demarcate sectors of life where these should be urgently administered, such as health, justice, education, etc. Regarding linguistic rights, the *South African Bill of Rights* emphasises the need for children to be educated "in the official language or languages of their choice in public educational institutions where that education is reasonably practicable" (RSA Constitution Act No.108, 1996). The norms and standards published in terms of Section 6(1) of the South *African Schools Act* of 1996 also recognise linguistic diversity as an asset, as is attested to by their promotion of multilingualism in education. Thus, consistent with the *RSA Constitution* (1996), the democratic Language-in-Education Policy recommends the maintenance of learners' home languages by promoting additive bi-/multilingualism in education and the use of mother tongue education in the first 3 years of schooling (Department of Education, 1997; Makoe & McKinney, 2014).

Additive multilingualism entails the maintenance of learners' home languages alongside the learning of additional languages, which could provide more opportunities for them to eventually become active citizens who are able to participate in the country's affairs (Biseth, 2009). Multilingual pedagogy recognises the value of the learners' home language in their acquisition of additional languages as well as the social and cognitive benefits associated with the learners' home languages (Haukåsa, 2015). Hence multilingualism is an asset in any democratic country as it fosters equal opportunities for active citizenship that strives to enhance equality (Biseth, 2009). In other words, there is a close relationship between democracy and multilingualism as both promote individual and societal linguistic rights for active participation in the society's affairs (Biseth, 2009; Chumbow, 2013).

Yet in South Africa it is also the case that no clear guidelines exist to facilitate the implementation of the democratic language-in-education policy (Chetty, 2012; Nomlomo, 2007). In addition, the choice of the language of learning and teaching (LOLT) is left to the parents or School Governing Bodies (SGBs) who have limited knowledge and capacity to make such decisions, especially in disadvantaged schools. As a result, post-apartheid language practices continue to perpetuate English hegemony and subtractive bilingualism which entails the loss of their home languages as they learn an additional language (Chetty, 2012; Desai, 2016; Makoe & McKinney, 2014). These practices continue to marginalise the cultural and linguistic capital of children especially those who come from low socio-economic backgrounds (Chetty, 2012).

Thus, the question of democracy and multilingualism in South African schools remains problematic as unequal access to learning and resources remains in place along "race" and social class lines. This state of affairs is perpetuated by language ideologies and politics that reinforce inequity and linguistic homogeneity (Makoe & Mckinney, 2014).

6.3 Which Language Ideologies Influence Classroom Practices in South Africa?

As emphasised in the previous section, language plays a significant role in any democratic state. It is a means by which citizens' share identities, values, culture and history – all of which inform their collective participation in public affairs (Biseth, 2009; Moss, 2011). Hence it becomes clear that language and society are interconnected (Biseth, 2009), because language forms part of social identity (Norton & Toohey, 2011). Together, language and identity influence language choices (Mbatha, 2016).

Language ideologies refer to the beliefs, culture, values and attitudes that are often associated with systems of power (Woolard & Schieffelin cited in Makoe & McKinney, 2014). Significantly, they reflect the link between social structures and the power relations which influence language use at the micro level, such as in schools (Makoe & McKinney, 2014). Language ideologies tend to manifest in education through the manner in which schools impose legitimate forms of discourse which do not necessarily accommodate the learners' language identities (Mbatha, 2016). This situation testifies to the entwined relationship between language and power (Freire & Macedo, 1987). It implies too that power and ideology have an influence on language choices in educational settings. A poststructuralist description of heterogeneous linguistic communities captures this critique when it states that they represent sites of struggle for power (Bourdieu, 1977, 2002; Weedon, 1997) in which unequal relationships between interlocutors form part of social networks.

In South Africa, linguistic inequality can be understood in relation to language ideologies which reflect the colonial and apartheid legacy (Makoe & McKinney, 2014; Prah, 2006). English hegemony can be attributed to the discriminatory apartheid education policy which aimed at offering education of low quality to black children through the Bantu Education Act of 1953 (Hartshone, 1995). Interestingly apartheid education included African languages in its stipulation that learners' mother tongue be used for the first 6 years of schooling. But while such policy might be associated with the cognitive and affective benefits of mother tongue education, the apartheid government had ulterior motives in their deployment of mother tongue education (Hartshone, 1995; Nomlomo, 2007, 2014). The consequence of this is that now – in the democratic dispensation – many black parents remain suspicious of mother tongue education in African languages (Heugh, 2003).

In addition to this apartheid language policy, another significant development ensued which still affects attitudes to language. The 1976 Soweto riots against the forceful use of Afrikaans as the main language of instruction for black children resulted in English gaining momentum as a language of liberation (Alexander, 2005). In the light of this historical manipulation which language has undergone in South Africa, it is thus comprehensible to see why the current language practices in South African classrooms are reflective of language ideologies of the dominant group (Makoe & Mckinney, 2014). Such tendencies are succinctly portrayed in

Bourdieu's concept of habitus which proposes that people's history, perceptions and experiences have an influence on their current behaviour (Bourdieu, 2002; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1979). Today the language choices, practices and attitudes in many South African communities reflect people's reactions to their experience of colonial and apartheid language history.

So, unfortunately, the old ideological practices continue to reinforce linguistic inequality by privileging only English and Afrikaans in education. The African languages – despite their official status and despite the fact that they are spoken by the majority of South Africans – are perceived in deficit terms (Makoe & McKinney, 2014). The unsettling consequence of this is that English hegemony thus continues to be a barrier to learners' epistemological access to education (Chetty, 2012; Makoe & McKinney, 2014), while African languages are still associated with low educational standards (De Klerk, 2002). Hence the democratic Language-in-Education Policy has had very little positive impact on children's education in South Africa (Mkhize & Balfour, 2017). This state of affairs necessitates an investigation into whether and how the twin influences of "language and democracy" might be revived to the benefit of children in ECE in South Africa.

6.4 Do Language and Democracy Matter in ECE in South Africa?

In many countries, democracy is considered to be a significant value within the precepts of early childhood development; it creates the frame in which children are regarded as citizens with rights (Moss, 2011). In line with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that focus on the well-being of children regarding free, equitable and quality education, many countries have invested heavily in ECE. Their rationale is that ECE forms an integral part of social and economic development (Department of Education, 2001; Neugebauer, 2007; Statistics South Africa, 2016). Halliday's assertion may be read as underscoring such rationale: he proposes that language development plays a crucial role in facilitating the transition to literacy and educational knowledge as children start formal schooling (Halliday, 1993). In almost explicit terms, Halliday's insight directs the focus to early childhood development.

In the South African context, early childhood development is defined within the framework of comprehensive policies and programmes that protect children's rights from birth to 9 years of age. Consistent with Section 29 of the Bill of Rights of the RSA Constitution (1996), the integrated policy frameworks aim at protecting children's rights, especially the right to basic education and the holistic development of the child – cognitively, emotionally, socially and physically (Department of Education, 2001; UNESCO, 2006). South Africa's *National Development Plan 2030 Vision* places high priority on early childhood development and education, especially in relation to access to high-quality education (Department of Higher

Education and Training, 2017). Consistent with the Language-in-Education Policy (Department of Education, 1997), it emphasises the importance of using the learners' home languages as languages of instruction for a longer period so as to facilitate the transition to English additional language instruction from Grade 4 (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2017).

Again, Halliday's claim helps to affirm this approach. He states that in ECE language is the most fundamental aspect of knowledge because it *encompasses* experiential and interpersonal knowledge for meaning-making (Halliday, 1996). Young children's proficiency in the home language facilitates concept development in an additional language because language skills transfer between languages (Giambo & Szecsi, 2015; Reyes, 2006). If the children's home languages are well developed and supported, the children are likely to develop strong language skills and thereby the skills to access academic concepts in two or more languages. This process may be described as additive bi-/multilingualism (Giambo & Szecsi, 2015).

Research shows that bilinguals as young as 2 have stronger cognitive control in learning than monolinguals (Giambo & Szecsi, 2015). This contradicts the deficit view that the learners' home languages interfere with the acquisition of a new language (Burcu et al., 2014; Giambo & Szecsi, 2015). Rather, the linguistic and cognitive advantages of the learners' home languages are in evidence in the learning experiences of bilingual children (Burcu et al., 2014; Reyes, 2006).

Thus, in the processes of education, bilingual proficiency is a learning resource because the home language provides a good foundation for acquiring new insights. In other words, such proficiency facilitates knowledge construction. In this context and from a democratic perspective, children may be viewed as constructors of their own learning with original points of view to be listened to (Moss, 2011), rather than as passive recipients of knowledge (Bennis, 2017). They can play an active role in their own learning and can participate in decision-making (Department of Basic Education, 2011a, 2011b; Moss, 2011).

Such capabilities may be further enhanced within other sociocultural environments which include the use of a familiar language and appropriate learning resources. What this points to is the crucial need for interactive and innovative pedagogical strategies to facilitate such active learning. For example, critical dialogue and reflection that stimulate children's curiosity and critical thinking are important aspects of meaning-making in the learning process (Moss, 2011). For these reasons, early childhood development environments should rely on the home language to play a significant role in all activities. Young learners in South Africa, as elsewhere, should be regarded as competent citizens with prior knowledge and capabilities that will enhance their construction of knowledge and the meaning they may make of their learning (Moss, 2011).

However, a reality is that some children start schooling in languages other than their home language in many African countries (Bloch, 2006; Chumbow, 2013; O'Carrol & Hickman, 2012; Prah, 2006). This happens mostly in primary schools where African languages do not form part of the curriculum (Mkhize & Balfour, 2017). For example, in some schools in South Africa, the nine official African languages are regarded as "a problem for the learning of English" (Makoe & McKinney,

2014 p. 670). This is despite the fact that as stated earlier, the South African language policy and other educational policies promote the use of the learners' home languages for teaching and learning in the Foundation Phase (Grades R-3) (Department of Education, 1997; National Planning Commission, 2012; RSA Constitution, 1996).

As a consequence of being compelled to operate with this linguistic deficit, some children – especially home language speakers of African languages – can hardly read and write in their home languages due to English hegemony (Prah, 2006). Clearly, this practice goes against the democratic values in education which promote equal children's rights and justice, particularly regarding equal access to quality education and literacy for human development as envisaged in the *Education 2030 Framework for Action* (UNESCO, 2016).

Central to children's rights are the language rights that determine their epistemological access to learning. In South Africa, a country that relegates African languages to the status of minority languages and marginalises them in education, these rights are not realised. This is due to the power afforded English with its link to ideologies associated with dominant political practices (Alexander, 2005; Makoe & Mckinney, 2014; Prah, 2006). This stated, it may be argued that English hegemony influences whether children have equal epistemological access to early literacy, especially in the case of those who do not speak English as a home language.

In this fateful way, children start schooling as either winners or losers, depending on the language used for literacy teaching and learning (Nomlomo, 1993). In any case, language and literacy proficiency determine children's epistemological access to knowledge; and these can either empower or disempower people (Freire & Macedo, 1987). This is because in a democratic society, literacy forms part of the cultural and linguistic politics that can affect people's lives and participation in society (Freire & Macedo, 1987).

In the following section, I explore literacy as a sociocultural construct that plays a significant role in the transformation of societies.

6.5 Language and Literacy in Democratic Societies

Freire and Macedo's (1987) conceptualisation of literacy is linked to political action and freedom. Literacy enables individuals to project their voices and to establish their agency towards empowerment. In other words, literacy is not just a technical skill, but it is also a historical and social construct that is linked to knowledge and power – and thus to self- and social-empowerment. It can perpetuate relations of repression and domination, and it can determine social and cultural emancipation. In other words, it is the key aspect of liberation and transformation (Freire & Macedo, 1987).

In line with democracy, literacy is a human right against which the economic well-being of a nation is measured (UNESCO, 2006). It is regarded as a foundation for lifelong learning, and it is thus an essential aspect of human development. It

forms part of socio-economic empowerment to transform people's lives (Freire & Macedo 1987; UNESCO, 2006). It is also defined as a cognitive and sociocultural practice that frames one's identity and the linguistic and cultural capital necessary for manoeuvring in multilingual environments (Cummins et al., 2005; Street, 2001). Hence, illiteracy is a global concern that threatens the economic system of any society (Freire & Macedo, 1987; UNESCO, 2006).

It is held that institutional democracy contributes to the sustainability of literacy and languages. In other words, democratic education develops well-equipped citizens who play a key role in building an equitable and socially just society (Bennis, 2017). This is possible only if citizens have strong and relevant language and literacy skills with which to engage the world around them (Bennis, 2017).

As democracy enhances human development, simultaneously it should aim at eliminating linguistic and cultural assimilation (Biseth, 2009; UNESCO, 2016). In a mutual way, the maintenance of people's languages and culture strengthens democracy by conferring status and voice upon all languages rather than perpetuating linguistic inequality. In educational activity children manipulate and reconstitute the language itself into abstract modes as they learn to be literate (Halliday, 1993). In this sense, language is an important aspect of thinking that translates into literacy.

I wish to argue that it is only through a language that is well known to all the citizens that such critical and abstract literacy skills can be developed for engaging with the world. There is thus a reciprocal relationship between literacy and democracy; that is, in the lives of their subjects, they can influence each other either positively or negatively (Marais, 2017). So, in cases where there is societal and linguistic inequality, this relationship may not be reciprocal.

Children who start their primary education in languages other than their home languages often perform worse in literacy than their counterparts who are taught in their home languages. In addition, early literacy deficiency often affects children's performance in subsequent grades (Banda, 2006; O'Carrol & Hickman, 2012; Samuels, 2013).

Due to learners' poor literacy levels, the South African government introduced Annual National Assessment (ANA) as an intervention for strengthening literacy and numeracy teaching and learning in primary schools. ANA drew on the experiences of other international assessment programmes in which South Africa participated, such as the Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality (SACMEQ) of 2001 and 2007, the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) and the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) programme of 2003. Regrettably, South African learners performed poorly in all the international assessment programmes (Howie et al., 2007, 2017).

Many South African Grade 3 children are unable to read at acceptable levels of competence, and they are still performing below the minimum requirement of 50% in literacy (Department of Basic Education, 2012, 2013, 2014; Howie et al., 2007, 2017; Madisaotsile, 2012; NEEDU, 2013). Another factor is that performance is worse in schools that serve poor communities (Pretorius & Machet, 2004), which

are also mainly black communities. This is the chief reason why literacy forms part of the language policy debate in South Africa (Bloch, 2000); there is a mismatch between the children's home languages and the languages used to teach literacy in multilingual classrooms.

Additional challenges include a lack of multilingual resources and the limited proficiency in African languages some teachers display (Prosper & Nomlomo, 2016). All this suggests that if children's home literacies are not recognised as a foundation upon which they may acquire additional literacies in the classroom, then children's democratic rights are being violated. And this disadvantage is likely to perpetuate the epistemic injustice associated with unequal opportunities for learning that reflect the apartheid legacy in South Africa (Madisaotsile, 2012).

Hence it may be argued that unequal access to literacy of good quality affects young children's rights as citizens who are expected to have equal opportunities for participation in the socio-economic affairs of their country. In a divided country like South Africa, the status quo indeed determines that the children of the black and poor communities are excluded from equal participation in their learning due to linguistic inequality. This compromises the democratic values and principles of social justice that underpin all its education policies. Therefore, it can be concluded that at this point, multilingualism as inscribed in definitions of democracy in South Africa remains part of the lip service paid to this and other ideas concerning the struggle for liberation.

6.6 Conclusion

In conclusion, the implementation of language policy in the education of children in South Africa is inconsistent with the democratic and inclusive values that are promoted in the constitution and other official policies of this country. Here, language practices still reflect the power of English at the expense of other official languages. With regard to the expansion of language and literacy development, research highlights acute linguistic and social inequalities that benefit English- and Afrikaans-speaking children and a few black middle-class elites. This is how children's linguistic rights are being violated.

If democracy encompasses equal rights by which citizens may participate in society, then schools and preschools should make concerted efforts to observe and respect all learners' linguistic rights for equal access to literacy. Schools and preschools should be accountable for children's active participation in matters that support their learning. In this way, responsible citizenship might be cultivated through effective literacy instruction in the familiar languages of the majority of citizens in South Africa, and this in turn may have positive effects in the domain of the country's economic development.

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Chapter 7
Engagement of Children of Finnish Descent in Bilingual Communicative Events in Swedish Preschool Contexts

Ellinor Skaremyr

Abstract This study explores Finnish language activities (FLA) and the engagement of children of Finnish descent in bilingual practices in the Swedish preschool context. Data were collected through observations and field notes, which were transcribed and analysed using the theoretical concept *communicative event*. The analysis shows that the FLAs are controlled by conditions, such as the timeframe for the FLA and by the fixed routines, meetings and excursions in preschools. Despite bilingual practitioners' ability to use Finnish in different situations, children's engagement in and the implementation of FLAs seem vulnerable to the prevailing conditions in preschools, and therefore the preschools' democratic foundation will be discussed. I argue that the timeframe for the FLA is the dominating controlling condition influencing children's engagement, and I call for clearer local policies. All preschool personnel need increased pedagogical knowledge in bilingualism if the statutory and democratic rights for children are to have real meaning.

7.1 Introduction

During the last decade, the protection of national minorities and minority languages has been guaranteed by Swedish laws and in the Swedish preschool curriculum. The political acknowledgement for the national minorities' rights to their languages has led to implementation of language revitalisation processes in Swedish preschools. Finnish is one of the recognised national minority languages in Sweden and enjoys basic protection throughout the country. [1] Inside the Finnish

[1] In Sweden, Finns, Swedish Finns, Jews, Sami and Romani people are classified as national minorities, and the recognised minority languages are Finnish, Sami, Meänkieli, Yiddish, Romani Chib and the Swedish sign language.

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administrative area,[2] greater protection exists, and children of Finnish descent have the legal right to participate in preschool activities that are offered completely or partially in Finnish. This is interesting, not just from the perspective of the Finnish language, as an increasing number of children with mother tongues other than Swedish are attending Swedish preschools. The preschools' mandate includes offering children opportunities to develop their mother tongues, and it is therefore highly relevant to explore Finnish language activities and to see how this is accomplished in practice.

This study shows how democracy may become and be negotiated by children and practitioners in preschool. It connects to the model of democracy in ECE provided by Hägglund, Löfdahl Hultman, and Thelander (2017). The *Swedish Language Act* (SFS, 2009a:600) and the *Minority and Minority Language Act* (SFS, 2009b:724) – which declares the children's right to preschool activities in Finnish – connect to dimension B of the model. Dimension C of the model relates to pedagogical practices and how bilingual practitioners (BPs) plan for and execute pedagogical situations in the Finnish language. The children of Finnish descent and how they participate in interactions with BPs illustrates dimension D, children's arenas. Especially interesting is that despite curriculum and policies which espouse children's right to their minority language in preschool, this study will show how it is a challenging task to perform and to ensure minority children's democratic rights in everyday activities in preschool.

The present study aims at providing knowledge about FLAs and how children of Finnish descent engage in bilingual communicative events in the Swedish preschool. The research reported in this chapter was gathered in a municipality in which Finnish language activities (FLAs) are implemented by Finnish- and Swedish-speaking bilingual practitioner's (BPs) who go out to different preschools and meet children of Finnish descent in the age range of 1–6 years.

The concept *communicative event* is used to frame and understand the interactions between BPs and children of Finnish descent. My analysis of these interactions is guided by the following research questions: What conditions influence the bilingual communicative events in FLAs? How do children handle these conditions?

7.2 Research and Background

7.2.1 Language Support Activities in Preschool

The literature on bilingual pedagogical practices may be used to understand language supporting activities, such as the Finnish language activity (FLA), in preschool. Already in the 1980s, Andersson and Nauclér (1985) examined linguistic interactions during home language education. They studied differences in patterns

[2] Administrative areas have been created for the Sami, Meänkieli and Finnish minorities and languages. Yiddish and Romani Chib have not been assigned specific territories.

of interaction in relation to home language and Swedish, individual differences between teachers, as well as different situations such as circle time, mealtimes and joint book reading. Their study shows, for instance, how vital teacher–child dialogues are for language development.

More recent studies focusing on second language pedagogical practices show, for example, that preschool teachers use pictures and objects to develop Swedish in recurring preschool activities (Carlsson & Bagga-Gupta, 2006) and that codeswitching and tandem talk in early childhood can provide a basis for language development (Gort & Pontier, 2013). A study by Palviainen and Mård-Miettinen (2015) shows that mixing two languages, Swedish and Finnish, can help to acquaint children with the Swedish language and develop positive attitudes towards both languages.

Some researchers have focused on recurring routines in preschool contexts, such as mealtimes, singing activities, greetings and play (e.g. Aarts, Demir-Vegter, Kurvers, & Henrichs, 2016; Kultti, 2013, 2014), and their findings show that these activities can promote children's language learning. As concluded in several studies, children's participation in meaningful interactions with adults, peers, cultural tools and language itself lays the foundation for language development (Björklund, Mård-Miettinen, & Savijärvi, 2014; Haworth et al., 2006). More specifically, children's language learning depends on the teachers' explicit verbalisation in shared everyday interactions (Björklund et al., 2014) and the balance between play and instructional input from the adult (Haworth et al., 2006). In language support projects, it is argued that an emphasis on the minority language in everyday settings is necessary if children are to become bilingual (Todal, 2007). Second language practices should, as shown by Alstad (2013), include different aspects, such as instructional and communicative language teaching, and it has also been shown that preschool teachers adapt their pedagogical practice to individual children's social, linguistic and cognitive needs.

7.2.2 Conditions and Challenges for Implementing Bilingual Education

Although bilingual practitioners (BPs) have opportunities to combine mother tongue or first language (L1) and second or subsequent language (L2), research highlights the constraints of classroom realities (Palviainen & Mård-Miettinen, 2015; Robertson, Drury, & Cable, 2014; Todal, 2007). Implementing a bilingual education is affected by the hierarchical position of the majority language (Robertson et al., 2014), and occurring discourses such as separation of language (one person – one language) (Palviainen & Mård-Miettinen, 2015; Robertson et al., 2014), but also by access to bilingual teachers able to use their languages in their daily work (Todal, 2007). Critics of a prevailing monolingual discourse and the separation of languages in some bilingual programmes point at the need for new pedagogical strategies. Cummins (2014) argues for the integration of new strategies like translanguaging alongside old strategies of separating languages to enhance productive

skills, like speaking and writing, by highlighting associations between languages and a "common underlying proficiency" (p. 7). Translanguaging is when two languages are being used during the same lesson (Lewis, Jones, & Baker, 2012).

The number and distribution of L2 instruction hours correlate positively with proficiency outcomes in most effective programmes for L2 learners (Lightbown, 2014). As discussed by Lightbown and Spada (2013), if a programme only offers a few hours of "drip feed" instruction a week, it may be more effective to start at a later age and provide more intensive exposure to the new language. Time is significant in relation to bilingual education, as is discussed in more detail below.

Another line of inquiry in the field of bilingualism takes on the perspective of the participants by examining how children and adults participate and communicate in social and educational activities in different ways (e.g. Björk-Willen, 2007, 2008; Björk-Willén & Cromdal, 2009; Rydland & Aukrust, 2005; Skaremyr, 2014). These studies show that participants use different communicative strategies in interactions in relation to language developing practices and that their participation affects language learning.

7.2.3 Minority Language Education in Swedish Preschools

How the challenge of giving multilingual children the opportunity to develop their mother tongue/s is met is a topic frequently discussed in the Swedish preschool context. Since the 1970s, documents governing Swedish preschools have been written from a political perspective that emphasises multilingualism, regardless of the language concerned (Skolverket, 2003). Due to an improved understanding of the national minorities in Sweden and of their languages and cultures, Sweden ratified the *European Minority Conventions* and the *Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities* (Council of Europe, 1995), in 2000. In 2009, the *Swedish Language Act* (SFS, 2009a:600) and the *Act on National Minorities and Minority Languages* (SFS, 2009b:724) were implemented. According to the *Language Act* (SFS, 2009a:600), Finnish has to be protected and supported, and children belonging to one of the national minorities must be given the opportunity to learn, develop and use the minority language in question. The *Act on National Minorities* (SFS, 2009a, 2009b) states that children from a minority language background have the *right* to participate in preschool activities offered wholly or partially in that minority language, in the specific administrative areas for Finnish, Sami and Meänkieli, and that proficiency in the minority language is not a prerequisite for participation. For mother tongue education in other languages, such as Arabic or Spanish, the language has to be used at home. The child's right to mother tongue education is then determined by the local municipality. The preschool curriculum (Skolverket, 2016) states that preschools have to provide opportunities for multilingual children to develop their mother tongues. How this is done varies between different local contexts.

7.3 Theoretical Framework and Communicative Events

The basic premise of this study is that language development is a process embedded in interaction in a sociocultural context. Language is seen as a tool in becoming a competent member of a society (Rogoff, 1990, 2003; Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986). A child is guided in their participation by those who are more experienced but also by the sociocultural context, and involvement will prepare the child for future participation in related events (Rogoff, 1995). For children of Finnish descent, this means that they are given the opportunity to develop their Finnish language skills in interaction with the bilingual practitioners (BPs) in preschools. Through these interactions, the children are equipped to become competent members of a minority community. In the analysis I use the analytical concept *communicative event*.

Communicative events are created in a context in which communication takes place and are defined by the same general topic, have the same general purpose, involve the same participants and use the same language variety and the same rules for interaction, all in the same setting (Saville-Troike, 1982). During such events, participants interact face-to-face and simultaneously use semiotic resources – body, speech and materials – to orient towards each other (Goodwin, 2000). The events are framed by joint attention achieved through participants' understanding of what the other party is doing and the structure and nature of the ongoing event (Streeck, Goodwin, & LeBaron, 2011). Joint attention or communicative consensus between actors is regarded as vital for language development (Gibbons, 2006; Lightbown & Spada, 2013). Furthermore, communicative events can be described in varying ways; they may be quiet or noisy, and events can differ in length and in intensity. They are also continuously subject to change (Rogoff, 1990). A communicative event stops or pauses when there is a change in the focus of interest or if a participant leaves the event (Saville-Troike, 1982).

Different kinds of events as research objects have been explored from different perspectives: as free-play events in bilingual preschool settings (Piker, 2013; Piker & Rex, 2008); as instructional events in monolingual school settings (e.g. Shepardson & Britsch, 2006); as communicative events mediated by whiteboards (e.g. Fernández-Cárdenas & Silveyra-De La Garza, 2010); and as adult–child interactions in everyday cultural settings (out of school) (e.g. Rogoff, 1990). The present study analyses communicative events in adult–child interactions in the Finnish language activity context of a Swedish preschool and thus adds to the research on bilingual pedagogical practices and to the fields in which the event is used as analytical research object. In an earlier study that focused on how newly arrived children participate by using verbal, bodily and material tools in interaction with peers in a preschool context (Skaremyr, 2014), the concept of "communicative event" was used to frame child-initiated interactions during free-play situations. In this study, understanding of the concept is further developed by investigating the communicative events that are created in FLAs and through a focus on child–adult interactions.

7.4 Methodology: A Finnish Language Activity Study

7.4.1 Participants and Setting

The municipality in which this study was conducted became part of the Finnish administrative area several years before the start of this study. The municipality started a Finnish language activity (FLA) programme during which Finnish- and Swedish-speaking bilingual practitioners (BPs) go out to different preschools and meet children of Finnish descent. Parents must register their children to participate in the activity. The municipality's objective for the FLA is to offer each child 1.5 h of Finnish language support per week. The BPs' task is to carry out an FLA according to the prevailing conditions in the municipality and in the preschools. A BP's allotted time depends on how many children she plans to meet at each preschool. If she meets a single child, she stays for approximately 1.5 h, but the period is lengthened if she meets with several children.

Participants in this study are 3 BPs, 17 children between 1 and 6 years of age and 8 preschool teachers. In accordance with research ethics (Swedish Research Council, 2011), BPs and preschool teachers gave written informed consent, and parents of the children of Finnish descent gave written informed consent on behalf of their children. The children's assent to be observed was sought during researcher visits, obtained either verbally or through careful observation of the children's body language to ensure that they appeared comfortable with the researcher's attendance. One BP withdrew her participation but gave consent to use already gathered data. Some of the children only appear once in the data due to sickness, vacation or the withdrawal of the BP. Pseudonyms have been used to protect the anonymity of participants.

7.4.2 Method

In order to study the Finnish language activity (FLA), I participated as an observer and followed the bilingual practitioners (BPs) at work. I conducted observations and took field notes for 15 days, across 50 situations, with the 3 BPs (37, 8 and 5 situations, respectively). During my observations, I focused on the interactions between the BP and the child of Finnish descent and on how the activity was performed in authentic settings in differing preschools. I watched, listened and sometimes asked questions as I made field notes about the context, material being used and the observed activity. Often my questions concerned the Finnish language, for example, why the BP switched languages during an activity. The summarised field notes were transcribed and supplemented with more detailed descriptions of the context at the end of each day of fieldwork. In addition to field notes from observations, I also collected other data, such as legislative texts regarding national minority languages and the local policy for the FLA, the interviews conducted with the BPs and preschool teachers in the preschools and diaries from the BPs. This article draws on data from analysis of the field notes.

7.4.3 Analysis of Data

The field notes were analysed qualitatively as follows:

1. The summarised field notes were transcribed manually by the researcher.
2. The transcript was read through several times.
3. Communicative events, in which BPs and children of Finnish descent orient towards each other, were identified. Goodwin's (2000), Rogoff's (2003, 1990) and Saville-Troike's (1982) frameworks for participation were used to identify communicative events, and 165 communicative events were identified.
4. Child- and adult-initiated communicative events were defined, identified and categorised. Seventy-seven adult-initiated and 88 child-initiated communicative events were analysed in relation to participants, focus of attention, material being used and according to the context in which the events took place.
5. Different categories were compiled and questions were asked, such as: What do children and adults take initiative in? What is typical of the child-initiated and adult-initiated communicative events, respectively?

7.5 Findings: Conditions in the Preschool that Influence FLAs and Participation in Communicative Events for Children of Finnish Descent

The results show that preschool conditions, such as other planned and unplanned events (activities, sickness, excursions, meetings), and preschool routines influence how the Finnish language activities (FLAs) are carried out. The timeframe for the FLA appears as a dominating organisational condition in the implementation of FLAs. The children of Finnish descent handle these conditions by accepting or rejecting participation and by taking initiatives of their own to make meaning.

Analyses of communicative events provided in the following sections are illustrated with excerpts from field notes, which have been translated from Swedish into English. Excerpts have been selected that are especially detailed and representative for differing themes in the communicative events. Each mention of adults refers to the bilingual practitioners (BPs), and each mention of a child/children refers specifically to children of Finnish descent.

7.5.1 Children's Meaning-Making Processes in FLAs

The result shows that the children of Finnish descent verbally and bodily initiate different activities in processes of making meaning within a specific Finnish language activity (FLA) and that the bilingual practitioner (BP) seizes these initiatives in their interaction. The analysis shows that the children mostly initiate *creative*

activities and activities of play, for instance, *role play*, *construction and carrying around things* and *playing with balloons*, and less often initiate storybook reading and ordinary talk about food, concepts and pictures. The communicative events initiated by the children are usually interest driven and have a more informal nature. The following examples show situations during time for activities and free play. The examples illustrate interactions initiated by the child and by the adult, in the analysis described as child- and adult-initiated communicative events, respectively. The events have been chosen to illustrate integrated versus segregated events and to make visible the flexible and changing nature of communicative events. These events show that children and adults differ in their focus of attention and that it may be difficult to establish a joint focus of attention. The following three excerpts are taken from two analysed communicative events, one adult- and one child-initiated event. First, we see how Sofie shows an interest in music with her body. Sofie's initiative, her interest in the music, is regarded as the start of the communicative event.

Pirjo, a BP, and Sofie, a 2-year-old girl, are together in the preschool's largest room where children can play and interact with different materials, such as blocks, magnets, dress-up clothes and musical instruments. Excerpt 7.1 shows that Sofie moves around the room and Pirjo follows her closely. The child first focuses her attention on the music.

Excerpt 7.1
Suddenly Sofie hears music. A preschool teacher and some children are singing (in Swedish) and playing music in the music corner. Sofie goes to the place where the music is. She watches and she listens. Sofie moves to a place with magnets situated nearby the music corner. Here she stops and claps her hands to the music. Pirjo follows Sofie as she moves across the room. Pirjo is close by and I hear her speak Finnish. Pirjo lets Sofie decide where to go. Occasionally, Pirjo tries to catch Sofie's interest by speaking with excitement in her voice and by pointing. Now Pirjo points at the studio, and Sofie follows her.

The illustration shows that Sofie's focus is directed by her interest in and curiosity about the music, but the BP's focus is not clear, and they do not focus on something together. It also shows that the interaction is responsive to other activities occurring in the room. Sofie hears the music and follows it. Pirjo's actions (closely following Sofie's initiatives and at the same time speaking Finnish) can here be understood as an ongoing effort to achieve joint focus with Sofie on an activity. In Excerpt 7.2, at last, Pirjo succeeds in catching Sofie's interest, and they move to the studio where Pirjo takes the initiative for a new activity, understood as an adult-initiated communicative event.

Excerpt 7.2
The studio is full of sources of inspiration. In the studio, an art pedagogue plans for and sets the tables with materials inspiring the children to be creative. Today, there is orange watercolour paint, an orange, water, papers and pencils on a table in the studio. Pirjo tries to steer Sofie's attention towards the table with the materials by speaking Finnish, pointing and leading her to the table. They sit down. Pirjo lifts up the orange and speaks Finnish. Sofie grabs one of the pencils and starts to paint with

the orange watercolour. Pirjo points at the watercolour paint and says the Finnish word for orange: *oranssi*.

The transcript shows how Pirjo leads Sofie into the studio, which can be understood as an effort to create a situation in which they can jointly pay attention to an activity and use Finnish. Pirjo and Sofie are alone in the studio, and the event could be understood as segregated from other activities. At the same time, the distraction or competition from other activities, persons and languages is reduced. The transcript also shows that Pirjo has a learning objective: she lifts up the orange, points at the orange watercolour paint and at the same time pronouns the Finnish word *oranssi*. The event assumes an educational character. Then, the child-initiated communicative event continues.

Excerpt 7.3

The sound of the music is tempting, and after approximately 1 min in the nearby studio, Sofie leaves the studio and moves towards the music. Pirjo is close behind. They sit down together with the other children who are singing. Pirjo addresses Malin, the preschool teacher who is playing guitar: "Please Malin, can we sing *Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star* in Finnish also?"

As the interaction develops, Pirjo builds on Sofie's interest in the music when she asks Malin whether they can sing the song in Finnish. The participants' different focal areas become clear in these Excerpts (7.1, 7.2 and 7.3), which make clear how attracted Sofie is by the music activity and also shows that Pirjo is motivated to speak Finnish and educate Sofie in the Finnish language. Taken together, the three transcripts show how Pirjo follows Sofie's actions while at same time tries to insert the Finnish language. Due to competition from different environmental stimuli, the task of creating a FLA seems challenging. When Pirjo in Excerpt 7.3 builds on Sofie's interest, she manages to include Finnish in the ongoing music activity, and Finnish language support becomes integrated in ordinary preschool practice as the participants' joint attention is focused on singing "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star".

Understanding Sofie's initiative as the start of the communicative event makes visible the process of establishing joint attention through Pirjo's acknowledgement of Sofie's interest. Thus, to use Finnish in interaction with Sofie, it becomes crucial for Pirjo to respond to Sofie's initiative and create integrated communicative events that engage with her interest. When Finnish becomes part of the surrounding context, the context and the BP can support Sofie in her Finnish language learning, which can be understood as guided participation (Rogoff, 1990). Results of the present study therefore align with those from earlier studies (Björk-Willen, 2008; Björklund et al., 2014; Kultti, 2013, 2014) that have shown how teacher–child interactions in preschool routines may support children's language development. This section shows that BPs' ability to respond to children's initiatives and use their pedagogical linguistic skills in authentic language support activities can facilitate the FLA and create an activity that is meaningful for both child and adult.

7.5.2 Children's Willingness to Participate in Bilingual Communicative Events

The results of this study showed that bilingual practitioners (BPs) take verbal action to express what they want: to do or tell something specific or to turn the children's interest towards a specific subject or to an activity, often with a learning objective. The child usually accepted the adult's initiative and joined the event. The analysed adult-initiated communicative events had a formal, educational nature. The analysis shows that the adult's focus was educational and contained more *talk about food*, *concepts*, *numeracy and colour*, *playing games*, *storybook reading* and *creative activities* and less building and construction, role play and other types of play like carrying around things.

Excerpt 7.4 shows a situation that occurred while all the other children had gone outside for outdoor play. This has been analysed as an adult-initiated communicative event segregated from other preschool activities. The event makes the BP's efforts to direct the child's attention towards numeracy and the Finnish language visible. It also shows that adult-initiated communicative events have an educational character and illustrates how a game was used as a tool to teach Finnish. Ritva, the BP, had been with another child in the same preschool earlier and now meets 4-year-old Siv. The joint focus of attention was on playing a game and started on the adult's initiative. Due to Ritva's schedule, she meets up with Siv just as the other children have gone outside to play. In the transcript, Swedish is given in *italics* and Finnish in **bold type**.

Excerpt 7.4

Ritva: *Hej, hur mår du idag?* [Hi, how are you today?]

Siv: (inaudible)

Ritva: *Jag har ett spel med mig, vill du spela?* [I have a game with me, do you want to play?]

Siv nods her head. Ritva and Siv take two game boards each and spread game pieces on the table. The aim of the game is recognising and matching a picture with a number of fruit and the corresponding numeral.

Ritva: *Vem ska börja?* [Who is going to start?]

Siv: *Jag.* [I will]. (flips one of the pieces).

Ritva: *Hur många?* [How many?]

Siv: *Fem.* [Five.] (places her piece on her game board).

Ritva: *Fem,* **Viisi**. [Five.] (flips another piece).

Ritva: *Fyra citroner*, **neljä sitruunaa** [four lemons], (places her piece on her game board).

The game continues with Ritva and Siv flipping pieces and placing them on their game boards. Ritva points at the pieces and asks Siv if she remembers the name of the fruit, followed by Ritva's telling or confirming the right concept. Siv continues to speak Swedish throughout the event while Ritva mixes Swedish and Finnish.

The event shows how the initiative from BP Ritva is accepted by Siv. Ritva asks if Siv wants to play a game, and when Siv nods her head, she lets Ritva know that

she has accepted to take part. The transcript shows how Ritva tries to engage Siv to having an interest in Finnish numbers when she first asks Siv *Hur många?* (How many?) in Swedish and then confirms the actual number *fem* (five) in Swedish followed by the Finnish **viisi**. Ritva builds on Siv's earlier experience and knowledge of numeracy in Swedish when she translates to Finnish. As the event goes on, Ritva also translates concepts: *Fyra citroner* [four lemons], **neljä sitruunaa**. Ritva's intention of developing Siv's command of Finnish becomes apparent in this event.

The example shows the BP and the child carrying out a planned activity while the practitioner uses her pedagogical skills to teach Finnish. This example shows bilingual education of a formal nature during which the practitioner consciously switches between Swedish and Finnish. The result therefore concurs with earlier research showing how teachers' verbalisation in joint activities facilitates language learning (Björklund et al., 2014; Palviainen & Mård-Miettinen, 2015). The illustration also shows the participants directing their joint attention to the game, something that has been considered a basis for language learning (Gibbons, 2006; Lightbown & Spada, 2013).

7.5.3 Absence of Finnish Language Support and Discontinuity of Communicative Events

The results show that there are shortcomings in the continuity of the Finnish language activity (FLA) due to children resisting participation or if something else happened or was planned in the preschools. In the data, ten occasions of 1.5 h each week for one or several children were identified during which the language support failed due to the permanent schedule or because of other planned or unplanned events, such as sickness, excursions, teacher conferences or holidays. Although children in general willingly took part in adult-initiated communicative events, children sometimes resisted participation. In 11 out of 77 (10%) adult-initiated communicative events, a child resisted by verbally and/or bodily expressing his/her unwillingness to participate. When children resisted participation or when planned or unplanned events coincided with FLAs, this always resulted in Finnish language support being absent and thus failing. For an individual child, this could mean an absence of Finnish language support stretching over several weeks.

The transcript in Excerpt 7.5 shows how a child resists participation when the bilingual practitioner (BP), Ritva, initiates a conversation about food. The interaction is analysed as an adult-initiated communicative event. Ritva and Siv (aged 4 years) have just finished playing a game (see Excerpt 7.4). This conversation was in Swedish, with an English language translation provided.

Excerpt 7.5
Ritva places a picture of a plate with food on the table. The picture has been sent to the children's home to inspire talk in Finnish during mealtimes.

Ritva: *Har ni tittat på dessa bilder hemma?* [Have you looked at this picture at home?]

Siv: *Jag kan inte säga allt.* [I can't say all of it.]

The engagement and interest Siv showed during playing the game (see Excerpt 7.4) seem to have gone. Together Siv and Ritva look at the picture, and Ritva points at the picture while naming the objects in the picture in Finnish, but Siv is not interested. She turns her body away from the picture and refuses to look at it.

BP Ritva initiates a conversation about food. As support she places a picture with a plate with food on the table, and her educational intention becomes clear when she asks Siv if she had looked at the picture at home. Both Ritva and Siv look at the picture, but then Siv decides not to take part. She turns her body away from the picture, and Ritva's effort to name the food fails. In the analysis of this communicative event, it became apparent that the participants paid attention to different aspects. What seems to be vital and meaningful to the adult in this excerpt does not seem to be of equal importance for the child. Siv's action can be understood as resistance against participating in this event. This event might easily have been overlooked, but by framing it as a communicative event, it becomes clear that the participants focus their attention differently. The FLA is vulnerable: this discontinued communicative event shows that the task of creating FLAs is full of challenges such as achieving joint attention, which in turn is seen as vital for language development (Gibbons, 2006). This illustration also shows that children can exercise agency by providing resistance instead of acting as they are expected to, something which has also been shown in other studies (e.g. Björk-Willen, 2008).

7.5.4 FLA and Preschool Routines

The results show that the time slot available to the BP often determined the focus of the analysed communicative events. Since the BP came to the same preschool at the same time every week, the topics of the analysed communicative events were often the same. If the BP's visit coincided with breakfast or lunch, the focus often fell on the food, on how to pour a glass of milk, on what the bread is called in Finnish and so on. My observations show that 12 child-initiated and 15 adult-initiated communicative events during breakfast and lunch involved conversations about food. Talk during breakfast or lunch only seldom moved beyond the "here and now". If the BP came during reading sessions, the joint focus of the communicative events usually fell on the book and the pictures in the book. If the BP arrived during a time scheduled for activities, there were more opportunities to discuss a broader range of topics. Keeping in mind that language is intertwined with the sociocultural context (Rogoff, 2003), the findings of this study make visible the extent to which the FLAs' fixed schedule and preschool routines limit the children's opportunities for language learning. The conclusion is that routines during the days in preschool offer specific topics of conversation and that during mealtimes a limited repertoire of communicative events was created.

7.6 Discussion: Democratic Connections

The present study aimed at exploring Finnish language activities (FLAs) in the Swedish preschool context and how children of Finnish descent engage in bilingual communicative events. This study shows that the FLA is vulnerable to the influencing conditions in preschool, one being the timeframe, and how this, in turn, influence children of Finnish descents participation.

Despite the political decision in favour of promoting bilingualism in general, and the particular promotion of national minority languages in Swedish preschools, the results discussed here show that performing a FLA in everyday preschool settings is a challenging task. In relation to the preschools democratic foundation, these results are problematic and somewhat contradictory. The children don't always get what they are entitled to. Time plays a crucial role, as shown here, in determining when and how the FLA is executed. Because the bilingual practitioners (BPs) have a maximum of 1.5 h per week per child (sometimes several children) at their disposal, and because the activity is scheduled at the same time every week, the activity is also vulnerable in other ways. First, the FLA is vulnerable in relation to other activities and to participants' absence. Second, it is dependent on children's willingness to participate during the scheduled time. Third, due to the fixed times and routines of preschools, the activity provides limited opportunities to create communicative events across diverse situations.

In previous research, aspects such as the length of instruction and the distribution of time have been identified as significant in bilingual education as well as the impact of time on language outcomes (Lightbown, 2014). This raises questions about how the FLA is organised and how it supports children's Finnish language development in the long run. In other bilingual education, time seems to have been an important factor when a new language is learnt, where no less than 50% of instruction time is in the target language (Baker, 2001). Thus, the organisation of time is of relevance to the aim in language outcome, yet for the Finnish activity, there was no such aim.

In addition to the issue of time, it was evident that demands on children's participation increase during their participation in the FLAs, and the FLA appeared to be more instructional and goal-driven than other preschool activities. The analysis of the communicative events shows that older children were more frequently exposed to instructional communicative events (see Excerpts 7.4 and 7.5) that put high demands on the child's participation than is the case for younger children (see Excerpts 7.1, 7.2 and 7.3). Because of limitations in formulated local policy, and scheduling organisation, BPs have to make the best use of the time available to them, regardless of the expectations placed on the activity or on the children's future language outcomes.

Fishman (1991) and Baker (2001) stress that heritage languages cannot be transmitted through education alone; they need to be passed on to the next generation for long-term success. So, if the statutory rights of children of Finnish descent are to have meaning, the local policy must be clarified, and parents should be involved in

their children's Finnish language learning. To strengthen the FLA, more Finnish-speaking personnel are needed, and all preschool personnel need to develop their pedagogical skills in the area of bilingualism so that access to Finnish may be offered throughout the week and not just for the 1.5 h of the FLA.

7.7 Conclusion

The results of this study have implications for the pedagogy of all minority languages in Swedish preschools. Today, every fifth child in Sweden speaks more than one language. Irrespective of whether the target language is a national minority language, we can assume that preschools face similar challenges in providing minority language education in a majority language context.

The results of this study show that the FLA is *facilitated* by BPs' ability to respond to children's initiatives, employ language and use their pedagogical skills – whether segregated from or integrated into ordinary preschool activities. However, despite the BPs' ability to use language and to respond to children's initiatives, the FLA is vulnerable to the influencing conditions. This study highlights particular *conditions that influence* planned language activities in the preschool, including children's willingness to participate, other events in the preschools, the temporal organisation of the language activity and fixed routines in preschools. Children in Swedish preschools are able to exercise their democratic right to participate by taking initiatives of their own and sometimes resist participation. This democratic action of children adds to the complexity of language activity in practice; children have the statutory right to minority language support and the concurrent individual right to influence their engagement.

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Part III
Espoused and Enacted EC Pedagogical Practice

Chapter 8
Banning the "Incompetent Child" in Pedagogical Documentation and Discourse

Åsa Olsson

Abstract In this chapter, preschool teachers' understandings of competent children are explored. The chapter draws on data collected within a project aiming at improving quality in preschools through pedagogical documentation. The theoretical approach, social representations theory (SRT), addresses how groups of people construct, negotiate and maintain understandings of objects and phenomena important to the group. The data consists of focus group interviews and written documentation, involving approximately 50 preschool teachers in 18 preschool units. Key findings suggest that preschool teachers' shared views on competent children may be organised in three categories based on an essential, relational or an ideological perspective. All three perspectives of competent children involve risks of perception of some children's shortcomings. A conclusion is that the notion of the competent child may deprive the passive and quiet child of their participatory rights and thereby challenge democracy in preschool.

8.1 Introduction

"Children are very competent even at a very early age; one should remember that". The voice of a preschool teacher in 2017 expresses what is seemingly a core value in contemporary Swedish preschool: Children *are* competent. The idea is far from ground-breaking; rather it has been a general assumption about children for decades. In recent times, however, there has been an intensified emphasis on children's learning processes, skills and competences in preschool. Early childhood education plays an increasingly important role in shaping active, learning citizens. Simultaneously, pedagogical documentation is rapidly spreading throughout the Swedish preschool system, influenced by Reggio Emilia-inspired pedagogy where the notion of competent children is fundamental. In Swedish settings, however, pedagogical

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documentation is not necessarily associated with emancipation, empowerment and democracy. Rather, it is put forth as a tool for developing quality in preschool and for evaluating children's learning processes (SFS, 2010:800; Swedish National Agency for Education, 2016). This calls for a deeper understanding of what is meant by competent children in a context. Moreover, questions are raised of whether "less competent children" risk becoming invisible in the pedagogical documentation, thereby depriving their participatory rights, declared in the *UN Convention on the Rights of the Child* (United Nations, 1989).

This chapter draws on data collected within a project aiming at improving quality in preschools by implementing a method for pedagogical documentation. The project was carried out in a mid-sized community in Sweden, in 2016–2017, with 18 preschool units including approximately 50 participating preschool teachers (heads of preschools included). In brief, teacher teams in the project video-recorded daily activities in their preschool, then watched the recordings together and engaged in a conversation on given themes, such as "children's learning" or "children's participation". Finally, the teachers collaboratively documented conclusions and plans for further development. In the project, teachers would frequently refer to competent children, regardless of theme or topic. Along the process, the notion stood out as a core value in the 18 participating preschool units. Questions arose about what the notion of "competent children" involved and how preschool teachers in the particular settings constructed children as competent. Thus, this chapter aims at exploring preschool teachers' shared understandings of competent children in a Swedish context, relating to dimension A (historical perspectives) and dimension C (intentional practices) of the model of democracy in ECE by Hägglund, Löfdahl Hultman and Thelander (2017). Furthermore, the aim is to reflect upon how these shared understandings may affect children's opportunities for participation in preschool.

8.2 Pedagogical Documentation Perspectives

Pedagogical documentation has its origin in the Reggio Emilia pedagogy (Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence, 2013). To understand the ideas behind pedagogical documentation, one needs to acknowledge the particular circumstances in which the Reggio Emilia pedagogy was developed, according to Dahlberg et al. With World War II fresh in memory, the pioneers of Reggio Emilia wanted to secure a democratic society and contribute to a better world. The intention was that children should be fostered into independent, critically thinking future citizens. Pedagogical documentation was developed as a process of reciprocal learning and a procedure that would make adult and child interaction visible and improve the quality of interaction and communication, according to Rinaldi (2006). Hence, preschool was to be a place where children and teachers would meet, explore the world and learn together (Dahlberg et al., 2013). In this context, pedagogical documentation was associated with democratic values, emancipation and empowerment.

Some background factors need to be addressed to understand the Swedish context in which pedagogical documentation takes place. Pedagogical documentation was implemented in Sweden by a group of researchers in the early 1990s (Barsotti, Dahlberg, Göthson, & Åsén, 1992; Dahlberg et al., 2013). One of their ambitions was to replace traditions in preschool to assess and evaluate individual children from a psychological development perspective, with Reggio Emilia-inspired pedagogical documentation, the latter aiming at developing cooperative learning methods in preschool (Lenz Taguchi, 2000). The *Swedish Education Act* (SFS, 2010:800) stipulates that "the quality of the preschool shall be regularly and systematically documented, followed up, evaluated and developed" (p. 14), in order to provide the best possible conditions for learning and development for each child. In guidelines published by the Swedish National Agency for Education (Palmer, 2012), pedagogical documentation is suggested as a useful method for documentation and evaluation. According to the curriculum for preschool (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2016), the aim is to evaluate and improve the quality of preschool, not to assess individual children's achievements. According to Dahlberg et al. (2013), pedagogical documentation refers to both process and content. Content includes, for example, the work of children and other materials recording children's sayings and doings. The process of pedagogical documentation is about visualising and learning from the content. These processes can contribute to self-reflexivity with the potential to reveal social constructions in preschool and to broaden the understanding of why things are done the way they are. These acts of interpretation include, according to Dahlberg et al., exercising power and control, which stresses the importance of reflecting not only on children's doings but also on ethics and democratic aims. A challenge for preschool, according to Sheridan, Williams and Sandberg (2013), is for teachers to apply methods and approaches to gain knowledge of children's learning processes without making value judgments about individual children. Nevertheless, research has shown that pedagogical documentation is still often used as a method to evaluate individual children's learning, contrary to the intention in the curriculum (Lager, 2015).

Another issue that has been raised by researchers (Bjervås, 2011; Dahlberg & Elfström, 2014) is what pedagogical documentation becomes, out of its theoretical and ideological framework. Goals to improve quality in preschool are associated not only with providing the best opportunity for children but also with proving and improving effectiveness and capacities to fulfil national goals. Hence, Dahlberg et al. (2013) raise a question about whether pedagogical documentation in the Swedish context implies a preschool aiming at educating effective, flexible entrepreneurs in a neoliberal context. A similar concern is expressed by Bjervås (2011) who claims that the great interest for pedagogical documentation in Sweden is nurtured by the idea of lifelong learning. The desirable learning citizen is active, capable, flexible, informed and responsible. Consequently, it is important for all children to be equipped with a broad, general knowledge base for present and future needs, according to Bjervås (2011). In her study, teachers described pedagogical documentation as a tool which enabled the children to show themselves as competent and to further develop their competences. In summary, some concerns are articulated about

whether there is a risk that pedagogical documentation becomes a performative arena for competent children. In the next section, different perspectives and previous research on competent children are presented.

8.3 Competent Children Discourses

Ideas about competent children are fundamental in Reggio Emilia pedagogy. According to Reggio Emilia pedagogy, all children are born as active subjects with capacities and urges from birth to make meaning of life and of the world, in interaction with others (Rinaldi, 2006). A fundamental principle, expressed by Loris Malaguzzi, founder of the Reggio Emilia pedagogy, is the image of a child who right from the moment of birth is "a competent, active, critical child" (Rinaldi, 2006, p. 86). This child is a person and a subject, according to Rinaldi (2001), full of curiosity, desire and ability to communicate from the start of his or her life: "To us, the child is a producer of culture, values, and rights, competent in learning and competent in communicating with all the hundred languages" (p. 51). Therefore, the competent child may sometimes be seen as a challenge and in some ways troublesome, according to Rinaldi.

In the 1990s, along with the development and adoption of the *UN Convention on the Rights of the Child* (United Nations, 1989), ideas arose within social studies of childhood about competence as a general capacity or potentiality within all children. In the mid-1990s, Hutchby and Moran-Ellis (1998) declared that a "competence paradigm in the sociology of childhood" (p. 8) had emerged, which sought to clearly view children as social agents in their own right. The notion gradually also spread among policymakers and practitioners. Within the competence paradigm, researchers sought to elucidate the children's social competences in everyday lives in interaction with other children and with adults. In the early millennium, Brembeck, Johansson and Kampmann (2004) claimed it was time to reach beyond the notion of the competent child and to challenge the "one-sided celebration of this child" (p. 9). Yet the notion prevails, supported by contemporary ideas about lifelong learning, according to Bjervås (2011).

8.3.1 Children's Competence as Individual Capacities

Several attempts have been made to elaborate the understandings of the competent child. A major part of international research seems to relate children's competence to didactic objectives such as mathematics or language skills (see, e.g. Curby, Brown, Bassett, & Denham, 2015; Hildenbrand, Niklas, Cohrssen, & Tayler, 2017) or to specific programmes or interventions aiming at developing certain competences (see, e.g. Theobald, 2012; Yazici, 2017). Other researchers have explored certain aspects of children's competence. Alvestad (2010) pointed out that the field

is dominated by research concerning cultural, social and personal competence, and in his own research, he focused on children's negotiation competences. The study showed that the children who played a lot with other children were the most competent in negotiations. One explanation was that children who played together often had a common focus and joint intentions, as they shared emotional conditions in their play and negotiations. Another research project focusing on particular aspects of competence was carried out by Vredenburgh and Kushnir (2016), who studied preschool children's strategies in searching for information needed to solve problems, for example, when they needed help to assemble a toy. The results provided support for viewing children's help-seeking as an information-gathering activity, indicating that preschool children flexibly adjust the level and amount of assistance to optimise their opportunities for learning. These studies are examples of research that put focus on particular aspects of children's competence as individual capacities.

8.3.2 Understandings of the Concept of Competence

Another research, particularly in Northern Europe, attempts to problematise the concept of competence and to identify different understandings and aspects of it. Sommer (2005) suggested that children's competences can be defined first as a potential, second as developed skills and third as children's observable actions and achievements. Ellegaard (2004) identified characteristics of the notion of the competent child as the children being seen as social actors, equal to adults, as "beings" rather than "becomings" (p. 178) and competent rather than not yet fully competent. Ellegaard argued that the discourse of the competent child was mixed up with other discourses and forms of practice in relation to children and institutions. Sommer, Pramling Samuelsson and Hundeide (2013) raised the importance of preschool teachers' approaches to competence and suggested a "child perspective paradigm" (p. 461), a pedagogy that acknowledges children's experiences, views and actions. Such an approach requires children to be seen as actors and cocreators in learning processes in interactions with others.

The discourse about competent children appeared explicitly in parent- teacher conferences in Bjervås' (2011) research. The two preschools where the study was carried out used pedagogical documentation as a means to plan and evaluate activities. In the analysis, Bjervås recognised that the teachers placed competence within the children and that they would accredit quite advanced capacities to very young children. Children as young as 1–2 years old were described as actors with abilities to interact with others and contribute to their own and to peers' learning. Bjervås concluded that the notion of competent children was taken for granted and could be understood as preschool teachers' ideological position. In Lillvist, Sandberg, Björck-Åkesson and Granlund's (2009) research, the aim was to find out if and how preschool teachers' definitions of social competence are related to factors in the preschool environment. Preschool teachers in the study defined social competence

as intrapersonal skills such as interaction, empathy and communication, showing that skills within the individual as well as in the social environment are included in the definition of social competence. Furthermore, statements emphasising the importance of problem and conflict solving were identified as subcategories of social competence. In the presented studies, intrapersonal aspects of competence are acknowledged, as is the impact of the environment. Hence, competence is not regarded solely as an individual asset but rather as social phenomenon.

8.3.3 Critical Aspects on Competent Children

In a sociometric study, Jonsdottir (2007) asked preschool children about their friends and related the data to preschool teachers' estimations of the children's social skills. The analysis indicated that children who had close friends were seen as the most competent. The teachers described popular children as confident, curious, happy and social, while children with no friends were considered moody and less competent. One of Jonsdottir's conclusions was that the discourse about competent children did not include all children. According to Franck and Nilsen (2015), the discourse of the competent child has become intertwined with a discourse of early intervention. The researchers explored descriptions of children who failed to meet certain expectations and standards of competence. The construction of a "normal child" in Norwegian/Nordic context outlines a social, independent, self-controlled child with a positive attitude. The researchers claimed that since not all children are considered socially competent, some children become a matter of concern as potentially deviating from the norm. Franck and Nilsen identified some subject positions that legitimise constructions of children as potentially deviating. Examples given of such positions were socially incompetent children as a risk to other children, dependent and passive children and immature or disordered children. The notion about children as competent actors per se calls for cautiousness, the researchers argue, since it produces subject positions of deviance in which some children become "othered". Kalliala (2014) challenges the overgeneralisations of the powerful discourse of competent children in the ECE field. In her research, she found the same children to be both competent and strong in some respects and vulnerable and needy in others. Kalliala concluded that there is a risk that preschool teachers who have adopted the paradigm of the competent child will face contradictions between this paradigm and practice, where they would find both more and less competent children. These researchers bring attention to less favourable aspects of the concept. The idea of competent children seems not necessarily to be applicable to all children at all times, and it may even include drawbacks for some children. This chapter further explores whether the idea of competent children may counteract inclusion and diversity and thereby challenge democracy in preschool.

8.4 Methodology

The aim of this chapter is to explore preschool teachers' shared understandings of competent children in a Swedish context. A theoretical approach appropriate to study preschool teachers' shared understandings is social representations theory (SRT), first introduced by Moscovici (2001). The theory addresses how groups of people construct, negotiate and maintain understandings and common knowledge about phenomena relevant to the group. In contrast to social cognitive approaches, it is presupposed that an object is social not by virtue of some immanent characteristics but by virtue of the way people relate to it (Wagner et al., 1999). SRT investigates how ideological concepts become common knowledge in everyday life (Passini & Emiliani, 2009). The social representation in focus in the chapter is the competent child, and the aim is to analyse the ensemble of thoughts and feelings expressed by preschool teachers, which constitutes the competent child.

Focus group interviews are considered an appropriate method for collecting data in SRT studies. The empirical material in this study consists of focus group interviews with 9 of the 18 participating teacher teams and of written documentations from a total of 72 learning dialogues. Ethical aspects were taken into account, such as requesting informed consent and securing participants' confidentiality, in accordance with the guidelines for research as described by the Swedish Research Council. In the focus group interviews, the teacher teams' written documentation was used as stimulus material. Data was analysed at a group level, and, in a first step, a content analysis was carried out. The content analysis involved marking all statements in the transcripts of the interviews, as well as in the written documentation, which contained remarks about competent children. In a second step of the analysis, statements were organised in clusters based on similarity. In a third step, themes and categories with subcategories emerged.

8.5 Findings: Understandings of Competent Children in Pedagogical Documentation

The results presented are based on the analysis of written documents and of group interviews with preschool teachers in their working teams. The analysis was carried out at a group level and includes all participating units. Some quotes are chosen to illustrate particular themes, categories and subcategories. The total of statements in the different subcategories varies, but the main purpose is not to tell which one is the most common, but to illustrate a variety in the empiric material.

8.5.1 Three Perspectives of Competence Development

Aligning with Bjervås' (2011) research, several preschool teachers in this study placed competence within the child. Competence was described as a feature of all children to various degrees, either as a capacity from birth or as gradually developed abilities and traits. The preschool teachers stated:

> *Children are competent. All children carry their own backpack of experiences and impressions.*
>
> *Children ARE very competent even at a very early age; one should remember that. You can see that already when they are tiny.*

Moreover, competence was regarded as a driving force within children, associated with dispositions such as curiosity and determination:

> *An active child. A power within the child demonstrating that it is competent.*
>
> *Children who want to explore the world and be curious.*

Although competence was placed within the child, teachers would in some cases describe it as potential, as defined by Sommer (2005), rather than as abilities and resources in the present.

> *All children are competent; every individual is regarded as competent in relation to its own potential and capacity.*
>
> *The child is like a seed that develops together with me. The child fills with knowledge and grows into a flower.*

Thus, competence understood as internal in the individual child was described as either an innate or an achieved quality, a driving force; or it was described as a potential, something that could be developed. An even more common position was that children's competence relied on the teacher. Preschool teachers reflected on their responsibility for arranging learning situations and settings which provide opportunities for children to be competent. In this perspective, competence was rather seen as a relational phenomenon than an individual one:

> *We want to facilitate for children to be competent, we need to be active and present and ask questions appropriate for the children's interest and competence.*
>
> *We [the preschool teachers] must be attentive and listen to the children and cherish their competence. Ask further questions, encourage their own reasoning and thinking. We supply the tools the children need.*
>
> *We find things out together. As an adult one learns a lot about the child in the process.*
>
> *Children become competent through learning alongside others in preschool.*

Hence, competence either develops in mutual relationships with other children and with teachers in cooperative learning processes or on the other hand because of the teachers offering tools and opportunities for children to develop competence. Furthermore, several preschool teachers addressed the notion of competent children as a position or a commitment. From this perspective, it was a responsibility for the teachers to regard and meet all children as competent, which to some degree placed the competence of the child within the teachers themselves:

Our approach in our daily activities is always that we believe in the children.
As teachers we need to broaden our views and see the child, its competence and what they are capable of.

The participants expressed that children's competence is closely tied to preschool teachers' work. As teachers, they are dedicated to believing in the children, they are committed to the idea of competent children and they regard it as a moral obligation to expect all children to act competent in daily life.

8.5.2 Practice Indicators of Child Competence

As noted in Sect. 8.5.1, the analysis of the empirical material in this study indicated that preschool teachers' shared views on competent children may be organised in the three categories of individual, relational and ideological perspective. Within these three perspective groups, the analysis revealed a total of seven subgroups which indicated how competence was viewed in practice. These seven indicators, with connection to three perspectives, are shown in Fig. 8.1.

Teacher teams within the study often shared a common understanding of children's competence with an emphasis on one of the three main perspective categories. However, the preschool teachers' common understandings of competent children were not limited to one single category. The teacher teams generally referred to multiple understandings of competence, across the seven different subcategories, when they discussed or collaborated in documentation and development goals.

Views on competence	**Practice indicators**
Competence is within the child - *essential view*	1. Knowledge, skills
	2. Driving force, spirit
	3. Potential
Competence is co-constructed – *relational view*	4. Collaborative learning
	5. Teacher facilitation
Competence as teachers' ideal – *ideological view*	6. Approach, commitment
	7. Statement, value

Fig. 8.1 Categorisation of preschool teachers' views on competent children

The essential view on children's competence includes three subcategories which teachers linked to in their discussions. Competence was described as:

1. Innate capacities such as knowledge, skills and abilities that children possess as well as achieved experiences. These capacities might very well develop, but the main point is that competence is an essential feature of all children, from birth.
2. Children's driving forces, described in terms of active, curious, explorative and adventurous children who would initiate play and who interacted with others.
3. A potential illustrated as a seed that would eventually develop into a plant, and from this point of view, all children had the possibility to develop their own competence in different settings.

The relational view included two subcategories in the teacher discussion.

4. In one subcategory, cooperative learning was emphasised where children learn in interaction with others and in the process become competent. The common understanding was that children learn from each other. Only a few comments were sorted into the subcategory "learning together", where teacher described mutual learning processes in which teachers would discover things together with children and learn from children.
5. From a slightly different angle, several preschool teachers regarded it their own responsibility to provide the right material and environment for the child and to challenge and stimulate children to feel competent and to develop competence.

The ideological view was about preschools taking a stand for the ideal of the competent child and included two subcategories. Either preschool teachers would:

6. Be committed to approaching all children as competent and believing in and respecting their competences in relation to their age, or
7. Preschool teachers would simply declare the standpoint that children are competent, with no need for further arguments, similar to a manifesto. The perspective appeared as a non-questionable value in preschool.

Again, it is important to stress that the different categories and subcategories were not exclusive and that teacher teams would move over several categories in their views. The categories and subcategories serve primarily to illustrate a variety of understandings of the concept competent children. Furthermore, it is important to recall that the categories with subcategories represent statements about competent children in the teacher teams' pedagogical documentation that do not necessarily reflect their everyday actions and approaches in preschools.

8.5.3 What About Incompetent Children?

When a question was asked about whether there were any *incompetent* children in preschool, answers were negative; all children were to some degree competent. When I repeated the question with further emphasis, teachers in two of the groups

suggested that sometimes it was the case that the parent "made" their children incompetent by expecting too little from them. In one of the two groups, the teacher team wrote the following in the documentation as a development goal: "We want to make parents aware of their children's competence", suggesting that parents underestimated their children and deprived their children of opportunities to be or become competent. In the other of the two groups, examples were given of situations when parents intervened and did things for their children that the children could do themselves, like buttoning or zipping up clothes and so forth. One of the teachers told about a boy who "was not supposed to be competent" by his parents, since they preferred to do everything for him. These stories were not really of incompetent children, rather of parents not encouraging their children to try for themselves. As for evidence of incompetent children, there was none in the empirical material, whatsoever. The notion of incompetent children seemed to be unthinkable; the incompetent child did not exist in preschool.

8.6 Discussion and Conclusion

There was obviously a strong reluctance among preschool teachers in the project to speak of incompetent children. The mere thought seemed to provoke teachers. But what would have been gained if they had suggested the existence of incompetent children in preschool? Perhaps nothing good would come out of it, yet let us for a moment reflect upon whether the image of competent children could in fact be a drawback for some children? A closer look at how competent children are portrayed by some preschool teachers in the study reveals great expectations:

> *(The competent child has) '… an inner force, curiosity, willpower, joy of discovery and social competence'.*
>
> *(The competent child is) '… socially competent, communicative, motorically competent, and creative in play, problem-solving …'.*
>
> *'An active child. A power within the child demonstrating their competence'.*

Added up, these quotes suggest an image of a "super child", hard for any child to measure up to. In the 72 written documents analysed in this study, hardly any evidence of children's shortcomings was given. Children's learning and participation were described in favourable terms telling about active children trying themselves, helping each other, communicating with peers and teachers and initiating play, activities and learning. Hence, in the pedagogical documentation in the project, the actions of competent children were highlighted and praised. According to Vallberg Roth and Månsson (2010), emphasis in pedagogical documentation tends to be placed on the competent, social and learning child rather than on the dependent and needy child. Children in their study who demonstrated less obvious competence were to a degree made invisible in the documentation. A similar conclusion was drawn by Kalliala (2014) who in her research found that pedagogy of participation

and the paradigm of the competent children in preschool may very well silence children who did not match the image.

The pedagogues who introduced pedagogical documentation in Sweden in the early 1990s distanced themselves from the regime of assessing individual children in relation to developmental psychology (Lenz Taguchi, 2000; Sheridan et al., 2013), which was assumed to provide a static, normative view of children. The ambition was to replace these traditions with Reggio Emilia-inspired pedagogical documentation (Barsotti et al., 1992; Dahlberg et al., 2013). Yet, the prewritten map about competent children in pedagogical documentation may be equally powerful as a regulator, Olsson (2009) claims. In the twenty-first century, pedagogical documentation is part of systematic quality development in Swedish preschool. Any evidence of competent children in the documentation will confirm quality in preschools' performance and development. Consequently, teacher may very well point the searchlight on actions of those children who appear as the most competent.

Both the essential and the ideological perspectives on competent children may contribute to a static and one-sided view, where all children are considered competent, either by birth or due to teachers' commitment. From the relational perspective, teachers may pay special attention to active and communicative children. All three viewpoints involve risks that passive or needy children are left out of the pedagogical documentation. Furthermore, the social and communicative children may more often be invited to participate and influence activities in preschool than other children. Similarly, curious and explorative children may more frequently interact with and be challenged by preschool teachers. Thus, the notion of the competent child may very well leave the passive and quiet child in the shadows. Thereby, there is a risk that the notion of the competent child may deprive some children the opportunities for social and political participation, counteract diversity and ultimately challenge democracy in preschool.

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Chapter 9
Parent-Teacher-Child Communication and Advocacy: A Community Intervention

Snezhana Radeva, Iliana Mirtschewa, and Deyan Velkovski

Abstract This chapter will showcase a democratic educational intervention model based in Bulgaria that guarantees the right to education for all children regardless of language or socio-economic background. The model emphasises parents' engagement, by developing good levels of communication between parents and teachers and appointing parents with active roles in the early education process. By advocating for equal access to education in the community, we could shift opinion of parents and build trust in the early educational system. The chapter will end with a comparison of the acquired knowledge of children from centres that engaged with our intervention support model and those that use a regular public pre-school.

9.1 Bulgaria and Early Childhood Development

In recent decades, a great deal of investment has been allocated towards research and the advantages of investing in human resource development. Parents, policymakers, business leaders, and the general public increasingly recognise the importance of the first few years in the life of a child for promoting healthy physical, emotional, social, and intellectual development (Karoly, Kilburn, & Cannon, 2005). This has played a huge role in the quality of care, starting before birth and continuing throughout the early years of development. Although the biological potential is different for every person, evidence shows that children from disadvantaged families face multiple risk factors that affect their chance to survive and thrive (Britto, Engle, & Super, 2013). During the period of yearly childhood development, where

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the importance of supporting personal development is the greatest, the essential caregivers for these children also need qualitative support to allow their children to fulfil their potential. All families need quality support, even more so those who are raising their children in stressful and poor environments. The biggest threats are extreme poverty, insecurity, gender inequities, violence, environmental toxins, and poor mental health. All of these things affect caregivers – by which we mean parents, families, and other people who look after children. The threats reduce these caregivers' capacity to protect, support, and promote young children's development.

As a member state of the European Union, Bulgaria is obliged to carry out early childhood development policies guaranteeing the observance of the *Convention of the Rights of the Child* (United Nations, 1989), as well as General Commentary No. 7 of 2005 of the United Nations (UN) Child Rights Protection Commission on the implementation of child rights in early childhood, and to offer optimal opportunities for sustainable development of each person. In addition to that during the last few months, WHO, UNICEF, and the World Bank, in collaboration with the Partnership for Maternal, Newborn & Child Health, the Early Childhood Development Action Network, and many other partners, developed The Nurturing Care Framework.

At the same time, Bulgaria is the poorest country in the European Union, where 4% of its GDP is allocated to education and hitting 2.5% on several occasions during the last 20 years (World Bank, 2017), with a minimal wage of 235 Euros per month with which people barely can cover their basic needs. As the youngest member of the European Union, the country receives strong support to ensure favourable conditions for the development of each child, but the implementation of the adopted Goals for Sustainable Development in September 2017 appears to be an impossible challenge even with the support from the European Community.

UNICEF Bulgaria, who for more than 10 years has worked to provide convincing arguments in defence of children's rights, has also extremely important role in emphasising the importance of early childhood development as a crucial part of the human development. The introduced programmes and activities as part of child advocacy emphasise that investing in early childhood development is one of the best investments a country can make to boost economic growth, promote peaceful and sustainable societies, and eliminate extreme poverty and inequality. Equally important, investing in early childhood development is necessary to uphold the right of every child to thrive and succeed in life and we are happy to see that such ideas are starting to influence national policies and practices. This chapter provides an example of how the different dimensions in the theoretical model of democracy may function together to strengthen democracy in early childhood education. As societal views on all children's rights to education change, new education agendas develop, and responsive practices emerge. This positively impacts on children's participation and education. Further challenges to democracy faced in the Bulgarian education system will be elaborated in this chapter.

9.2 Access to Early Education and Care

In the past few years, Bulgaria undertook a reform in the area of education. The new "Preschool and School Act" (2015) provides an inclusive approach to education by advocating the child's personal development, taking into account its individual needs and resources. Despite that their democratic right for education is guaranteed by law, there are serious challenges that remain, particularly in reducing the equality gap for the most vulnerable children and adolescents in the country.

9.2.1 Access to Education

Bulgarian educational systems begin when a child is 3 years of age, and it is compulsory from the age of 5 to 16. Compulsory public education is free which means that the education service, facilities for learning, and state exams are free of charge. The European strategy by 2020 from Barcelona recommends that at least 90% of the children between 3 and 6 years of age actively participated. The high percentage of enrolled children, in Bulgaria, 82%, is a result of the 2-year compulsory pre-school education requirement, which was introduced in 2006 for children 5 and 6 years of age, as a measure for guaranteeing children an equal start and reducing the number of early school dropouts. The two forms of pre-school education in Bulgaria are summarised in Fig. 9.1 and discussed in this section.

Pre-school education in Bulgaria is free of charge from the 5th year of age but only in school preparatory groups. These school preparation groups provide children with access to education every work day throughout the school year for up to 3 astronomical hours. A group consists of 22 children on average, and the activities focused mostly on numeracy and literacy.

In kindergarten: paid	In school: free
Whole-day stay (up to 12 hours). Children enrolled in kindergarten at 3 years of age benefit from it. Parents pay a monthly fee of up to 15% of the minimal monthly salary) The amount of the monthly charge is determined by decision of the Municipal Council. It covers two main meals and two snacks, as well as the expenses for afternoon rest (sleep).	3-hour daily stay with preparatory school group (for 5 and 6-year old children).

Fig. 9.1 Compulsory pre-school forms in Bulgaria

In addition to the pre-school preparation groups in schools, another service that is authorised to offer pre-school education in Bulgaria is the kindergarten. Children of 2–7 years of age have access to education and care in Bulgarian kindergartens. Children are grouped by age, and one group consists of about 30 children on average. Kindergarten is not free, and parents pay on average 15% of the minimum wage for one child per month. Usually, in order for the child to get into kindergarten, application is required a year prior. The lack of places for children in kindergartens accounts for the introduction of a selection system, and priority is given to the children of permanently working parents. In addition, the need to pay a monthly charge for attending a kindergarten reflects primarily on the most vulnerable children, who are most at risk of lacking conditions to develop their potential. Research by Zahariev and Jordanov (2014) shows that the intake of children to pre-school is lowest for those from unequal situations: from very poor and marginalised communities, with uneducated or of low-education parents, and from the deep countryside and of Roma background. For example, only 29.4% of 3- to 6-year-olds living in villages and only 31% of Roma children attend kindergarten (Zahariev & Jordanov, 2014). A 2011 survey conducted in Bulgaria by the UNDP/World Bank/EC regional Roma concluded that although "75% of all children aged 3–6 are in preschool the large majority of disadvantaged children are not" (World Bank, 2017). The results of the research show that it is necessary to improve the opportunities for practical realisation in order to meet the needs of early education and childcare in the context of democracy of early childhood education. To ensure the democratic right of every child to participate in ECE, it is possible to introduce flexible forms of ECE for decentralised education and to enable municipalities to open centres for the interpretation and development of national curriculum or for engaging in experimentation in particular what Roberto Unger calls "democratic experimentalism".

9.2.2 Daily Routine in Kindergartens

The education model in Bulgaria is strictly centralised. Educational establishments stick to a fixed daily routine, and kindergartens offer academic-type curricula. Every school day teachers present children with educational situations that last for about 20 min for the 3- to 4-year-olds and 30 min for the 5- to 6-year-olds. The strict curriculum consists of language, mathematics, science, social studies, music, and fine arts and follows the ordinance of early childhood education.

In a UNICEF-led study of the quality of the environment in kindergartens, several kindergartens from different regions were evaluated. The environment was evaluated using the ECERS-3 scale (Harms, Clifford, & Cryer, 2014).

With regard to the UNICEF study, several recommendations were made:

– Kindergartens need to include more materials in the daily environment, and those materials also need to promote diversity as an important value too, and also they must be adequate to the interests of children.

– Kindergartens need to organise the work process in a democratic way, where children are active participants in day-to-day planning.

9.2.3 Parents' Engagement

Usually parents have limited access to the child's everyday life in the kindergarten or school. It is necessary to develop opportunities for parents to be involved as real partners in the educational process; furthermore they need to be involved in decision-making that is related to the education of their children. Right now they only participate so much as to agree if a decision has to be made whether the child is involved in any activities such as classes of interests and field trips or receiving additional support if they have special educational needs. There is no practice of parents and teachers planning together steps for the child's development, discussing strengths or difficulties.

9.3 Early Childhood Development Supporting Policies

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. Comprehensive personal development is a concept that tries to capture an overarching aim for all the child's learning and experiences (Ringsmose & Kragh-Müller, 2017). There are numerous data showing that public policies and programmes are aiming simultaneously at overcoming and reducing the risks for a child's optimal development and strengthening the factors that facilitate highest potential for improving children's well-being in both short-term and long-term aspects. While still more often associated with the environment, sustainability has more recently taken on a broader meaning which includes social, economic, and environmental factors (Vann, 2015) all of which are interrelated. A study published by Lancet (Black et al., 2017) proves that laws and policies can improve childhood development by increasing access to and quality of early childhood development services, as well as money and time for parents to provide nurturing care for their young children. The effect of public programmes is greatest on children in vulnerable situations.

In order to achieve this improvement effect, programmes should focus upon providing opportunities for inclusion for all including those who mostly need them and gradually be expanded to include families and communities of better resources. A well-planned and purposeful intervention can contribute to compensating the developmental inequalities brought about by unfavourable surroundings or the presence of biological risks, providing opportunities for expanding one's inborn capacity.

9.4 Early Intervention Programme

In 2014 a UNICEF initiative in partnership with municipality of Sliven region launched a service that provides early education and care for children from poor and marginalised background. Children aged 2–4 and their families have the opportunity, together with intermediaries or facilitators working in the centre, to invest in early childhood development and to build up their parenting skills. The aim is for children from 2 to 4 years of age and their parents to use the Social and Education Support Center, where specialist facilitates learning and cooperation between parents and children. The next paragraph describes the service, the focus of the programme, and its goals.

9.4.1 Choice of Location for the Execution of the Programme

The programme was piloted in 1 (Sliven region) of the 28 administrative regions in the country of Bulgaria. The municipality was chosen according to National Statistics Institute's data. This is the region with the highest child mortality rate, among the regions with a high percentage of families with the lowest kindergarten child inclusion. There is only one kindergarten and 40% children study there. Some of the reasons for the lower reach of children in the garden may be monthly fees, teachers' "attitudes", and the different parents' socio-economic status. Moreover, in the municipality where the programme was implemented, 20% of the children drop out of school before their 6th grade.

According to research conducted for the same region, the level of education of the mother influences considerably the educational achievements of the children (Mirtschewa, Dzhambazova, Radeva, & Velkovski, 2017).

The black joined line of Fig. 9.2 represents the distribution of the former generation – the mothers of mother-respondents who participated in the research. The grey separated line represents the level of education of mothers – respondents. The graph shows that there is considerable positive correlation between the level of education of the mother and the educational achievements of the next generation. It has been found out that there are rare cases, rather exceptions, when the education levels of the mother and the child differ considerably, which leads to the necessity of introducing effective measures to support students whose mothers' education levels are low. Parents' level of education influences strongly the attitude of children studies, their interests, as well as their school attendance.

More than half of the parents participating in the programme have not completed their secondary education, as illustrated in Fig. 9.3 (Bulgarian education levels are primary education, from 1st to 4th grade; secondary, from 5th to 7th grade; and high school, from 8th to 12th grade). These families may, for example, pick up herbs and mushrooms in spring and autumn for a living, most often having no income in winter. Looking for income, some of those families often move from place to place.

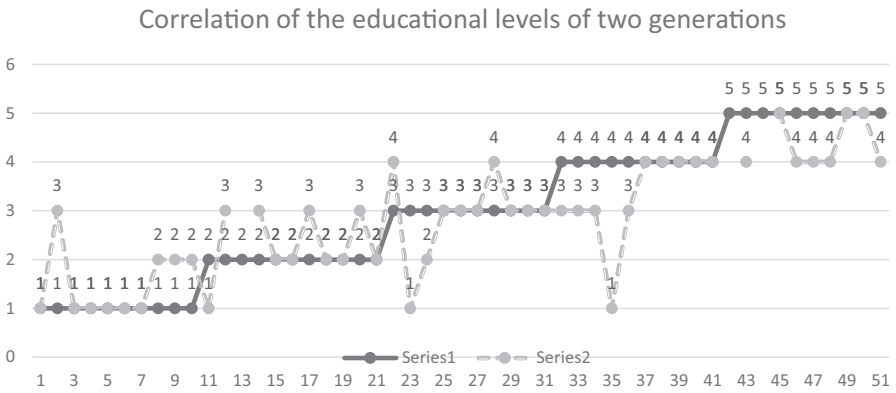
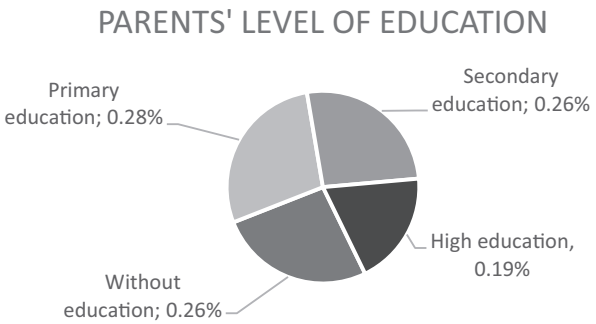


Fig. 9.2 Correlation of the educational levels of two generations, research in Sliven region

Fig. 9.3 The educational level of the parents who participated in the programme



The selected families eligible to participate in the programme were visited at their home, and during that visit the *Home Inventory Environmental Assessment* (Bradley & Caldwell, 1979) was applied; 96 families were visited in total, and the following results were registered: there is a lack of toys in the visited families 89% of them do not have any toys even including handcrafted toys that could be made from available materials, they had no pencils, or childrens' books.

Positive resources of families: Children and parents spend a lot of time together during the winter months; furthermore children have constant contact with their grandparents. Thus the attachment between parents (close relatives) and children is strong, which is extremely important and is a prerequisite for partnership and cooperation.

During the Home Inventory visit, the researchers are welcomed warmly by the families; one positive aspect that they all share is the desire for their children to get a good education.

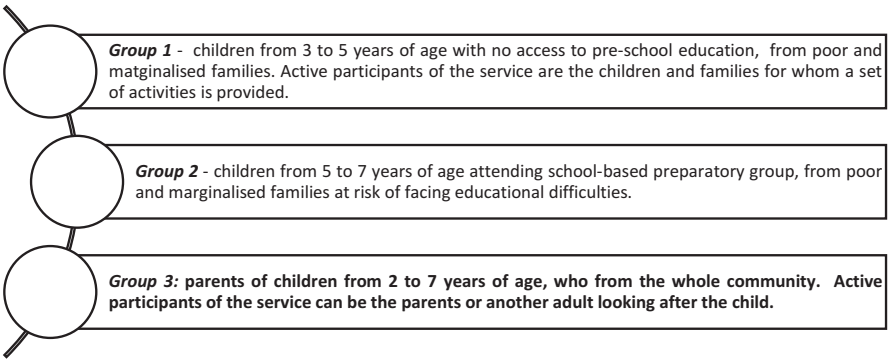


Fig. 9.4 Different groups engaging in the intervention programme

9.4.2 Social and Education Support Center

The Social and Education Support Center is a social and education service providing an organised environment which stimulates the complete development of the potential of every child with no access to pre-school education for social economic reasons or because of lacking educational infrastructure. The aim of the centre is to ensure the democratic right of access to education with active participation. Both the participation of the parents and active communication with the community are one of the main focuses for identifying activities in the model. There is an organised environment in the centre close to the kindergarten one in rhythm and content of activities, which stimulates the personal development of children and their families by building up skills for equal participation in the next educational stages. Children attend activities at the centre for 4 h every working day and have two meals a day – breakfast and lunch – and one snack. Figure 9.4 illustrates different groups of children and families using the support centre services.

9.4.3 Benefits for Different Groups Engaging in the Intervention Programme

9.4.3.1 Children

Key aims to be achieved through activities involving 3- and 4-year-old children included:

– Formation of knowledge, skills, and attitudes expected to have been acquired by the end of that age period in the main educational fields. In Bulgaria there are established standards for required education contents to be achieved by children during their pre-school education (Ordinance № 5, Ministry of Education).

- Increasing the active and passive vocabulary in the official language. Almost all children in the programme speak a language different from Bulgarian in their homes.
- Formation of self-service habits and acquisition of socially acceptable for a preschool institution behaviour.
- Supporting the deployment of children's potential for learning and full participation in subsequent educational stages. Achievement of age-appropriate knowledge with accordance to ordinance standards for pre-primary education.
- Supporting the child in learning Bulgarian language through different activities. The age range from 3 to 5 years is crucial to the initial acquisition of the literary standard of the basic second, not foreign, language which makes it possible to build up knowledge and skills in all other fields of studies taught in the official language (McLachlan & Arrow, 2017).
- The activities in which parents were included in the model were a key factor for the success of its goals.
- Preserving and exploring the cultural identity of children

9.4.3.2 The Centre Staff

The centre's team consists of a teacher and two assistant teachers, one of whom is also a communication coordinator. Prior to including families in the programme, an information campaign was carried out. In order to provide everyday access of children to the programme, a member of the team was selected for the position of "communication coordinator" (CM), who had good relationships with the community. A teacher pedagogue and two assistant teachers receive a group supervision under the lead of a university early child development professor once per month. The pedagogue is engaged mainly in educational activities aimed at children and parents. She is the person who plans and accomplishes the main as well as the additional forms of pedagogical interaction, with the help of an educational programme approved by the Ministry of Education and Science. The additionally created situations are oriented to children's needs to build up competencies to communicate and play in a group. They are carried out through a variety of play and educational stimulating materials. The environment is filled with different types of materials that children have access to. They are age adequate and particularly chosen so that the staff can use them in different ways. The assistant teacher organises meal times and provides for the regular attendance of children and the consumables needed in the centre. They are also actively involved in and support the educational process and the activities with parents.

9.4.3.3 Parents' Activities

The programme is structured in a way that gives the democratic opportunity to parents from low social economic status to take part in the education of their children. Teachers share responsibility with parents, and they also plan daily activities, as well as some regular events which reflect the important values of the community.

The key goals to be achieved through the activities with parents were:

- To share the importance of the early childhood stage and the acquisition of strategies and activities to stimulate the child's potential development
- Acquisition of skills for constructive communication observing the right of each side of the pair – children and parents

There are several kinds of activities in the centre:

1. Regular weekly afternoon sessions.
   During these sessions several different topics are discussed:
   – What goals do we set for the development of the child, what could we expect of a particular age?
   – What do they think is important for a child to have in his/her environment?
   – What is your child interested in?
   – How parents and child can have fun together while these activities and also help the development of the child, what and which are the appropriate game materials, and how to organise an activity for both parent and child as well as the environment so that they all provide maximum stimulation?

At each discussion, parents share what change they see in their children, what new games they play, and other things that have impressed them.

During the discussion, staff and parents often discuss additional topics – useful and healthy foods, effects from watching too much television and how by talking about what you see you can negate its effect, home safety measures, regular doctor visits, violence, and more. The team had structured themes that closely related to the attitudes and expectations of parents, which they followed on regular bases, but if necessary modified them or added new ones depending on the situation. Special themes were created relating to the development of children in families of travellers and their way of life (moving from place to place, traditions and customs and how they are celebrated, etc.).

2. Open situations during the week

During those situations, the information that the parents share serves as a basis for drawing up a general plan for the centre's activities for the next week. Parents spend time with their child in the centre and talk about their day and vice versa.

3. Every parent spending a whole day once a month at the centre, participating in all planned activities.
4. Every 3rd week, parents – with the help of the intervention team – made a toy from available materials. The aim was to make materials suitable to create

delightful and developmental games and activities available in the home environment. A big part of the materials were made together by children and parents; the staff merely helped with the process by providing the materials needed. This was also an opportunity for teachers, children, and parents to get closer and know each other better.

The staff use the *Workshops for Parents* programme (an author's programme provided by UNICEF), aimed to work with parents the potential of their children at that age in order to create adequate expectations of them. "Workshops for Parents" is a programme comprising 14 topics on the essence of parenting and aims to improve parents' skills for better communication and understanding the behaviour children can have in different situations. They touch on basic aspects of parenting; the psychological needs of both parent and child; information about the child's development; the emotional relationship between the child and parent; the specifics of a child's thinking; the importance of playing; the development of affection and devotion; types of communication; the importance of listening to the other and the meaning of the words used; how the child perceives the world at pre-school age; the importance of early reading skills, of television, and of prohibitions and rules; and common traps parents fall into.

Special attention was paid to the importance of communicating and reading books. Parents were also active participants in the organisation of joint festivities and entertainments. They took active part in the preparation of holidays by creating costumes and decorations together with children and offered different games.

9.4.3.4 Active Communication with the Local Community

Communicating with the entire community is critical for delivering one of the key goals and benefits of the model. Reflection of diversity as a value, richness of cultures and languages, and various family values enrich the social environment in the community.

Before the programme started, some representatives of the local community, including some at municipality managerial posts, were worried about possible negative effects. Their main concerns were connected with the fact that part of the parents who paid the monthly charges for their children's kindergarten attendance would oppose the granting free-of-charge education and care to programme participants. Another concern was that parents whose children were included in the programme free-of-charge would not appreciate the importance of education.

At the start of the programme, on the other hand, families suitable for it were worried as to how their children would be treated.

Negative attitudes, as they are known, are extremely difficult to change; they have a strong impact that prevents the building of an inclusive environment in the community. The team needed to work in two directions; the first was to build close relationships with parents. They achieved that by organising meetings, doing home visits, and explaining the importance of participating in early education during

those activities. The second objective was to organise meetings and events, joint activities, and discussion workshops involving families from the whole municipalities who have small children.

In view of this, a vast information campaign was held with the local community, including the centre team actively visiting families and explaining the significance of the initiative and its implementation.

Parents were reassured that only families meeting the concrete criteria would participate in the programme. It was also explained why exactly at that age it was important for children and families to complete such a programme. Arguments based on the latest scientific studies, connected with the long-term economic efficacy of including the poorest and most vulnerable families in similar programmes, were pointed out.

After each passing day, the parents that have joined our centre have shared their experience with the community which helped build trust.

During the initial stage, the team of the centre kept looking for cooperation through all initiatives organised with the local kindergarten. All parents of preschool-aged children, no matter whether their children participated in the programme or not, were invited regularly to the parents' meetings at the centre and took active participation on the different activities. Discussions and joint games were organised. At all initiatives, diversity as a value was highlighted, in order to overcome negative attitudes. Various cultural customs, feasts, costumes, and games were demonstrated. In most of the activities, both parents and children participated.

9.5 Results

This section presents the results achieved for 1 year by families using the Social and Education Support Center. The educational achievements of children visiting the centre are compared to their peers attending a kindergarten in the capital. It reflects the change in the environment and at home, as well as the change in the adults involved in the programme.

9.5.1 Educational Achievements

At the end of 2013–2014 school year, a comparative analysis was conducted to establish the educational achievements of the children from the experimental group. The control group consisted of children attending a whole-day kindergarten in the capital city, who had passed through the same diagnostic procedures set at the base of the educational programme "Fairy Path/Prikazna patecka".

The preliminary plan for comparing the results had three phases – initial, intermediate, and final. As a relatively high percentage of the children from the centre, that is, the experimental group, did not know the Bulgarian language, the initial

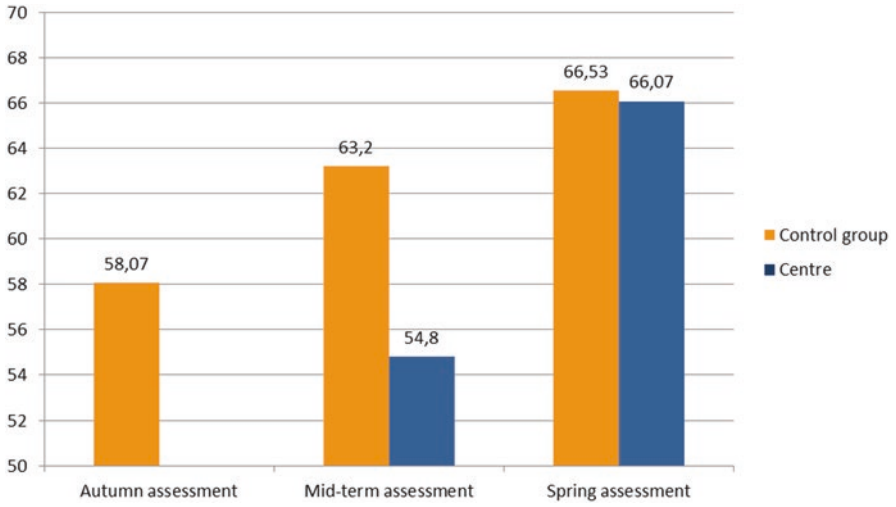


Fig. 9.5 Children's educational achievements of intervention group and control group

phase reported only the results of the children from the kindergarten (the control group), so that there will be conformity with the data from the other two phases – intermediate (registered in January) and final (counter registered at the end of May).

For the sake of ethical and correct registration of the achievements of bilingual children, and of commensurability of their results with the result from the control group, we applied a screening test (Trifonova, Peneva, Andonova, Mutafchieva, & Kolcheva, 2013) for identifying developmental problem risk, developed by a team from the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences. The screening tasks are verbal and non-verbal at a verbal minimum set at the base, which registers if the child has a satisfactory command of the language to allow correct interpretation of achievements.

Figure 9.5 shows the educational achievements of both groups of children – the children attending the centre are shown by the bar shaded blue (darker bar for black and white print) and their peers from the kindergarten (control group) in orange. The statistics analysis considered children's educational achievements in all nine educational fields with a minimum mark of 25 and maximal of 75. As it can be seen, the education level of the children from the centre (column 3, blue, average intermediate value 54.80) registered at the intermediate phase by the diagnostic test in January was low. Even after a 3-month attendance, the children from the centre lagged considerably behind their peers in their educational achievements at the same time (column 2, orange, average intermediate value 63.20). They showed statistically considerable differences, even though not being able to reach their peers who were tested 3 months prior.

The results of the final phase comparison, in May 2014, were impressive – the educational achievements of the children from the centre not only came close to those of their peers but have nullified the statistical difference between them (the average value for the children from the kindergarten is 66.53, while the average

value for the children from the centre is 66.07). Despite the seeming equalisation, a thorough analysis of the separate educational fields shows that the children from the centre still need to improve their achievements in Bulgarian language and mathematics. This tendency, however, is sustainable and shows that the difference in the achievements of the two groups of children as registered by the final analysis is minimal, and one can expect that most children from the experimental group will be able to reach their peers in upcoming months. These results are indicative of the opportunities for progress of child development in early years. Data show that only 4-hour-a-day systematic education sustainably improve children's development in all basic fields. Undoubtedly, success is also influenced by the positive attitude of the family towards the programme.

By the end of 2013–2014 school year, a total of 12% of the children that had completed the programme moved to the local kindergarten. As a result of active communication between teachers and parents, part of the children who continued the programme continued their early education at the kindergarten. After several months of staying in the centre, some of the parents shared that they had decided to take steps to move the children to the kindergarten. The actions of the parents provoked a positive reaction in the local community.

9.5.2 Family Environment and Involvement

By the end of the 1st year after the programme had started, the team from the centre made one visit to every home of the participants, and they witnessed numerous child-friendly materials many of which were handcrafted in the centre with collaboration between parents and children. The significant outcome is the commitment of parents and children towards common activities through the produced materials. Every family of the participation groups had gone in turns taking books from the centre and bringing them to their home for a readout or a bedtime story. Thus, the environment had been enriched and offered more opportunities for unfolding the child's potential through play. Parents' motivation to acquire literacy and education themselves was also raised. The pedagogue at the centre teaches seven mothers to read and write at their own request.

9.5.3 Parent's Opinion

We believe that the spontaneous commentaries of parents and adults taking care of children show changes in their attitudes towards the programme and to the educational institutions. The admiration with which adults speak about the achievements of their children, for example, as included in Fig. 9.6, is important because they show a change in attitudes which leads to change of behaviour.

Before the Program	In the Course of the Program
Zdravka's grandmother: I will not manage to take Zdravka every day to the centre because I am the only one looking after her! Her mother deserted her and her father left too to look for a job. I go out very early in the morning to gather herbs and wood for the stove.	*Zdravka's grandmother:* The moment Zdravka wakes up she urges me to take her to the centre. At home she acts as Miss Fany (head teacher) and enquire us with her grandpa how many poems we know. While I am taking her back home, she sings children's songs happily all the way. I am very proud how smart she has become.
Siana's mother: I shall not let my child go to that centre, there are dirty and sick children there. Her Granny takes very good care of her.	*Siana's mother:* Siana has learned so much since she has started attending the centre. And so have I. I absolutely love it when we gather together and have "music in action" (workshop program).
Daniela and Natalia's grandmother: I can't take the two of them to the Centre, it's too far away for me (the centre is 10 minutes away from their house on foot). Besides they have no shoes and I'm afraid if they get ill I can't afford to buy them medicine.	*Daniela and Natalia's grandmother:* I am extremely grateful to the teachers, they found out Daniela has difficulties (it had been established that Daniela had some slight mental retardation) and they helped her find medical assistance.

Fig. 9.6 Parent comments about the programme prior and during intervention

During the joint meetings and activities, parents had the opportunity to share their values related to raising children. Sharing different strategies for responding to children's needs provoked a better understanding of their difference.

9.5.4 National Results

It is planned that the programme will be spread and implemented in places with no kindergartens or where kindergartens cannot include all pre-school-aged children. According to the financial calculations for family participation in the programme, the cost of one school year is 1.5 the yearly maintenance that the state pays a school for the education of a pupil at school age in a municipal or state school for a year and 4 months. This investment, however, is expected to pay off manifold times for each year spent in school. The programme changes the political framework and provides a democratic law for more children and parents to gain access to educational services.

9.6 Discussion

The model of supporting families in need and giving help in raising and educating their children has a huge potential. It encompasses and tries to integrate into a community on the basis of common interests between parents and teachers and between children and social institutions. It offers children an opportunity to benefit from their democratic right to social support and access to education and to be prepared as equal to all other participants in the social life of their country.

The piloting of the model for early childhood development through the active cooperation of teachers, parents, and children at the centre for social and educational support, as well as through the involvement of social communities in the settlement, proved its high level of efficacy both in social and educational aspects.

The fast rates at which children's development is improved, even from minimal starting levels and only within a single year, are impressive. It is not only the vocabulary store of the children involved in the programme that is enriched, but also their perceptions in all spheres set in the educational standards are broadened up. They improve many of their competences. The children's observed achievements show a marked sustainability.

The additional activities included in open situations and game frameworks contributed to the enrichment of children's social experience and formation of social skills, which was a prerequisite for their integration in the community of their peers and, in perspective, for their easy social life integration.

Of great importance as to children's development was also the successful cooperation with parents, thanks to which family attitudes to education changed. Parents began to realise the significance of early education, and they got to better know their children's abilities, began to feel proud of and satisfied with their children's achievements, and got to respect with teacher's work. This process led to improve family environment and influence children's motivation to learn.

At the same time as the children's increased competences, there was a notable increase in parents' aspirations to improve their own education and social status. This means that positive results attained by children have their projection in the future and are of significance to democratic society. It is an example of how dimensions in the theoretical model function together to overcome challenges to democracy in ECE.

Spreading the model will decrease very serious problems in our society – scepticism, intolerance to people of lower social status, and the reluctance of many parents' children of different ethnic background and social and financial status to be educated together. Work on the programme showed that joint activities of parents and children from different social communities resulted in their getting to know each other better, understanding and accepting each other, and raising their children to be tolerant to others which, as a final result, would lead to optimal conditions for bringing up the children who will attend the same educational institutions – kindergartens and later on schools.

The first steps in realising the model showed that this is the right way to provide support for young children to help them develop and make their first steps in society.

9.7 Conclusions

The centre for early child development is a good opportunity for educational decentralisation and gives flexibility to the municipality to take the democratic decisions for its citizens. The goals that are the base of the model underline the importance of the child's rights to education as a value. Allows parents to share responsibility for their children's education with teachers and society. Allows a change in the perspective of parents about democratic values and benefits. The society becomes a place for interculturalism. It also allows for flexibility depending on the needs and resources of the respective community and level of preparedness of the children for active inclusion in compulsory pre-school education and kindergartens. The model is appropriate to be implemented in settlements with no pre-school institutional establishments for 3 and 4 years old children.

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Chapter 10
Time to Tell More Stories: Children, Democracy and Education in Movement

Kristin Ungerberg

Abstract The purpose of this chapter is to highlight and challenge a dominant contemporary perspective regarding children in relation to education, learning and democracy. This perspective primarily puts economic- and future-oriented ideas in focus. Scholars are now claiming that this perspective has become so prominent that it many times is assumed as the only true, right and possible alternative. In relation to this, I find it interesting to contest this dominant discourse by proposing an alternative approach where a more inclusive and pluralistic idea highlights individual differences and diverse worldviews.

The chapter provides a review of key literature where the different approaches are highlighted. By introducing two vignettes, drawn from a doctoral study in Sweden, the two approaches are discussed in relation to different consequences. The conclusion opens up for a discussion concerning the role of the child and the teacher but also a discussion with a democracy aspect concerning education based on predetermined goals and consensus or based on inclusion and diversity.

10.1 Introduction

At the intersection of macro and micro perspectives, many different interpretations and meaning-makings concerning children, learning, democracy and education take form. The purpose of this chapter is to highlight and challenge a dominant contemporary perspective regarding children in relation to education, learning and democracy. This perspective primarily puts economic- and future-oriented ideas in focus. Many scholars (e.g. see Moss, 2014; Vandenbroeck, 2017) are now claiming that this perspective has become so prominent that it many times is assumed as the only true, right and possible alternative. In relation to this, I find it interesting to contest

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this dominant discourse by proposing an alternative approach where a more inclusive and pluralistic idea highlights individual differences and diverse worldviews.

After a short introduction concerning global changes, the first part of the chapter presents a research review addressing one contemporary and dominant narrative based on neoliberal ideas in relation to education. Theoretical concepts of consensus and conflict in relation to democracy are explored; this theoretical discussion merges in a construction of an alternative and pluralistic narrative. This perspective is based on conflicting worldviews, which emerge as a democratic alternative regarding children, learning and education. In the final section, two vignettes from a Swedish preschool illustrate how situations create different consequences depending on the adopted perspective. The discussion concludes the chapter by proposing this pluralistic perspective as a way to include all individuals, regardless of age and life experience, as participants in producing knowledge and education.

10.2 A World in Movement

For the last decades, most parts of our world have gone through many extensive changes. Technical and digital development has blurred distances and national borders. National economics connect in global markets, where power has dislocated from the nations themselves to multinational organisations with a more global perspective (Lauder, Brown, Dillabough, & Halsey, 2006). This globalisation development is often argued through positive aspects, for example, that countries are tied together in an increased consensus regarding knowledge, ideals and values. At the same time, many of us are experiencing the world as more turbulent than ever, both regarding the nearby social climate with an increased "we and them" thinking and in a more global perspective regarding terrorist threats, extremism and refugees. An increased consensus in the world seems to represent a predominantly Western view of values and norms, with a decreased possibility of thinking and acting in alternative ways (Institute for Future Studies/Institutet för framtidsstudier, 2015).

Political societies are based on certain ideas concerning, for example, the relation between the individual and the society, which in different ways is materialised through the organisation of governmental control, economics, the market and education' s role in the society (Lauder et al., 2006). How to organise our individual and interconnected lives, where differing visions and values are promoted, affects our ways of thinking and being in the world and our views regarding what creates life value. Diverse perspectives are present in our everyday lives, but often there is one perspective that is more dominant than others are. Therefore, our everyday living can never be assumed as something constant and fixed but rather in continuous movement and change (Ball, 2000).

10.2.1 The Right Turn: Knowledge and Education as an Economic- and Future-Oriented Narrative

One of today's most dominant narratives regarding the relation between society and education is sometimes described as *the right turn*, which focuses on modern ideas regarding a political liberal view, neoliberalism (Apple, 2006). The main focus for neoliberal ideas seems to be economic growth and maximal returns from investment. This can get the effect of a search for control, results and measurability to reach increased welfare for the individual and the society (Lenz Taguchi, 2010; Moss, 2014). In a neoliberal frame, nations and societies are organised and governed as companies, where the citizens are expected to be responsible and autonomous economic actors with an ambition to create a good life through education, and thereby contribute to society through profitable work (Lauder et al., 2006; Moss, 2014). This economic- and future-oriented perspective effects the aim of education and how education is organised.

The idea of the free market is often described as a way to increase quality through consumer demands. As an aspect of democracy, the individual consumer is often positively argued to have increased freedom to control and affect one's own individual life. Based on an educational context as an example, this freedom may imply choosing the preschool or school that best suits your own personal preferences. However, we know that not all individuals have the same freedoms or opportunities to make choices in the same way. Further, the freedom to choose connects to a responsibility to choose and to make the right choice in having a profitable life for oneself and one's children in the future. Studies in an education context (Ball & Vincent, 1998; Bunar & Ambrose, 2016; Karlsson, Löfdahl, & Perez Prieto, 2013) show how some individuals benefit from this responsibility-based perspective, but others are disadvantaged. For example, Karlsson et al. (2013) show how parents who make an active choice of preschool for their children appear as "good parents", showing a moral accountability (p. 221):

> A good parent chooses between different preschools in order to find one that can meet the individual needs of that parent's child. The non-choosers, on the other hand, end up being displeased and worried. Preschool choice becomes an act of moral accountability. (Karlsson et al., 2013 p. 221)

The ongoing creation of what is a good or bad parent, or in Bunar and Ambrose (2016) a good or bad school, presents that the act of choosing is part of the legitimising of the market system. These constructions of "good" and "bad" increase the distinction between what is assumed as right and other alternatives, which consequently become bad and thereby wrong. By connecting a moral aspect of responsibility in the act of choosing, the performative and competitive individual who adopts this frame is constituted as right (Ball, 2000; Ball & Olmedo, 2013).

An approach where learning and competence are highlighted as something to increase in a never-ending process to dedicate better and new competences has in a neoliberal agenda become the only right and true way to a good life. This approach can sometimes be so common and taken for granted that it is seldom questioned (Storme & Vlieghe, 2011). Vandenbroeck (2017) questions how research results which highlight long-term and beneficial effects of the early education, regarding the cognitive and social competencies for children later in life, are connected to economic benefits from investing in education in early years. By connecting investment of money in early childhood education (ECE) to yields of high return for society in the future, the already dominant neoliberal discourse is reinforced. A political consequence of this homogenised consensus regarding what is right and wrong is that it seems like there is only one universal and rational truth, which blurs other ways of thinking and acting. It becomes a reconstruction of common sense, which in turn makes it harder to see other possible alternatives (Popkewitz, 2013).

10.2.2 Consensus and Conflict: Two Different Movements

To summarise the previous section, a neoliberal approach includes a dominant consensus perspective that primarily advocates a right way, a truth, concerning education and knowledge. As Moss (2014) and Vandenbroeck (2017) emphasise, the neoliberal narrative is about to get so dominant that we perhaps have to remind ourselves that this is just one alternative among others. In other words, there are more stories to tell. By putting a pluralistic grid on democracy and education, other possibilities can emerge.

Rancière (2004) identifies *the consensual democracy era*, which is characterised by the tendency to avoid conflicting opinions. He claims that societies which have a democratic consensus government are the ones that are experiencing an emerging of xenophobic and racist movements. This, he suggests, implies that the idea of consensus can be the cause to increasing disturbance.

According to Mouffe (2008, 2014), an alternative to a consensus perspective as a democratic aspect is a conflict perspective. Within a conflict perspective, several possible alternatives may potentially be right. Mouffe distinguishes antagonist conflicts in the sense that one alternative is considered right and others wrong and agonist conflicts that in turn may be better interpreted as a difference in opinion where there is an understanding of other and different opinions (Mouffe, 2008). An agonistic conflict is what Mouffe assumes to be the foundation of democracy, and she suggests that democracy in our societies should be built up by real alternatives. If there is a lack of alternative voices and opinions in an agonistic debate, it could be a threat to a democratic society (Mouffe, 2014).

Vandenbroeck and Peeters (2014) also argue that this *tyranny of consensus* can get the consequence that there are no clear options or alternatives, for example, in education. Instead of focusing on education as a reproduction of earlier knowledge, which often results in a one-way communication between the one who teaches and the one who shall be taught, there should be a focus on alternatives and different opinions as a way of becoming more democratic.

10.2.3 The Pluralistic Turn: Knowledge and Education as a Democratic and Explorative Narrative

So, what could an agonistic conflict perspective regarding democracy and education implicate for learning and teaching? Biesta (2004) chooses to describe that neither teaching nor education is performed by the one who teaches or the one who receives it. Rather, it takes place in the relation between them since the meaning sent out doesn't always get adopted in the same way. As an effect, this transmission between the sender and the receiver cannot be predetermined and controlled. It is in this *in-between* in the communication that the learning takes place through an active participation from both parties. Often, we only focus the teaching and learning situation in education to the transmission of knowledge from one individual to another and with the purpose to end up with the same understandings – in other words reproductions of earlier knowledge – yet we simply cannot guarantee that the receiving individual will create exactly the same meaning (Biesta, 2004).

In this perspective, learning and education are about meeting in communication where meaning is constructed in-between the participants there and then. If we connect this idea with Mouffe's need for alternatives and agonistic conflict to create democracy, education can be highlighted as a meeting place, where we meet others who are different from ourselves. Knowledge is produced in the meeting between people who think differently, where real democracy becomes a prerequisite for education and knowledge. A conflict perspective emerges in different and plural interpretations regarding things you agree on, where it is important to be open for development and to have an ambition to reach a common aim. But this is what Mouffe (2008) believes to be an aim we neither can nor should reach. Instead, we should create an understanding of our differences in meaning-making and plural ideas as the only way to reach democracy.

Such democracy aspects of education require pedagogical work that starts where we are at the time, to develop towards something that isn't predetermined. This calls for a conflicting approach where knowledge and education is understood as something potential and explorative (Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence, 2013; Moss, 2014; Olsson, 2008; Vandenbroeck & Peeters, 2014).

10.3 To Create Alternatives: Two Swedish Preschool Vignettes

To illustrate democratic alternatives for education and learning situations, two vignettes are introduced. The vignettes are glimpses from a preschool department in Sweden for children at the age of 1–3 years old. The data material, which consists of video observations, is part of a bigger data set that have been collected for an ongoing PhD study concerning children's participation and influence in preschool. The specific data material in the first vignette in this chapter was used in an article in a Swedish journal (Ungerberg, 2017) but has not been published in English.

Ethical considerations have been made, including gathering written consent from the children's parents for the recordings of the children and for the findings to be published (Swedish Research Council, 2017). Obtaining verbal assent from children themselves is more problematic, but the children's responses were carefully observed, and self-reflection occurred regarding myself as a newcomer in their department. Ongoing reflections regarding when and where to record with the camera, for example, taking an ethical radar (Skånfors, 2009) into account, were also been taken into consideration.

10.3.1 A Dough Activity

Participants in this vignette are Nenne and Ellis, both aged between 1 and 2 years old, together with an early childhood teacher.

> At the children's request, the teacher brings three[1] children into a small room with a table and some chairs. The teacher tells the children where to sit, then takes a plastic bag from a shelf on the wall and brings forth a green, round lump of play-dough.[2] She also puts a basket of things on the table. The teacher starts telling the children what all the things in the basket are and how they should be used. She also explains what order the baking procedure should have. Firstly, the dough should be kneaded soft and then rolled out onto the sheet that is placed in front of the children. After that, different cake tins should be used on the dough to create cookie figures. The rest of the dough must then be gathered and the procedure starts over again. The children are sitting very quietly with their hands still and looking at the teacher. The teacher shares a piece of dough with each child and they all start to dough in different ways. Nenne starts by reaching some tins and uses them here and there on the big round lump of dough in front of her. Another tin is then picked up from the table and Nenne is using it to push up and down on the dough. Many patterns emerge in the dough and Nenne looks excited, points at it and says: "look!" The teacher looks at Nenne and tells her that she hasn't rolled out the dough on the sheet first. Ellis then gets help to roll out her dough onto the sheet. When the dough is flat, Ellis reaches out for one of the table knifes which lies in front of each child. Ellis takes the knife and sticks it into the flat dough. A hole emerges in the dough and Ellis stops suddenly and looks my way with a serious face. I smile back at her and say: "have you made a hole?" She starts to smile, looks down at the dough and continues to make many holes. She seems fascinated by the holes and points with a finger at them and says: "look" at me several times with a very happy face. The teacher notes this and tells Ellis to be careful with the knife. (Extracts from data material)

In the vignette, we can see how the teacher largely arranges the activity for the children. She coordinates where they should sit, cuts the dough to almost the same sizes, places a baking sheet in front of them where the dough is supposed to be rolled and puts many implements such as rolling pins, table knives and cake tins in different shapes and colours a on the table. The teacher appears meticulous when she tells the children what all the things are and what the tins should be used for. The children are sitting quietly and looking at her. It seems like the teacher is putting a

[1] A third child is also joining the activity but he does not participate in this vignette.

[2] Playdough is a mix of water, flour, salt, oil and alum where the alum is used to conserve the dough so it can be saved and used many times.

lot of focus on verbally teaching the children what the things *are*, and her purpose with this activity seems to be to teach the children how to bake cookies.

When the activity is over and I have turned off the camera, the teacher tells me that the children are still too young to bake, but after a while, they learn how to bake cookies in the right way. She assumes the role of a teacher who is consistent with a learning process where the teacher mediates the knowledge she has gained, to the children who haven't yet acquired this knowledge. She also assumes the children as not yet capable of knowing certain things regarding to their age and life experience. The knowledge and outcome here are predetermined and give no space for other ways of thinking or acting, which is *one* common way to organise education. What is *not* becoming possible here, on the other hand, are other suggestions of how to dough, where the children's relations with the dough here and now can be taken into consideration. Another alternative in this short glimpse of a dough activity could be to explore what becomes possible and potential in the relations between the children, the teacher, the dough and the materials, where Nenne and Ellis detect and show different alternatives and seem to be fascinated by the occurrence of both patterns and holes in the dough.

10.3.2 A Fairy Tale Activity

In this next vignette, it is time for a fairy tale activity in the preschool department, and in this activity there is one early childhood teacher and four children who are participating. The children are Alicia (3 years old), Astrid (1 year old), Eric (2 years old) and Sarah (3 years old). The children are sitting in a row along one side of the room, and the teacher sits opposite them. On the wall above the children, there are different fabric bags with props for one fairy tale in each bag. There are about eight to ten different bags, which are all often used in this kind of activity. Usually the children choose which fairy to tell, and this time Alicia has chosen the story of *Bockarna Bruse (The Three Billy Goats Gruff)*. The teacher begins by putting out a blanket in front of her, which then acts as a framed scene where things which represent the fairy tale are presented. This time the props consist of three wooden goats, a troll, a bridge, a river and a little piece of grass. Alicia is lying down with her body stretched and her stomach against the floor. She has her feet towards the wall and her gaze pointed at the scene. Astrid lies next to her, in the same position but with her gaze pointed towards Alicia. Sara and Eric are sitting still on their knees or on their buttocks on the floor, and they look at the scene the entire sequence.

> The teacher begins by showing all the props while telling what the things represent. Alicia is actively involved in the teacher's presentation of the fairy tale and repeats what the teacher says. When the teacher introduces the troll, Alicia says: "It's scary troll!" The teacher confirms by saying: "You think it's scary?" Alicia pushes her body against the scene by pushing her feet against the wall. She then comes closer to the scene and draws back against the wall by pushing her hands toward the floor. The teacher begins to tell the story. When the teacher tells that the big ugly troll lives under the bridge, Alicia pushes her body quickly towards the scene and expresses with a kind of anger: "Look out troll!"

> The teacher answers directly with a question directed to Alicia: "Can you sit on your buttocks?" Alicia is backing in the same way as before, while shaking her head from side to side, still lying on her stomach. Astrid, who follows Alicia's actions, mimics her. Astrid says: "Little, little" and the teacher giggles and answers her: "Yes, that little, little goat." She immediately turns towards Alicia with a more annoyed tone and says: "No Alicia, now you sit up."
>
> "No", Alicia says, watching the teacher.
>
> "Then there will be no fairy [tale], and then I'll end it now", the teacher says. Alicia rises her body a little bit from the floor and looks at the teacher with a sigh.
>
> Eric, who is sitting next to Alicia screams: "No!" The teacher says, directed at Alicia: "But then you have to sit up properly." Alicia looks at Eric and changes position to sit on her knees on the floor. The teacher continues to tell the fairy tale. Astrid looks at Alicia and also rises and sits on her knees. When the teacher says that the little goat managed to escape from the troll as it crossed the bridge, Alicia excitedly adds in: "And the grass."
>
> "Yes, and the grass", the teacher confirms and continues to tell the story. Alicia is now sitting with her back towards the wall and looks dedicated to the scene. When the teacher says "Bridge", Alicia wrinkles her forehead and repeats "Bridge"! with a rough voice. The teacher continues. "Mm", Alicia says and moves closer to the scene, points her finger and says: "There is my …"
>
> "But, little, little Alicia", the teacher interrupts; "Do you have something crawling in your pants?" Alicia moves sideways in front of Astrid while she laughs a little and responds: "Noo", looking at the teacher. She is now placing herself a bit away from the teacher and the scene. The teacher continues: "But it will be disturbing for the other children when you do like this."
>
> "No", Alicia says, and is now sitting properly with her back against the short side of the wall facing the scene. The teacher continues with the fairy tale. Alicia follows the story and mimics "No no no" while shaking her head from side to side. (Extracts from data material)

In this vignette, this teacher also arranges the activity a lot. Just like the dough activity, the teacher appears meticulous when she tells the children what all the properties are. The children may be involved in choosing the fairy and verbally mimic the words that the teacher pronounces. However, what is not allowed is to get too close to the scene, maybe so they will not touch the props or disrupt the storytelling. It seems like it is important for the teacher that the fairy tale must be told and thereby reproduced in the same way as it has been told before.The vignette shows how the children should be quiet and passive just watching as well as listening to the fairy tale. When Alicia refuses to sit up, the teacher threatens to end the telling. Alicia does not seem to want to sit up anyway. But the threat gets a strong reaction from Eric who shouts out no! This reaction makes Alicia look at him and move her body to a sitting position.

This vignette can also be highlighted based on aspects of the age of the children. Astrid, the youngest of the children, is allowed to lay on the floor and move in different ways, something Alicia is not allowed to do. Astrid's attention seems to be more towards Alicia than the fairy tale, but the teacher does not mention anything about that. Instead, the teacher sounds happy when Astrid mimics something from the fairy tale. Alicia, however, should preferably sit up and lean against the wall, as the other two older children do. If Alicia talks about the story but without getting too close, it seems okay.

The vignette shows one idea of a fairy tale activity which is focused on training to be able sit still and listen to a content. Maybe it also contains an idea of telling a story

the right way and for the children to learn this explicit story. That is a common learning situation in many education situations. However, as in the previous vignette concerning the dough activity, this aim of the chapter is to introduce plural ways as alternatives where the children get more included in the process. This seems to require a shift from a goal- and result-oriented focus of the activity to a process focus instead.

An alternative in this fairy tale activity is to let the children take an increased part in the process. Alicia is very interested in the fairy tale and she cannot just sit still and watch. This could be seen as an asset where her ideas of the story could be taken into consideration. This could also include Astrid more in the storytelling since she seems very interested in what Alicia is doing. As another alternative, the story could be told in a way that includes the children's bodily actions instead of them sitting completely still, which could then create new ideas regarding the fairy tale activity.

10.3.3 Alternative Meaning-Making

To summarise these vignettes, I argue that a pluralistic approach could be assumed as a way to relate to and learn about different alternatives where the outcome isn't predetermined and the process is in focus rather than the result. This could emerge as alternatives to assume different relations with the dough or the fairy tale as right or wrong but instead highlight diverse actions and explorations as real alternatives. In this way, the children's and the teacher's actions together can assume a collective experimentation concerning what can *become* in the meeting with the dough or the fairy, enabling an open-ended activity and plural ways to assume what children, education and knowledge can be in this specific context. By highlighting the different meaning-making processes in the relations in-between the actors and not assuming these as opposites, more and plural potential alternatives can emerge as an agonistic and democratic learning process. Then, the knowledge isn't predetermined but rather emerges in the relations between children, teachers and activities. Thus, this chapter relates to the model of democracy in ECE by Hägglund, Löfdahl Hultman and Thelander (2017) through challenges to historical perspectives on the role of children in education (Dimension A) and the suggestion of alternative intentional practices in ECE (Dimension C).

10.4 Conclusion: Children and Education in Movement

As a discussion of this chapter, I want to conclude with the idea that not only is the world with its societies in continuous change and movement, so too are education and individuals. With the vignettes from two everyday activities in a Swedish preschool, I want to highlight the possibilities of creating other and new narratives concerning children and education where an agonistic conflict perspective creates possibilities for diverse democratic alternatives. The narratives provided in this chapter highlights

how the children and teachers can be considered as both receivers and creators of knowledge and education with a possibility to create new ideas and perspectives. Or as Dahlberg (2016) puts it, "Then, children and teachers assume the function of connectors, the openers of doors to new actualisations, where they get the chance to live out their productive lives amidst processes of always becoming" (p. 130).

Vandenbroeck (2017) emphasises that we all are both consumers and producers of a hegemonic discourse, which implies that both researchers and practitioners have a responsibility for the "truth" that is produced. It is important that dominant discourses are both challenged and broadened. The teachers' actions in the preschool examples of this chapter are in resonance with the hegemonic discourse regarding ECE, with a focus on specific results and predetermined goals, which are both measurable and evaluable. The teacher's statement after the dough activity highlighted a linear and chronological view regarding the children's development, which occurs after predetermined stages. This is one way of assuming children, learning and education, and it implies certain advantages with a consensus perspective concerning some knowledge and values. Nevertheless, by adding another perspective to this example, the dominant perspective regarding learning and education can be challenged. The children can be a part of the creation of alternatives where an agonistic conflict perspective creates possibilities for other ways of thinking about and acting in education.

In Sweden, ECE is politically controlled, where ideas of a good and valuable life are promoted. This makes preschool an important place, where all the participants should be a part of the construction of these values. Instead of an education only based on predetermined goals, I argue that there is a need for a conflict perspective on education that can enable a more pluralistic worldview, which includes all individual differences and meaning-making, regardless of age and life experience. This could make even young children creators of new knowledge and thereby co-producers of education. This, in turn, implicates that education does not always have to take the starting point in a reproduction of earlier knowledge but can also be assumed as an exploration of new ways of becoming in the world. In our relations with each other, there is a need to assume our differences as a diversity of possibilities and potential for thinking and acting in the world. ECE could hereby be a place where the participants' relations with the world are taken seriously as real alternatives in shaping and rethinking a pluralistic and democratic world.

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Chapter 11
Establishing a Learner Identity: Young Digital Citizens and the Pursuit of a Democratic and Empowering Early Childhood Education

Simon Archard and Sara Archard

Abstract As the twenty-first century progresses, there is an ever-growing population of digital technology users. For many, this use begins in their early childhood years with opportunities to access and experience digital technologies in their home and wider world. These experiences are the foundations for children's socially and culturally mediated digital funds of knowledge. Digital funds of knowledge can include dispositions, skills and experiences in the use of digital technologies in meaningful, valued and responsible ways that reflect a digital citizenship. For these digital funds of knowledge to be useful, others in the young child's world need to be aware of and validate the children through a democratic lens. This includes seeing and treating the child as a valued and capable learner who is able, and should be entitled, to direct and participate with others in their learning encounters. In the context of early childhood education (ECE), it requires teachers and the learning environment to be democratic by being receptive and responsive to young children's learning capability and that can include their digital funds of knowledge. In this chapter, the teacher's ability to be receptive and responsive to children's digital funds of knowledge is regarded as a digital pedagogy that invites and supports children's growth as digital citizens by promoting principles of digital fluency. This chapter draws on case studies undertaken with young children, their families and teachers in their ECE settings in Aotearoa (New Zealand). The findings demonstrate the importance of a digital pedagogy and its implications for democratic teaching and learning.

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11.1 Introduction

The twenty-first century has seen immense growth and progress in digital technologies and practices in many parts of the world. Such growth and progress have included developments in the uses, size, cost and mobility of digital technologies and included the ways people think, socialise, communicate and create with them (Business Matters, 2016). Indeed, "The pace of change driven by new technologies and technological advances looks set to continue and even accelerate … in every part of our lives, technology is reshaping expectations and enabling new possibilities" (Core, 2017 p. 4). One example of growth in digital technology in Aotearoa (New Zealand) is reflected in the development of ultra-fast broadband to cover the majority of the country through high broadband access for 87% of the population by 2022 (Ministry of Business, Innovation & Employment, 2017).

11.2 The Place of Digital Technology in Education

The significant development in the use of digital technologies in society has seen education as being key to both responding to and advancing digital citizenships (Core, 2017).

11.2.1 Digital Technology in Education in Aotearoa (New Zealand)

In Aotearoa (New Zealand) educational contexts, the growth and progress in the uses of digital technologies are reflected in the recent implementation of a newly devised digital technology component in the New Zealand national curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2007). This has entailed the rolling out of digital resources and practices in all primary and secondary schools commencing in term 1, 2018 (Ministry of Education, 2017b). This acknowledges the importance and impact digital technology has in "… digital environments that have the power to transform teaching and learning in our schools" (Ministry of Education, 2017b). The NZ$40 million strategy focuses on enabling digital fluency through resources, a state of the art infrastructure, informed and skilled teachers and equitable access for all students (Ministry of Education, 2017b). Former Minister of Education, Nikki Kaye, asserted the new curriculum focus would ensure all students have access to a learning environment that will equip them for the technological world they live in.

11.2.2 Digital Technology and Te Whāriki*, the Early Childhood Curriculum*

Digital technology is embedded in the Strands and Principles of the early childhood curriculum, *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 2017a). *Te Whāriki* was revised in 2017 to reflect changes in the lives of children and their families since its original publication in 1996. The curriculum is underpinned by sociocultural theory that views learning as being shaped by the influences of the cultures and societies we live in (Rogoff, 2003: Vygotsky, 1978). Therefore, the inclusion of the use of digital technologies in *Te Whāriki's* framework of principles and strands is a significant, and necessary, addition reflecting contemporary society in Aotearoa (New Zealand). The curriculum is enshrined in both social justice and empowerment principles placing partnerships between children, teachers and families at the centre of the learning relationship (Lee, Carr, Soutar, & Mitchell, 2013; Ministry of Education, 2017a; Smith, 2007). It acknowledges strong democratic values that include all children having rights to protection and promotion of their health and wellbeing; to equitable access to learning opportunities; to recognition of their language, culture and identity; and, increasingly, to agency in their own lives (Smith, 2007). This aligns with Moss's descriptors of democracy in this book's foreword. In particular, he emphasises practices of listening and dialogue, confrontation and negotiation, recognition of diversity and multiple perspectives of knowledge and understanding. These features can be enacted through a democratic, relational pedagogy that recognises children's agency as part of their digital citizenship. So, while digital technologies are embedded in the curriculum, it is the principles of democracy in *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 2017a) that remain unchanged and paramount. Consequently, the assertion is that the core principles and approaches to teaching and learning of the curriculum are not changed and that digital technologies are integrated into early childhood settings with pedagogical rationale. For example, the Ministry of Education states:

> Although programmes and apps may claim to be "educational", not all work in ways that will nurture the kaupapa and pedagogy of *Te Whāriki*. For example, they may work on skill and drill approaches to learning or have little connection with the language, culture, and identity of children in Aotearoa (Ministry of Education, 2017a).

11.2.3 A Digital Pedagogy in ECE

A body of literature has identified the need for early childhood education (ECE) to establish a pedagogy that recognises and responds to digital technologies and embraces the fundamental principles that underlie ECE and *Te Whāriki* (Bolstad, 2004; Dalli, Cherrington, Oldbridge, & Green, 2009; Ministry of Education, 2005). The revised 2017 curriculum states that:

> technologies are wisely chosen and reflect the kinds of rich learning and dispositions emphasised through *Te Whāriki*. This means that they will be technologies that encourage children to explore, create, and produce their own work, and so empower them as learners. (Ministry of Education, 2017a)

This "wise" decision-making requires a cognisance from teachers to what the use and place of digital technologies is in learning and education and how it must include the interests and expertise that children themselves will bring to the learning environment (Archard, 2013). The role of the teacher and a responsiveness to the development of children's digital fluency and digital citizenship are integral to such a pedagogy. This point resonates with the democracy model for ECE proposed by Hägglund, Löfdahl Hultman, and Thelander (2017), in particular, the dimension of the model (Dimension C) that identifies what teachers and other adults do in ECE settings, which needs to be intentional and relational. However, this does not mean that a skilled teacher has to be an expert in the technical knowledge of digital technologies, although some knowledge is important. Rather, they must have a strong pedagogical understanding and competence toward the uses, tools and potentials of digital technology in teaching and learning in an ECE context (Archard, 2013; Archard & Archard, 2015; Hatherly, 2010). One of the key features of this pedagogy is an understanding that digital technologies are useful in teaching and learning but should never be the driver of it (Wright & Forbes, 2015).

11.2.4 Democracy, Curriculum and ECE

The importance placed on education to endorse and support democracy has been prevalent since the ideologies accompanying the progressive education movements of the early twentieth century. The writings of John Dewey assert that education is a site for democracy both as a reflection of, and a contribution to, a democratic society (Jenlink, 2009). Dewey identified the need for a social and moral consciousness in education as necessary for the creation of social progress and that schools must be a form of community life (Dewey, 1938). Democracy requires educators to have a recognition of, and responsiveness to, the child as both a capable person and citizen. This includes valuing a child's rich diversity of talents and dispositions as a reflection of democratic life (Jenlink, 2009). *Te Whāriki's* key philosophical statement is that children grow up as "competent and confident learners and communicators, healthy in mind, body and spirit, secure in their sense of belonging and in the knowledge that they make a valued contribution to society" (2017 p. 3). The curriculum statement recognises the competence and agency of the child and is a critical part of a democratic pedagogy in advancing children's genuine participation in their learning (Carr & Lee, 2012; Smith, 2007). Competency and agency are reinforced in the bicultural context of the curriculum where Māori (the indigenous people of Aotearoa (New Zealand)) and their world view see children as "inherently competent, capable and rich, complete and gifted no matter what their age or ability" (Ministry of Education, 2017a p. 12). Competency-based perspectives reinforce

the virtues of children being, and not just becoming, successful learners and citizens. This is further emphasised by Moss and Urban (2010) who state that specifically for young children in early childhood:

> Democracy and democratic citizens are not just for a later age, they are not something we prepare children to practice and become as they grow older. They are something young children can and should live here and now. (p. 49)

The commitment to viewing children as competent citizens is enshrined in the participation rights discourse that underpins the United Nations *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (1989). The convention recognises the child's personality, autonomy and ability to make and exercise choices (Smith, 2007). Smith (2007) states that being a citizen is an ongoing and relational process that takes place both inside and outside the classroom and "… today children and adults are citizens together, and both have to learn to give meaning and shape to their active citizenship within educational settings and as partners and peers" (Smith, 2007 p. 161).

Henry Giroux, a contemporary educational thinker and theorist of critical pedagogy, asserts that democratic life is a life occupied by active citizens participating in democratic activity in the social world and community (Arthur & Sawyer, 2009). Giroux argues that schools (and we include ECE settings) must enable experiences with their social and community world. Smith (2007) sees early childhood settings as often the first places where children can experience citizenship seeing children as informed and valuable persons who can present views on many issues relevant to their lives.

11.2.5 Funds of Knowledge and Digital Funds of Knowledge

To enable children to democratically participate in effective ways and feel valued requires a recognition of what skills, interests and experiences they have acquired and learned already. This has been encapsulated under the term funds of knowledge by Gonzalez, Moll, and Amanti (2005). Funds of knowledge are "historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household or individual functioning and well-being" (Gonzalez et al., 2005 p. 133). Therefore, funds of knowledge are a collection of skills and attitudes that are shaped by the social and cultural contexts and practices that children are part of. This concept can be extended to understanding how some children have developed skills and dispositions to the use of digital technologies. Digital technologies are engendered through the child's family and community activities and behaviours; sometimes they are simply acquired by the child by observing the practices of others (Plowman, McPake, & Stephen, 2008; Stephen, Stevenson, & Adey, 2003). Digital funds of knowledge are a range of experiences of, and dispositions to, the use and competence of digital technologies (Moll, Santiago, & Schwartz, 2013). The concepts of young children's funds of knowledge and digital funds of knowledge provide an important implication for democratic teaching and learning as it recognises and

values the young child who has experiences, dispositions and skills. This is important in any pedagogy including a digital pedagogy.

The skills and dispositions displayed in the child's use of digital technologies can also reflect some of the ways the child learns and displays aspects of their learner identity (Somekth, 2007). This aligns with a key intention of *Te Whāriki* that recognises that the child becomes increasingly able to assess their own achievements and "transfer their learning to new contexts, taking on new responsibility, strengthening a disposition, extending their knowledge and skills or refining an outcome" (Ministry of Education, 2017a p. 64).

Recognising children as autonomous or collaborative partners in learning and teaching activity reflects the important pedagogies that advocate co-construction as a valuable learning technique. In Aotearoa (New Zealand), collaborative learning also draws on indigenous Māori pedagogy and the concept of *ako* (the learner is the teacher and the teacher is the learner) (Hemara, 2000; Ministry of Education, 2017a). The *ako* concept asserts the democratic principles of power-sharing in learner and teacher relationships and is a rich democratic stance that adults (and particularly teachers) need to take when working alongside competent and curious young children.

The learning and teaching features discussed indicate important democratic perspectives that should exist in a digital pedagogy so that children's digital practices and skills are valued, and their learner identity is recognised and respected. We explored these factors in a series of small case studies conducted with young children (3- and 4-year-olds) in their ECE setting, including contributions from their teachers and their parents/carers.

11.3 Case Study Methodology

11.3.1 The Research Context

Case studies for the empirical data shared in this chapter were undertaken in a privately owned, teacher-led ECE centre for children aged 3.5 years to school age. It was located in an urban setting in a well-established and medium/high socio-economic suburb of Hamilton, a city with a population of approximately 130,000 (Statistics New Zealand, 2006). There was a teaching team of four qualified early childhood teachers and a roll of 30 children per session. The ECE centre had two sessions per day with each session lasting for 3 h. Children attended morning, afternoon or 6-h "all day" sessions. The ECE centre had a good ICT infrastructure with a range of technologies available to children and teachers. The teachers had access to two desktop computers with Internet availability. Children had access to one desktop computer with Internet availability in the learning environment. Teachers and children had access to a digital camera, flip video recorder and a digital microscope. The group time-space (a designated space for children and teachers to come

together for group activities) in the ECE centre had a computer (with Internet access) linked to a large TV screen so that children and teachers could use tools together such as YouTube and Google. The computer and screen also enabled children and teachers to share photographs and other digital information. All computers in the ECE centre were connected to one printer.

11.3.2 Project Methodology

A qualitative case study research approach was adopted that had an interpretivist epistemological orientation focusing on "the understanding of the social world through an examination of the interpretation of that world by its participants" (Bryman, 2004, p. 266). Through this investigation, a case study seeks to provide a picture of the richness and depth of a situation and a construction of the reality of the participants' lived experiences within a bounded system (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000; Creswell, 2005). These case studies were bounded to 4 teachers, up to 12 children and their families who attended the same ECE centre during the same period of time. Three specific children are discussed as part of this chapter, Jack, Jessica and Paul. It is acknowledged that the participants in this study were from similar high socio-economic backgrounds with access to a range of current digital technologies in their home environments. Data was collected by conducting semi-structured interviews with teachers and family, and the voices of the children are captured in the narrative assessment of Learning Stories, the key formative assessment tool implemented in Aotearoa (New Zealand) ECE settings (Carr, 2001). Thematic analysis was used to identify patterns within data. What is key, according to Braun and Clarke (2006), is that a theme must "capture something important about the data in relation to the research question and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set" (p. 82). The themes identified include children's uses of digital technologies in their learning and how digital technologies support a connectedness between home and centre. In addition, data identified receptive and responsive pedagogy to the use of digital technologies by the teachers.

11.3.3 Ethical Considerations

The studies referred to in this chapter were approved by the University of Waikato ethics committee, and considerations included informed consent, any conflicts of interest, confidentiality, privacy and the trustworthiness of data. All participants (children, teachers and parents) were invited to participate, having had the research projects and their potential roles clearly explained, and with the opportunities and processes to withdraw detailed to them. In addition, participants were given assurances of anonymity and also their agreement or not, as to where the findings of the studies would be shared.

11.4 Case Study Summaries: Children's Digital Funds of Knowledge and Learner Identities

The case studies identified and explored the children's dispositions, uses and skills in digital technologies (Archard & Archard, 2015, 2016). The studies recognised children's own decision-making and reasons for using digital technologies in their life and where in their social and cultural contexts they were likely to have been formed. This range of digital funds of knowledge, along with other interests, dispositions and skills, contributed to how each child may demonstrate their own style of learning and reflected something of their identity as a learner.

The child's learner identity was reflected in their use of digital technologies. Findings included examples where connections with the digital technology use and practices that they experienced in their home settings were made (Archard & Archard, 2015, 2016). Experiences included the child's use of digital photography, computers, printers and Internet search engines. The findings noted how often a child would express their interests but also their intention to pursue what they wanted to do and how the digital technologies would serve them in doing this (Archard & Archard, 2015). This intentional engagement reinforced the strong argument that has prevailed about technologies in education, that learning drives the technology (Wright & Forbes, 2015; Hatherly, 2009; Ministry of Education, 2005).

11.4.1 Case Study of Jessica

For Jessica aged 4 years of age, her mother explained that Jessica will often initiate and use digital devices in ways that appear meaningful to her and reflect her interests. An example was the photographing of the regular chalk drawings she (and her sister) did in the family driveway that were frequently washed away. Jessica would rigorously document and archive them through digital photography and print off for her photo album. Her mother reported this as being an important part of her play and learning stating "We have the laptop and computer. They (the children) run around the house a lot of the time with the digital camera. Jessica has several collections of things (for example, rubber ducks) and she loves to photo these [sic]". Jessica's use of technologies was widened by her participation and engagement with her family in their everyday ICT uses. For example, she used Skype to talk, sometimes daily, with her grandmothers, who lived in America and England. Jessica's mother described a particular routine: "The girls speak often on Skype with their nannas in England and America. Nanna [in England] has breakfast with us every morning even though she is 15,000 miles away".

Significantly, Jessica's mother identified this as reflecting an important part of Jessica's learner identity, stating that digital technology "brought together people

and places that are important to her" (Archard & Archard, 2015). This was relevant on the occasion of Jessica building a birdhouse at her ECE centre one morning.

At the carpentry table, Jessica built a birdhouse with the intention to take it home. Jessica stated that the birdhouse was to be put up in a specific tree in her garden. So, with the support of a teacher, Jessica constructed her birdhouse. Sure enough, at the end of the centre session, Jessica collected her birdhouse and promptly informed her mother of where it was going to be placed at home.

A couple of days later, Jessica handed over a USB "stick" to a teacher stating that they were "My photos, me and Dad and my birdhouse [sic] we can see them on the computer". A catalogue of photos showed her and her Dad putting up the birdhouse in their garden, and she excitedly explained what was happening in each one. "Can I show them at mat time?" (circle time), she asked.

This example shows Jessica's motivation and disposition to explain and share her learning experience with others through digital tools. She knew that these tools enabled her to do this, and her knowledge and experience had been well established in her home setting becoming a part of her digital funds of knowledge. This example may reflect an important part of Jessica's learner identity as she was clearly able to use digital technology to document and help her to join her home and ECE setting and share with others her ideas and experiences.

11.4.2 Case Study of Jack

Jack's mother described him as an "avid inquirer". During an interview with Jack's mother, she noted that he had a wide repertoire of skills and resources that enabled him to undertake his investigations. For example, he used books, people and digital technologies for information gathering. These "cultural" tools and practices are available to Jack in his home environment as part of family life and appear to co-exist successfully. In terms of access to ICT at home, his mother shared that Jack could use the computer whenever he wanted. Jack and his father often worked together at the computer to find interesting websites. Jack's mother reported that Jack had been confident in using technologies in pursuit of his interests from the age of two and a half, saying that "he could navigate websites [from that age]. He goes into Favourites and just goes around [sic]".

Although Jack was an inquirer by nature and, as his mother highlights, initiated the act of research, it is by engaging in the practice of collaboration with his father that Jack added to his digital funds of knowledge by experiencing an affordance of ICT as being a tool for inquiry (Archard & Archard, 2015). For Jack, his use of digital tools fulfilled his learning motivation to investigate and collaborate, and this showed an aspect of his learner identity.

11.4.3 Case Study of Paul

Paul bounded into his ECE centre having visited the *Walking with Dinosaurs* (a BBC programme) exhibition in Auckland at the weekend.

By asking his teacher "Can I look it [the exhibition] up in Google? We can print things off and colour them in. We can look at dinosaurs on YouTube [sic]", Paul was drawing upon his knowledge of what digital technology could provide in the pursuit of his interest. He also seemed keen for this to include others (his peers) and appeared confident to ask this of his ECE teacher. This led to an extended period of conversation and comments about dinosaurs between Paul and several of his peers that also involved the teacher who co-constructed the group's ideas about dinosaurs with them. Later in the day, the teacher recounted the activity with Paul's father who stated "we are big fans of Google in our house", reflecting some social and cultural practices in the home.

The digital technology seemed to enable Paul, as part of his digital funds of knowledge, to pursue his interests and importantly met his wish and expectations of sharing them with his peers. In this example, an extended period of discussion with his teacher and several peers occurred. Paul arrived with the digital knowledge of what digital technology could do to facilitate such sharing of his interest and, along with the teacher and his peers, how it could support discussion and debate. This may reflect an aspect of Paul's learner identity but equally highlights a key aspect of a digital pedagogy as the teacher recognised and responded to his wishes.

11.5 Findings and Discussion: Teachers' Digital Pedagogy

Digital technologies and its capacities and speed of development can certainly challenge adults' technical know-how, as both teachers and family members reported in a case study (Archard, 2013). This might be a significant influence on whether, as teachers, we are able to apply a digital pedagogy that is receptive and responsive to children's digital funds of knowledge. To support a digital pedagogy needs teachers to encourage each other and pool their skills and dispositions to digital technology uses and potential in their ECE setting. As teachers we should be able to ask and wonder what we might be able to do to invite the child to bring in their experience and share their expertise in digital practices too. For example, in the case of Paul, the teacher's receptiveness to Paul's requests, and responding by being part of the rich debate between the children, reflected what potential digital technology could contribute to learning as the child's interest led it.

The three case study examples of Jessica, Jack and Paul highlight relational and collaborative elements in each learning episode. The learning episodes involved the teacher and child, and also recognised the collaborations and experiences the child had with family, including some well-established digital practices. Children recognise and value many influences in their home, which includes digital practices, and expect to be able to take and use them in their ECE setting (Hatherly, 2009, 2010).

This key sociocultural perspective to learning was clearly seen in the case studies, and it affirmed the essential feature of the teachers recognising and responding to these interests, skills and motivations of the children valuing it as part of the child's learning and learner identity. With Jessica, Jack and Paul, it could result in teachers also being surprised by the child's initiative in using digital technology but being open to guidance and leading of the child in the learning interaction. All these case studies included strong democratic components to the learning that valued the child as a competent learner capable of directing their own learning and who will use their own digital funds of knowledge to express aspects of who they are as a learner. If teachers are attuned to the democratic perspective of children and learning, and incorporate this into a well-established digital pedagogy, then a stronger democratic learning and teaching environment will exist in ECE. The examples in the case studies reflect the descriptors of listening and dialogue and multiple perspectives that Moss highlights in the foreword of this book. They also reflect elements of the model of democracy in ECE by Hägglund et al. (2017), in particular, Dimension C of the model which is about intentional teacher and other adult activities. These activities include the use of pedagogical documentation (in our case Learning Stories); parent, teacher and child communication; and the opportunity for digital citizenship to exist and be nurtured in the child's ECE setting. The case studies also challenge historical ideas of children and childhood (Dimension A of the model), with reference to children's digital capability and funds of knowledge.

11.6 Summary and Conclusion

In this chapter we have discussed that digital technologies and their continual growth in many aspects of people's lives include the lives of young children who access ECE. It is through the development of regular social and cultural activities using digital technologies that many young children have developed their digital funds of knowledge. These digital funds of knowledge on their own do not qualify children as digital citizens. This requires a well-formed digital pedagogy by people who support and collaborate with children in their learning. Such a digital pedagogy requires an ability and willingness of teachers to recognise and then respond to children's own digital skills, motivations and experience and to then engage with them in developing a stronger digital fluency that includes increased technical skills, opportunities for functional use of digital technologies and the skills of being responsible and aware of the opportunities and challenges. This then can lead to the development of young digital citizens who apply their digital interests and skills in meaningful and safe ways.

This process contains a number of examples of democratic practice that emulates the aspirations of the early childhood curriculum, *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 2017a). The recognition and responding to children's digital funds of knowledge reflect a sociocultural understanding of children's meaningfully acquired skills, dispositions and experience in digital technology and consequently will view them as competent and insightful learners.

A well-developed digital pedagogy reflects a preparedness by teachers to be guided by, rather than only leading, children's learning by recognising and responding to their digital funds of knowledge. The role of the teacher can be as a collaborator and champion of digital technology (Hatherly, 2010) who can guide the child into the practices of digital fluency and citizenship. This requires a prerequisite of teachers seeing young children as being capable as citizens in the first place.

Not only does this pedagogy enable young children to practise their digital interest and skills and be valued as a learner, but it also provides teachers with "another way into" what a child finds important in their lives and what it might say about their learner identity. In the examples shared from case studies in this chapter, this acknowledgement of child interest and identity is invaluable as it provides insights about the child which support meaningful and respectful learning collaborations with young children through democratic teaching.

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Chapter 12
Democratic Discourses in Higher Education: Australian Preservice Student Teacher Perceptions of Quality Early Childhood Education

Anna Popova and Valerie Margrain

Abstract This chapter reports interview findings with preservice student teachers in Australia on aspects of quality in early childhood education (ECE). A total of 14 interviews were conducted with 5 interviewees in 2017 across a university semester, with 3 interview points for most participants, to capture the influence of higher education and professional practice practicum placement. The observations and reflections of preservice student teachers provide important evidence of how contemporary and historical views on children, childhood, and children's rights as citizens are applied in contemporary early childhood practice.

Our analysis of the interview recordings and transcriptions clarified that all the participants were in-between several concepts: certainty and uncertainty, plurality and uniformity, and personhood transformation. These reflections indicated tension between theory and aspirational conceptualisation of quality and the reality of experience and observation. The discussion of quality ECE indicated that the preservice student teachers intentionally searched for positive examples of specific practices and strategies, alongside their experience of varied quality in their practicum placements and their reflection of complexity in real-life practice. Positivity and responsiveness to diverse context are important in ECE professional practice; however, advocacy for children's democratic right to quality in ECE is also a critical aspect to foster in the teachers of tomorrow.

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12.1 Introduction

Preservice student teachers are the teachers of the future, and it is useful to learn about how they build their ideas of what quality in early childhood education [ECE] should look like and how they manage democratic tensions and challenges. The student teachers also contribute valuable insights on their experiences and observations of authentic sector practice and how this connects or contrasts with contemporary theory. In Australia, learning about preservice student learning and practicum experience is of interest as the quality of professional experience placement settings varies enormously.

Discourse is created in contexts of practice, and we were interested in investigating how preservice teachers participate in the creation of a discourse of quality ECE, as they engaged in theoretical learning in higher education and experienced practice through professional experience (practicum) placements. By capturing the student teacher perspectives while they are still learning about quality, we can explore how higher education contributes to the shaping of quality and what happens when preservice teachers apply what they have learnt to different ECE contexts. We also wanted to capture the challenges that preservice teachers see in the developing discourses about ECE quality and how they recognise competing discourses and to consider their capacity for influencing change.

12.2 Quality ECE Policy and Literature

Recent decades have seen a strong international shift in professional focus of early childhood education (ECE), resulting in increased levels of qualifications, enhanced regulations, curriculum development, and research (Council of Australian Governments, 2009; Taguma, Litjens, & Makowiecki, 2012/2013). These changes are informed by the view that there is a correlation between the quality of ECE and the positive outcomes for children's academic learning, self-concept, relationships, and engagement in learning (Elliott, 2006; Farquhar, 2003; Ishimine & Tayler, 2014). Two main discourses frame the rationale for high- quality ECE. First, children have the right to experience quality care and learning. Article 29 of the *Convention of the Rights of the Child* begins with the statement "Education should develop each child's personality and talents to the full" (United Nations 1989). The second and rather dominant driver for quality ECE is that it yields positive outcomes which benefit both children and wider society. A range of OECD countries have conducted longitudinal research validating that the impact of high-quality ECE persists throughout schooling and into adulthood – including the US High/Scope (Belfield, Milagros, Barnett & Schweinhart 2006), UK EPPE project (Sylva et al., 2006), New Zealand Competent Children studies (Patterson 2011; Wylie & Hodgen 2011), and Swedish Longitudinal Research (Andersson 1992). Governments are increasingly concerned with literacy and numeracy testing (NAPLAN for Australia

and various other countries' standardised tests) and international country rankings (e.g. PIRLS, PISA, TIMSS) to financially justify investment in early childhood education (Kell & Kell, 2014). Yet children are more than investments, and their development should be for more than future productivity.

There are a range of ways to view quality. Structural characteristics are to the fore of regulations and include group size, child-teacher ratio, environment, and resource provision. Child development is also influenced by the process quality, which includes social, emotional, physical, and instructional aspects of children's activities and the quality of interactions with teachers, peers, and materials (Howes et al., 2008; Pianta et al., 2005; Vandell, 2004). Thus, reviews of quality demands in-depth observation, using such quality rating tools as the ECERS-R and ITERS (see http://ers.fpg.unc.edu/), yet quality may also be a more elusive concept. Löfdahl (2014) refers to the uncertainty of professional strategies in ECE, and Rosenthal (2003) to cultural diversity of views on quality. Service quality ratings administered by the Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA) reflect both structural and process quality, and Australian ECE services are required to publish their ratings (ACECQA, 2018a). In 2017, ACECQA announced that 76% of Australian early childhood services had reached minimum standard or higher; this also means that 24% of services were not rated as at least minimum and an even higher proportion of services fail to achieve minimum standard in one or more individual rating criteria. These statistics are highly concerning for the realisation of children's rights, families that place their trust in the system, and the opportunity for student teachers to view quality practice on professional experience.

Preservice teacher education must prepare graduates to be aware of professional requirements including indicators of quality (Lillvist, Sandberg, Sheridan, & Williams, 2014; Nuttall, 2012), yet the majority of research about quality ECE focuses on teachers and educators already in the workforce and with a predominant focus on children aged 3–6. This study addresses a gap in the literature by exploring preservice student teachers' perceptions of what defines quality, including with infant and toddler practice (age birth to 2 years 11 months). It also provides a novel aspect through the focus on mediation because perspectives held by participants are informed by a range of experiences and influences, higher education theory, and professional experience placements.

12.3 Theoretical Framework: Social Positioning of Preservice Student Teachers

The theoretical framework for this study is social constructionism, with the ontological belief that reality for humans is constructed (Denzin & Lincoln, 2017 and that knowledge is acquired from social interaction. Language is an essential aspect of interpreting social constructionism (Gralewski, 2011), giving meaning (Vygotsky, 1978), as is the consideration of power (Foucault, Hurley, & Faubion, 2000).

Preservice student teacher teachers construct ideas in continual interaction with society and with social structures; knowledge must be understood in relation to practice (Potts, 2015). Knowledge is culturally influenced and interactive (Snow, 2001).

Application of this social constructionist theoretical framework is evident in this study through recognition of social interaction between and among participants in the preservice student teachers' university classes and practicum experiences and the traditions brought by the various participants to the learning context. Mediation is the meaning-making applied by the participants in the specific cultural contexts (Smagorinsky, 2011). Preservice student teachers can be positioned on the bridge between theoretical impact of higher education and a practical enactment of an emerging discourse of ECE in settings. The discourses of quality in ECE can be theorised as an enduring tension between and among different polarities (for an easy example, we can talk about safe EC environment and unsafe EC environment), although we acknowledge that social positioning is more complex than a binary polarity. Observations and reflections of preservice student teachers provide important evidence of how contemporary and historical views on children, childhood, and children's rights as citizens are applied in contemporary early childhood practice. These aspects relate to dimension A (historical and societal views) and dimension C (teaching activities), in the model of democracy in early childhood by Hägglund, Löfdahl, Hultman, and Thelander (2017).

12.4 Method

In this section we outline the specific methods, who the participants were and how we recruited them, our approach to analysis, and ethical considerations relevant to the study.

12.4.1 Data Collection Methods

As this project focused on preservice teachers' perceptions of ECE quality, it was important that our methods enabled participants to explore their own understanding of what they perceive quality to be and in which way high-quality provision can be achieved in practice. Thus, this was a qualitative study in which we facilitated student reflections during individual semi-structured conversational interviews. The interviews were conducted during 2017. Semi-structured questions and prompts were used by the interviewer, but there was also spontaneous exploration of relevant issues and examples raised by the interviewees. Three interviews of around 30 min each were conducted with each participant: the first early in the semester; the second at the end of the semester's theoretical content but before the professional

experience placement; and the third and final interview after the end of the professional experience placement. The interviews were audio recorded and subsequently transcribed using an electronic programme and then manually checked for accuracy. The interviews probed student teachers' recognition of structural and process quality indicators, their evaluation of quality in specific professional experience settings, and the extent to which their thinking about quality was mediated across a teaching semester and subsequent block teaching placement. From the larger data set, this chapter focuses on examples of tension and challenge in the participant thinking about quality, as this issue relates to the realisation of democratic practices and ideals in early childhood contexts.

12.4.2 Participants

The participants in this study were predominantly 3rd year undergraduate preservice student teachers enrolled in a Bachelor of Education (Early Childhood & Primary) or a Bachelor of Early Childhood Education (Birth to Five). These are both 4-year degrees. To be eligible to participate, students needed to be enrolled both in a professional experience placement and in associated theoretical study preparing them for their professional experience. Most of the participants had previously completed one professional experience with children aged 3–5 but were undertaking new learning about infants and toddlers and preparing for their first professional experience with children aged from birth to 2 years.

To recruit participants, we addressed preservice student teachers at the end of the first lecture in the semester, followed up by visiting tutorials, and posted messages on the online learning platform for online and interstate students. Volunteers were provided with a project information letter and a consent form. From a cohort of over 100 preservice student teachers, 5 participants engaged in the research. Four of these participants completed three interviews, and 1 participant completed 2 interviews; meaning a total of 14 interviews were analysed.

12.4.3 Analysis

The analysis of the semi-structured interviews with preservice student teachers involved qualitative critical reading of the interviews and thematic analysis (Cohen & Manion, 2000). This thematic analysis was guided by our theoretical and empirical prior reading, although we were open to new themes that might emerge. The process used involved listening to the audio recordings and reading the transcripts multiple times; noting frequent, contrasting, or unique comments and expressed dilemmas and concerns; reducing the data to core concepts of tension; and then seeking indicative examples.

12.4.4 Ethical Considerations

This research was approved by the Australian Catholic University Human Ethics Research Committee, as it meets the ethical requirements of the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) (2017). The researchers have considered ethical issues of informed consent, confidentiality, conflict of interest, avoidance of harm, professionalism, and beneficence.

Participants were provided with project information in an information letter and a consent letter and were asked for their permission for the interviews to be recorded. The participants were reassured that their names would never be revealed in publications and reports or to colleagues and the data interrogated to ensure that all names, centre details, or any other identifying information were removed. Neither of the researchers were teaching any of the participants in the relevant units of study and did not visit them on professional experience, and hence their involvement had no risk of influencing academic assessment.

12.5 Interview Findings: Bridging the Discourse

Our analysis of the interview recordings and transcriptions clarified that all the participants were positioning themselves in the discourse about quality in ECE as in-between several concepts: certainty and uncertainty, plurality and uniformity, and personhood transformation. These aspects of our findings are reported below.

12.5.1 Certainty and Uncertainty

Preservice student teachers expressed their views on quality in ECE practice more in terms of certainty than allowing for possibilities of change and innovation. They articulated their belief that there were ways which things "should" be done. The student teachers attached importance to observation of children, planning and creating opportunities for learning. All three reflect the principles presented in the ECE Curriculum Framework (DEEWR, 2009). Preservice teachers discuss these principles as either present in the practice where they took their placement or critically absent in the practice.

Planning is an example of the participants evidencing of quality, proposing it to be an important and unquestionable part of ECE practice. The following examples are of preservice student teachers describing high-quality experiences in the form of statements about the visible presence of planning:

Planning is connected to quality. In my setting, children played outside a lot with no planned activities. They got bored and it impacted badly on their behavior. When they were engaged in activities, they were able to settle in … I was not sure if there as any planning in my setting at all. I did not see it as it was all a bit all over the place. Then after I while I began to see planning in the different things they did with the children. (Claire)

High quality ECE practice is based on good professional environment and having routines and planning. (Eliza)

The setting I was at is highly organised. There are so many ideas you could do with children, we need to be organised about it. (Erica)

Preservice teachers emphasised that planning involves observation and activities that are based on these observations. The connection between observation and planning is promoted in the Early Years Curriculum Framework (DEEWR, 2009). Our participants pointed out that activities should be based on knowing children's interests and family backgrounds and should aim to enhance children's learning.

It is not just about caring. It is teaching through play. You need to learn what they are interested in. For example, a child comes with story that they saw a caterpillar in the garden. You can start asking them questions and a child may or may not know enough about a caterpillar. You can build up activities to help the child learn about it. (Erica)

Science is not just about science. They like nature; they like movement. We can do something about waterwheels, for example. (Eliza)

It is interesting that alongside stories about how perfectly organised and planned practice should be, preservice teachers mention challenging situations they had encountered in practice, which seemed to contrast the idea that ECE practice can be continuously well planned.

There were ethical issues that the staff had to deal with. It was very difficult for me to learn about it. How to react when a parent makes an accusation against staff and the setting? […] It is also a challenge when a parent does not speak English. (Anne)

There were issues with the communication in the room I was working in. I think that allowing educators in the same room to be on the same page as you is important. If each educator in the room understands what's going on, then they will be able to guide the children. (Eliza)

There was this girl in the setting who had it very hard in the outside world. There were other professionals working with her. She was really cute. It was really hard for me to leave her. I wish I could have done more for her. (Eliza)

These examples show that preservice teachers constructed a narrative of certainty as in describing what high-quality ECE should be like and another of what it looks like when it happens. They spoke confidently about planning and ensuing activities. They also tried to reconcile in their stories the need to be highly organised and to deal with real-world disruptive situations. They did not define these ideas in theoretical terms, and it appeared that they just began to tap into the issues of possible uncertainty as contradiction to their ideas of ideal planning and organisation.

12.5.2 Plurality and Uniformity

Although there was similarity in the ways preservice student teachers articulated principles of quality, there were also examples of opinions that seemed to be influenced by their personal and cultural experiences. Among the narratives that mainly privileged uniformity, we could discern glimpses of plurality. This was particularly visible in the interviews with Claire who was older than the other students and had extensive experience working outside ECE environments and Erica, who is an international student. The other participants, who are all native speakers of English and were all around 20 years of age, had fewer differences in how they formulated their narratives.

Claire pointed out that the setting she was at for her professional experience practicum reminded her of the corporate environment where she worked, as this was one of the privately owned "chain" kindergartens. She was concerned that what she was observing resembled mostly "child care", as opposed to "education and care", and did not represent high-quality ECE practice. She pointed out existing differences between long day care (full-day service) provision and sessional (part-time) kindergarten programmes for 4-year-old children. She also said: "EYLF is for every room. Not just for kinder. There should be quality in all the rooms". In doing so, she elaborated that this was an aspirational belief that she held, but not one that she felt was realised; she believed that the sessional (part-time) kinder programmes for 4-year-old children had more consistent quality in their application of the *Early Years Learning Framework* (EYLF) (DEEWR, 2009) in comparison to full-day services or services for younger children. These aspects of inconsistency relating to quality service and inequality of provision concerned her.

There were also positive comments made about quality ECE in Australian settings. Erica evaluated the quality of ECE practice in comparison to what she observed in the developing country where she came from. She told a story of how kindergarten staff in a setting in her country "forgot a child in the setting". The child was left in the toilet, and nobody noticed him missing for an extended time. She said that "this kind of thing would never happen in Australia as there a system of signing in and out".

12.5.3 Personhood Transformation

In the interviews, as demonstrated above, the preservice teachers bridged elements of the learnt curriculum with the observed practices of the present and, at times, brought in their own unique perspective to evaluate quality in ECE practice. Eliza discussed with passion of how she struggled with identifying her professional preferences. She leans towards being a primary school teacher and, hence, was reluctant to do a professional experience in early childhood. However, she claims she had gained more than she hoped to get as she "went in there with an open mind" and

allowed herself to make the transformations that she could not predict were possible. Her open-mindedness was reinforced as she eloquently stated, "Once you are on practice you are on your own, and it is up to you what you do with it. You have to have an open mind and a desire to get the best out of this experience" (Eliza). Eliza also reinforced the importance of bringing theory and practice together in understanding quality ECE, stating how useful tutorials about professional relationships were at university and that on placement she saw how important relationships were with her own eyes.

Yet, the theoretical framework we presented in Sect. 17.3 suggests that reflection and open-mindedness may not be sufficient to understand the preservice student teachers' personhood transformation. We witnessed how the interviewees could recognise high-quality practice and offer critique to practices that they deemed to be of lower quality. For example, Anne recognised that the teachers she observed selected books for reading that are "related to their culture and the struggles of the families". By referring to the teachers working with refugee children and being responsive to their needs, Anne pointed out that she appreciated cultural sensitivity demonstrated by the teachers. Interviewees also began to recognise how their own background affected what they valued in practices. Erica stated that there were some disagreements on issues during tutorials she participated in: "I think one of the reasons is that we see things differently. I am from [name of the country] and she is from another country, and maybe it affects how we see things". These examples of reflection by preservice student teachers provide more than a constructive alignment approach in higher education, which ensures an achievement of curriculum knowledge and current rules. The same responses can indicate reflecting on an "imaginary" (Lee, 2014 p. 81) and aspirational future. The imaginary is subtlety constructed by the interviewees' references to the importance of building up effective relationships with children, families, and other professionals. Relationships are part of the imaginary as they are contextual and unpredictable. The understanding of this element of quality practice by preservice student teacher makes us feel more optimistic about encouraging and enabling ECE practice that will have the power to contribute towards building a strong democratic ethos and professional initiatives for the benefit of children, families, and ECE communities.

12.6 Discussion: Power and Possibilities for Transformation

As advocates for democratic practices in ECE and with a focus on ensuring that children's rights are met, we acknowledge the necessity of regulations that help prevent undemocratic practices and which address inequality of power (Foucault et al., 2000). Yet, it is a concern that in a society that aims to develop democratic practices, there is such an emphasis on positivist ideas of temporality, that is, expecting certain results by putting in place certain standards. The participants' search for certainty in their reflection on quality in ECE was influenced by their aspirations for children but tempered by their roles as preservice student teachers. As higher

education students, they were subject to "relationships of power" (Taylor, 2014 p. 1), through being assessed on both their theoretical knowledge and their fieldwork practice. This influence on the development of the preservice student teachers' ideas about quality and their search for certainty connects to the work of Pence and Pacini-Ketchabaw (2008), who write about their concern that the discourse of quality in ECE is not based on the discussion of possibilities but is driven by the desire to achieve a universal definition of quality.

The notion of power is also applicable to the increasing emphasis on regulation and structural processes in discourses about quality in ECE. Democratic pleas for freedom of speech and respect for the free will of the individual stand in contrast to the attempts to establish uniformity of professional identity and treatment of teachers as a collective professional body responsible for the delivery of regulated standards; theoretically speaking, this debate is old (Danziger, 2013; Sugarman, 2013) but still unresolved. The *Early Years Learning Framework* (EYLF) (DEEWR, 2009) and the *National Quality Framework* (NQF) (ACECQA, 2018b) initiatives have helped to place ECE in a more respected professional position in Australia, but the introduction of these resources to preservice teachers within higher education is highly regulated. For example, each academic unit within a course (elsewhere termed as course within a programme) is based on a certain number of learning outcomes that have been formulated in such a way as to enable a student to demonstrate knowledge and skills in an area. Although there is a strong emphasis on reflective practices in higher education teaching (Stenberg, Rajala, & Hilppo, 2016), privileging creativity and innovation are needed to enable agency transformation, which in turn will allow for more pluralistic views of ECE quality.

Preservice student teachers are not simply members of an abstract collective agency, called a teaching profession (Popova, 2009). A concept of "transformative activist stance" (p. 190), proposed by Stetsenko (2013), enables us to see the process of becoming and being a teacher in a substantially different way from the currently accepted definition. She argues that:

> Human beings come to be themselves and come to know their world in the process and as the process of changing their world (while changing together with it), in the midst of this process and as one of its facets, rather than outside of or merely in some sort of a connection with it. (Stetsenko, 2013 p. 191)

The discussions raised above imply the importance of preservice sociocultural positioning within the discourses around the quality practices in ECE and the students' personal agency and power. The discourses are connected to Hägglund et al.'s (2017) model of democracy in ECE through discourses, including how contemporary and historical views on children, childhood, and children's rights as citizens are connected and contradictory to contemporary early childhood practice.

We see preservice teachers as agents of "bridging practices", negotiating concepts of certainty and uncertainty; plurality and uniformity; and between being seen as persons developing their personhood functioning and individual agents grouped together into a professional body.

12.7 Conclusion

There is an underlying discourse of certainty and uniformity in preservice teacher education that attempts to impact the teaching profession by bringing in quantifiable structural and process concepts of quality. Quality ECE unifies teachers within a body of professionals who translate aspirations for children's rights into democratic practice, thus working at the nexus of dimensions A and C of Hägglund et al.'s (2017) model of democracy in ECE. Additionally, there is a well-voiced call for making sure that teachers' democratic right to freedom of approach to teaching and learning should be nurtured.

The findings from this study reinforce that there still exists a divide between teaching theory and engaging in practice in higher education. We are aware of power relationships being unequal while students are on professional experience. As preservice student teachers participate in the discourse of quality in ECE, they are poised on an in-between position, bridging something they have been taught to see as high-quality practice against something they observe in real practice. It is refreshing to hear the beginning of the bridging between the established uniform narrative of quality and personalised interpretations that help these preservice student teachers to make sense of what they see and do but worrying that observed quality is so inconsistent.

The student teachers could recognise examples of practice that contradicted the theory that they had learned in higher education about quality. This is not surprising given that a quarter of all ECE services in Australia are failing to meet minimum quality standards (ACECQA, 2017). The preservice student teachers questioned particular examples of practice but also reframed their observed reality in terms of plurality and focused the discussion on aspects that they felt were more consistently or easily recognisable as quality. As the current preservice student teachers are the teachers of tomorrow, the ones who can be agents of change for the realisation of democratic outcomes that benefit children and adults working in ECE, we stress a sense of urgency in higher education to equip students with the skills to recognise and critique quality practice, for our sector to strive for more than minimum standards and for this to be evident in all ECE settings.

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Part IV
Childrens's Democratic Arenas

Chapter 13
Narratives of Belonging: Migrant Children's Friendship Negotiation

Birgitta Ljung Egeland

Abstract This chapter reports findings of life story interviews with Swedish immigrant children aged 9–13 from non-urban areas, reflecting on their younger childhood experiences of belonging, relationships with other children and friendship negotiation. Some of the children were newly arrived, and some of them were born in Sweden. Using Corsaro's (The sociology of childhood, 3rd edn. Pine Forge Press, Thousand Oaks, CA, 2011) concept of *peer culture* as theoretical framework and analytical tool, the premise of the chapter is that preschools, schools and other education arenas play a central role in society through their mandate to foster children as democratic citizens. Studying the conditions and opportunities available to the children in these education arenas promotes understanding of which individuals and groups are included and which are excluded in differing contexts, thus making issues of power visible. The results of the study show that establishing relationships with friends involves extensive relational and emotional effort. The children describe what it is like to have and not to have friends and how adults are and are not included. The narratives display several aspects of how entering into comradeship is conditional and connected to immigrant conditions and also to the local community codes, for example, religious and cultural meeting places.

13.1 Introduction

During 2015, more than a million migrants and refugees arrived in Europe. Around 160,000 of them sought asylum in Sweden, and more than 100,000 of these were children and teenagers. This more than doubled the number of asylum seekers of the previous year, and today around a quarter of all children in Swedish schools and preschools have foreign backgrounds. Speaking about a new demographic landscape in Sweden is not an exaggeration, and many more of these children live and attend

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school in rural areas than had been the case before. Children with immigrant backgrounds have increasingly become a national concern, rather than an issue that only affects metropolitan suburbs. Issues of citizenship, belonging and democracy are challenged and kept on the agenda by international migration, also as far as children and teenagers are concerned. As a result, education arenas face complex challenges, while research also shows that these arenas are particularly significant in determining how children with immigrant backgrounds and their families are positioned in society (Ní Laoire, Carpena-Méndez, Tyrrell, & White, 2011). Education arenas are central in creating identities and meaning through the interaction between friends, teachers and parents – not only for these children with immigrant backgrounds but for all children. Processes of identity development and meaning-making are by no means neutral; power dynamics and tensions are built into such interactions, and children with immigrant backgrounds often have to engage in complex negotiations of recognition and visibility. How children are regarded and how they regard themselves in these arenas determine the success of fostering a democratic community in which everyone can participate and belong and where diversity is seen as an asset.

This chapter highlights how children's narratives of belonging and migration show who is included in the peer community, who is excluded, and how these boundaries are demarcated. As stated in Chap. 1 of this book, democracy is not a fixed concept. It is about negotiations of norms and values, and this chapter focuses on children's arenas, where the children together shape their everyday practice including play, friendship and social actions. Based on the life narratives of two children, and using Corsaro's (2011) concept of *peer culture* as a theoretical framework and analytical tool, the chapter focuses on children with immigrant backgrounds and their experiences of relationships with friends. The premise of the chapter is that preschools, schools and other education arenas, as, for example, sports organisations, play a central role in society through their mandate to foster children as democratic citizens. In all these arenas, assumptions about "normality" and "abnormality" are constantly being created and negotiated. Studying the conditions and opportunities available to the children in these education arenas promotes understanding of which individuals and groups are included and which are excluded in differing contexts, thus making issues of power visible. Should society fail to instil democratic values, there is an increased risk of intolerance and racism inside and outside of education settings. Ways of promoting social inclusion in peer groups and in education areas are discussed in the chapter, which aims to show that what happens in these arenas is infused with values, norms and attitudes, and these informal learning influences play a central role in children's everyday lives.

13.2 The Importance of Children's Peer Cultures

The theory of *peer cultures* was developed by the American sociologist William Corsaro (1985, 2011). The concept can be used to describe and understand what happens in children's relationships with each other when they meet and spend time

together in institutional contexts like preschools and schools and how these relationships contribute to specific conditions and opportunities which influence the construction of childhood (see Löfdahl, 2014 for a comprehensive discussion of peer cultures in early childhood). Corsaro's theory includes many different concepts, and some of them are used in this chapter to provide a way of understanding the contents of peer cultures. In his studies of preschool children, Corsaro (1985, 2011) has shown that children exhibit two interests: participating socially and defending what he refers to as *interactive space.* He uses these concepts to describe ongoing interaction and to show how children use different *access strategies* to gain access to this interactive space. This involves inclusion as well as exclusion and may be described as a relational project that continues parallel to and integrated with being children in schools and preschools (Bliding, 2004). Depending on the place, the status of children differs, as does who is regarded as the most interesting, best, coolest or prettiest. This perception of status also varies over time. Using examples from preschool, Skånfors (2013) shows that children reproduce and create norms for what may be used as *tokens*, a type of ticket to status and activities.

The continuous relational project at preschool, school and after school involves creating peer alliances to protect the interaction space (Corsaro, 2011). *Collective agency* is a central concept in Corsaro's theory; children are seen as actors in their own lives and together, and through collective actions they reproduce the social order outside of preschool and school *in* preschool and school. The socialisation of children involves much more than the boundaries provided by adults – children are important agents of socialisation for each other, and their positions constantly shift. Corsaro refers to the strategies used by children *interpretive reproduction* and *secondary adjustments.* Children encounter norms and values in the culture through the actions of adults and other children, and in their peer cultures they do not only perform and imitate these norms and values but also interpret them. Corsaro calls this process *interpretive reproduction* because, through their joint actions, children contribute to lasting change and new knowledge. Corsaro uses the concept *secondary adjustments* to describe how children, implicitly or explicitly, can present joint resistance to rules and norms, particularly in institutional contexts. This resistance may involve negative social actions such as different types of exclusions, despite the fact that these are prohibited by regulations (Löfdahl, 2014).

Peer cultures are significant in children's everyday lives, and increased knowledge of how children learn from each other also provides knowledge of power relations and the importance of the peer group in fostering democracy. The democratic process is changeable and dynamic, leading to both difficulties and responsibilities regarding a community of difference and showing the importance of focusing on children's perspectives from inside their cultural contexts. Such a focus may contribute to increased understanding of the factors inside and outside of schools that are significant for dimensions like language, learning, identity, belonging, and, by extension, integration in school and society.

13.3 Narratives of Belonging: Methodology

One way of learning about children's experiences over time is by asking them to tell their stories. Grounded in an interest in children with immigrant backgrounds and their experiences of peer relations, this chapter is based on material collected for my PhD project, *Narratives of Belonging: On Immigrant-Background Children in Non-Urban Areas* (Ljung Egeland, 2015). In the following section the methodology is described, and then narratives are shared from two of the participating children, Yassin and Rania. The children's narratives are then analysed in terms of Corsaro's (2011) concepts and wider interpretation.

Using life narrative interviews, the aim of the doctoral study was to obtain nuanced knowledge about pupils' experiences of migration and belonging, thereby increasing knowledge of preschools, schools and the conditions of growing up. Children aged 9–13 with immigrant backgrounds participated in the study, reflecting on their younger childhood experiences. Some of the participants were born in Sweden, while others came to Sweden during their preschool or school years. They hailed from different parts of the world, although in this chapter just two children's narratives are shared, a boy from Sudan and an Arabic girl. The children in the study were attending one of two Swedish schools, in two small rural municipalities. They were recruited through their schools, and the ethical consent process followed Swedish research council ethics. The participating children in the larger study were often the only pupils with foreign backgrounds in their classes or the only ones with their specific language backgrounds.

Löfdahl Hultman (2018) discusses the different ways in which children's peer cultures can be studied. Change over time is an important dimension to consider if patterns are to be distinguished. Further, the children's joint actions are in focus rather than their individual actions. In this study, I set out to learn more about children's experiences over time, through retrospective narratives. These were individual narratives, but they reflected a common non-urban context and many children's experiences of peer relations. I regard these interviews as life narrative interviews, based on the simple definition of a life narrative interview as "the story someone tells about their life or selected aspects of their life" (Johansson, 2005, p. 23, my translation). In life narratives, personal experiences, social conditions, historical circumstances and cultural frames of reference are weaved together, and therefore such narratives can reveal something important about the society and the political discussions we are exposed to (Pérez Prieto, 2006). A life narrative interview is always embedded in a social context, and it includes a past, a present and a future that are rendered visible in various ways. The narrative interviews conducted are thus simultaneously retrospective and forward-looking. Most of the children in this study were interviewed on three occasions.

In compiling my material, I supported the pupils in different ways in telling their stories. Two important tools used for all the interviews were lifelines, often used in life narrative interviews, and social network maps, which in a concrete, visual way guided the children's narrative focus to the people who are and had been in their

vicinity and their relationships with them (see Ljung Egeland, 2015, for a more detailed description of these tools). I had maps of the town and the school area, as well as a map of the world, and we used these during all the interviews. There were also maps in the classroom where several of the children received mother tongue tuition, and we mainly used these in the children's initiative. We also moved between different classrooms and on the school playground. Sometimes, I asked if they wanted to draw while we were speaking, to show me in a different way or to get time to think. Some of the children drew and others did not; sometimes I drew to illustrate something. Several of the children brought their own pictures and other materials to illustrate the interviews during the second and third interviews. These included their own photographs, drawings, storybooks and other things they wrote themselves, like power point presentations. The interviews were conducted without an interpreter, and I made it clear that they were welcome to use all their languages to communicate during the interviews. I framed the conversations by describing my own attitude to them. After each interview I summarised my main impressions from the interview in notes, aiming to describe in words that which I observed during the interviews to complement the recordings. The pitch and strength of their voices, emphasis, giggling, laughter, crying, silences, gestures, body language, facial expressions, moving in the room and their involvement in the interview were some of the aspects I described as I experienced them and if I deemed these important for understanding the conversation.

My study draws on a narrative research tradition that is based on a view of narrative and narration as socially situated actions (De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2012; Mishler, 1999). The participating children were co-producers of my material. The premise is that narrative research makes it possible to place the children at the centre as experts on their own lives, and therefore interviews can take different directions. The focus therefore naturally falls on the conditions of the interaction and storytelling, and these narratives may be understood both as a form of knowledge and a means of communication (Bruner, 1990). During the interviews, my questions were premised on the desire to give the children the opportunity to tell me about what really mattered to them in their everyday lives. Curiosity was important; as an interviewer, I tried to be as open as possible to their stories and how they told them. Based on the idea that the need to communicate forces us to use all our language resources, I therefore encouraged the pupils to use all the languages available to them (García & Kleifgen, 2010). In analysing the children's narratives, it became clear that the interviews facilitated different ways of storytelling and that children use different entry points. Most used language, but also drawings, their own photographs and other images, maps, their bodies and voices, as resources for telling stories, often at their own initiative.

The children's narratives highlighted different aspects of the peer group's significance in creating a sense of participation and belonging, including their experience of who was allowed to participate, who decided, who had high or low status, and how that was connected to conditions and possibilities. I chose to focus on two of the children's narratives on peer relations in this chapter and analyse them using Corsaro's (2011) theory of peer cultures. Below, I use extracts from interviews with

Yassin and Rania. I first present the children, because their narratives should also be understood in the light of their histories and earlier experiences. The children's names are invented, and they decided themselves what they would be called in the study. The place name, *Viken*, and the apartment building, *Fågelsången*, have also been invented to support confidentiality. By way of introduction, I describe the children's backgrounds and histories to anchor their narratives in time and space. Then I present short narratives in the first person that exemplify the patterns and positioning that occur in the peer culture, the complexity of inclusion and negotiations of belonging, as well as how social emotions and corporeality are involved in this interaction. The children themselves, and other children and adults, express solidarity, similarity and difference, or superiority and inferiority. In the light of a number of the children's narratives, Corsaro's theory enables me to describe, analyse and discuss how groups of children create their own peer cultures, i.e. which social norms governing behaviour towards each other are found in the groups the children form part of (Löfdahl, 2014).

13.4 Children's Narratives: Yassin

Yassin was 9 years old at the time he shared his life narrative. He was born in Sudan but lived in refugee camps in Egypt for as long as he could remember. He has been in Sweden for 2 years and moved to Viken about a year and a half before the time of the interview. Therefore, his narrative included reflection on experiences before and after moving to Sweden at 7 years old, as well as his present reality.

13.4.1 In Egypt I Had Loads of Friends

At the time the narrative was recorded, Yassin lived in Fågelsången, one of the few apartment blocks in the town. Yassin said:

> It's where all the immigrants live here in Viken. I usually play with my brothers. We play and go out. And we ride our bicycles a bit. Mum stays at home with my baby brother and Dad studies Swedish here in Viken. I don't have family in Sweden. My mum has only one friend. She lives in another city. I think it is 300 km away. They also lived in Egypt. Her son was in my school. He is my best friend. He and another boy. The other boy now lives in Finland. My Mum's friend and her boy will maybe come to visit during the Christmas holidays.
>
> Some of the immigrants stay in Fågelsången for a long time, some move all the time. When I first came here I met a boy from Serbia. But he has now moved to a different city. When we came to Sweden we lived in another big city. I started going to school there. There were many immigrants there. I had many to play with. Here in Viken, I go to school alone. There in the other city the children took a taxi together. It was fun to arrive at school together.
>
> When I come to school I play a little ball. I'm not with someone special in the class. Sometimes I play with someone in Grade 1. I'm his godfather, sometimes I help him and

> so. There's a new boy too, Fardis. I usually ask him and sometimes he plays with me. He was here today, and I said, "Do you want to play?" Then he said, "no". I don't know why. I think he wants to be with the Swedish kids.
>
> After school I'm alone. I first went to afterschool, because you have to learn Swedish and stuff. Then I stopped. The school decided. Mum is home. I want to go to afterschool and have friends. In Egypt I had loads of friends.

In Yassin's narrative, he and his family were positioned as alone in Viken. For Yassin, life in Viken was dominated by continuous efforts to create new friendships. Yassin told me about his two best friends from their time in Egypt, and he hoped that they would see each other during the next holiday. The refugee camp in Egypt, where he had lived most of his life, was presented as a place with positive connotations for Yassin, with many friends and positive school experiences. This may be a surprise for those who assume that life in Sweden post-refugee camp would be more positive. In Viken, Yassin had no real friends. In the apartment block Fågelsången, where he lived, there were other children with immigration backgrounds, though none from his homeland, but many children are moving; they move in and out again. This transience made it difficult to form friendships. Based on Yassin's narrative, it seems that someone who recently moved in became his friend, but there was a problem, as Yassin shared, "I think he wants to be with the Swedish kids". This reflection implies that a choice had to be made between Swedish and immigrant friendship groups. Nobody in Yassin's class lived in Fågelsången. He does not meet his classmates after school.

13.4.2 Floorball Stick and Water Bottle

> After school I run. I like that. Running fast. I'm good at that. I go to Vikenvallen. Sometimes there are other kids there too. There's a track. Then I take a water bottle and shoes and first I jog, then I run. I want to become a professional runner. Better and better. I've started playing floorball too. You have to go to a place outside Viken. It's two times a week. Dad drives me. Some of the other dads are coaches. We bought things, eye protectors and a floorball stick. You have to run quickly there. There's nobody in my class who plays floorball. I play with them who are a year older. I'm not allowed to play matches yet. I have to practise a year first. The coaches decide this.

Yassin went to Vikenvallen to run and sometimes there were other children. Thus, Yassin had an important strategy to find a community of potential friends in Viken, and that was to make progress in the floorball team. He had bought new gear, and after school he often practised running so that he could be the quickest. Two possible arenas for friendship emerge: the sports arena and the school arena. The floorball club was viewed as offering opportunities, for example, when he had played floorball for a year, he will be allowed to play matches. It is not, however, clear whether Yassin's strategy in the sports arena is intentionally about finding a friendship group through the social activity of sport, about trying to be good at something to gain peer respect and acceptance or about accessing activities which provide a sense of identity and achievement which will fill the void of having no friends.

13.4.3 The Story of Fardis

> There is someone in my class, Fardis. Sometimes he is sad if he is beaten. Sometimes the others get angry with him and that. It's a bit difficult. They pass the ball hard to him, only to him, with high sticks and so, against his legs. So, he gets bruises and cries … but … or … It's not Fardis, it's me. I'm not even new. I've been here two years now. I don't know why they're nasty to me (points to his skin). When I get a goal, they say that it wasn't a goal. If I say, "Leave the ball, it's our ball", they never listen. They change the rules all the time. I go to the teacher. She speaks to them, sorts it out. But they don't listen. They taunt me. They say, "Your country is the ugliest in the whole world". "You are weak", "You can't do anything". I go into the hall and just sit there. The teacher calls their parents and stuff. Sometimes a boy in the class says, "My dad says I can go home if I taunt someone, so I can go home whenever I want". Then the teacher says, "You cannot say that, you don't make the decisions here". But the grownups, they don't do anything anyway.

The children in Yassin's narrative, including Yassin himself, belonged to three categories that were positioned in relation to each other: "the Swedish kids", "other immigrant children" and "immigrant children from Sudan". His narrative shows the different statuses of the categories. In his narrative, Yassin ascribed the lowest status to the third category. He was also alone within this category in Viken. Yassin's narrative was largely a narrative of trying to understand a situation in which status and a feeling of belonging were no longer self-evident and in which skin colour became significant. The colour of his skin appeared, to Yassin, to be the reason for exclusion and judgement and was something that determined belonging and peer community. Yassin was frustrated about many things, including things he experienced as unfair, such as being accorded the lowest status in the class, that the other children more frequently said "no" to him than to anyone else if he suggested games and that the other children always decided on the rules for games. He was told that he was "weak" and came from "the ugliest country in the world". The adults at the school were described by Yassin as powerless, and he had little confidence in their ability to help him make friends with the other children.

During the interviews, Yassin chose to start a story as if he was talking about someone else, "Fardis", instead of himself. Admitting that one does not have any friends, that one is beaten and ignored by the peer group, is often connected to feeling ashamed, and it becomes easier to tell the narrative as if it is about someone else. As a social emotion, shame says a lot about a conflict between the individual and the dominant social perspective in society but especially about a conflict in the individual connected to fear of being demoted in the group. In the conversation with Yassin, that which appeared to be shame was, however, quickly replaced by pride in his running abilities and the fact that he was about to obtain a place in the floorball match team. He was proud of what he did to become part of the community; through the sporting arena, he demonstrated democratic agency and engagement.

13.5 Children's Narratives: Rania

The next narrative is that of Rania. She is 12 years old and had been living in Viken for 4 years. She came to Sweden about 5 years before the time of the reflective interview, after spending her first 3 years in Iraq and then some years in Jordan. Thus, Rania's reflection also involved life both before and after moving to Sweden around the age of 7 years old, as well as her present reality. She had spent her first year in Sweden in a different town in Northern Sweden.

13.5.1 We Don't Wear Veils, So We Have Friends

> I had many friends in Jordan and we lived in a house with only one room. I can remember our school. When we came to Sweden, we lived for a year in Åsen. There were very few pupils and it was extremely boring during breaks. Just me and two other girls. One was very small and the other one was my age and we had to be together all the time. I went to a preparatory class with only children who came from other countries. Then we moved here to Viken, to the apartment in Fågelsången. But I'd rather live in a townhouse. Here everyone else does.
>
> I love this school. It kind of feels like my other home. Everyone is nice. I read during breaks. Or we sit and knit. Or I play floorball with the others. A boy called Eddie usually comes to me. He doesn't have so many friends, but he lives in Fågelsången, like me. He bites and spits and stuff, so most of the children won't play with him. He plays with small kids. I'd really like to be with two girls called Felicia and Matilda and I sometimes can be with them, if they're not doing something top secret and nobody is allowed to be with them. They are best friends. Sometimes I feel alone at school, when someone had been nasty during the break before. Sometimes some of the boys call me neger [Negro] and stuff like that.
>
> I love my teacher. She tells everyone that you have to be as you are. You shouldn't change anything. Then you won't like yourself and that is bad. You have to believe in yourself.
>
> Something happened at school when a new boy started. He started to taunt me all the time. And he thought that everyone else taunted me just because I am from a different country, but they don't. So, then he stopped. He saw that I had friends in class. Nobody thought that they should treat me like that. The teacher also became very angry. He realised that I had been in the class for quite a long time and knew everyone very well, better than he did. I think he doesn't like people who come from other countries.
>
> My sister and I, we like being with other friends, not just Arab ones. It is a bit different for me than for the other Arabs here, because we don't have to wear veils if we don't want to. It's the veil that makes the difference. We don't wear veils, so we have friends. Nobody in our family wears a veil. We usually wear our hair down. We want to have the same clothes as the others, so my sister and I borrow each other's clothes every other day.

Rania positions herself in the narrative as someone with friends who was liked, respected and included in the peer group, particularly at school. She reflected that

sometimes one gets to be with the popular girls, and sometimes one has to be satisfied with Eddie. She had lived in Viken for 4 years and was slowly building a personal social network, describing her relationships as mutual. However, she wanted to spend time with her classmates after school. It was only possible to spend time with the children living in the Fågelsången apartment block. Here, in the apartment block, Rania formed part of a strong community, but she is also inhibited and controlled. In Rania's narrative, the children were categorised as "Swedish girls", "Arab girls wearing veils" and "Arab girls without veils". Rania positions herself during the interviews as an Arab girl, affiliated with the Mandaean religious community, and without a veil: "It's the veil that makes the difference". She understood that acceptance by her peer community in Viken was determined by absence of the veil, wearing one's hair down and having the same clothes as the others. Rania and her sister solved the need to have a variety of clothes by borrowing each other's clothes and wearing them "every other day".

Rania described the confidence she had in her teacher's authority to ensure her security and to allow for diversity. Rania thought it is as important to be allowed to be different as to be the same. She describes how her teacher discussed such things with the class, as when she was taunted because of her background: "Sometimes some of the boys call me *neger* [Negro] and stuff like that". The example of the teacher encouraging self-belief and empowerment is a strong example of democratic pedagogical practice.

13.5.2 The Venue

> Some of the other Arab girls I know in Fågelsången say that I'm involved with all the boys, but I'm not. If you have Swedish friends and play with them at home, people talk. Nastily. That's why you never really play anywhere else. If I play with girls who are not Arab there may be Swedish boys there and then they say these nasty things.
>
> We are usually in The Venue [an Arabic community social meeting place] here in Viken. On Saturdays for the women. And all other days for the men. And the boys are also allowed to come on Saturdays. The small ones, like in the fourth grade. But then the girls in fourth grade still have to wear veils, but those who are bigger than the boys may take theirs off. And those who are the boys' cousins may also take theirs off. It's fun and we usually play games and tell stories and stuff.

"The Venue" was also an important place to Rania where Arabic-speaking women, girls and younger boys met on Saturdays. She described it as an important social context where different forms of organised activities took place, such as joint cooking, dancing and sometimes excursions. The same children who were at "The Venue" on Saturdays also lived in Fågelsången. There were clear cultural rules determining who could be there together and for wearing the veil. Rania's awareness of these cultural rules reflects her identity as a community member.

13.5.3 The Story of the Chin

> I'm happy here in Viken. I don't want to move again now, I want to be here now. They talk about moving all the time. I've said that I can't do it anymore, but my mum and dad won't listen. They want to move away from here. Seven hours away. I've never been there. We have friends there. Mandaeans. I really really want to be here. I've lived four years in Viken now.
>
> A lot has happened to my chin in my life. Every time we move to a new place. I remember that there was a cleaning day in Jordan and my sister and I played that we were ice-skating. I fell on my chin and I started bleeding so much that I got two stitches. And when I was two, in Iraq, I was bitten by a dog. I have a little scar there, just next to my lip. I got stitches. When I fell in Åsen it was even worse because I very nearly was not able to talk for the rest of my life. We played hide-and-seek and it was very muddy because it rained. It was so slippery that my hand slipped, and I hit my chin with a lot of gravel. We had to go to the clinic then … I don't know what will happen to my chin [if we move to somewhere else] …

I interviewed Rania twice. When I arrived to fetch her for the third and final interview after the Christmas holidays, Rania was gone. The teacher told me that, in hindsight, she understood that Rania knew that she was moving during the Christmas holidays but that she could not bear telling them and saying goodbye. The teacher also said that she wished she had known, because she could have helped her to say goodbye. One girl in the class said that they would soon be 13 and then they could find each other on Facebook. The main plot of the story of the chin may now be understood somewhat differently. She told a long, involved story about the connection between her chin and the moves: "A lot has happened to my chin in my life. Every time we move to a new place". The moves resulted in changes in the physical environment, and she tried to handle the shifting ground under her feet bodily. There were differences between living on sand, on tarmac, in the forest, in the rain and in the snow and in controlling one's body when playing in Iraq, Jordan and different parts of Sweden. The story of the chin become a way for Rania to tell me about her feelings ahead of a new departure and new negotiations of peer relations and belonging.

Rania said that she felt that the adults treated her unfairly when making decisions about her life and that she had no way of resisting, but she still positioned herself as a person with her own agency. She had moved and departed many times in her life, and peer relations were central in her narrative. She made enormous efforts to become part of the community and make friends. She was proud of that but also knew that democratic participation requires effort.

13.6 Concluding Discussion: Global and Local Peer Cultures

Returning to Corsaro's (2011) theory sheds light on what characterises the peer cultures Yassin and Rania form part of. Their narratives show that these children were preoccupied by the possibility of social participation and provide examples of how they and other children wanted to defend what Corsaro calls *interactive space.*

This involves some inclusion as well as exclusion, and in the ongoing interaction, the children used different access strategies. In his narrative, Yassin described children who recently arrived and who preferred to play with "the Swedish kids". In other parts of his life narrative, he shared that when there were no alternatives, he went to the preschool class and played with his younger "godchild", whom he was supposed to help. Rania's narrative describes how a boy without playmates turned to her, while she in her turn waited for opportunities to join with the two popular girls in the class. She also told me about a new boy who presumably sought to gain popular access by taunting Rania. This ended when he realised that it was not a feasible strategy in that context.

The floorball stick in Yassin's narrative and the veil in Rania's appeared to be *tokens*, which can be explained as things that can be used to gain status and entrance to activities and community that determine entrance into the peer community of Swedish children in Viken. When Yassin pointed at his skin during the interview to explain why he is not allowed entrance into the peer community, it becomes clear that he saw skin colour as a condition for entrance. Racialisation and various processes of "othering" work to exclude, and these are something several of the children describe as part of everyday life. They report their peers as using expressions like *neger* [Negro], *arab* [Arab], *åk hem* [go home], and so on, usually in conflict situations. Racialisation and othering are complex processes that form barriers to democratic participation.

The children's narratives also say something about *where* experiences were shaped. Throughout the interview material, the children related in differing ways and with different purposes to places such as small town where they lived, to transient places such as refugee camps and to their family's country of family origin (Ljung Egeland, 2015). The children's narratives can be seen as negotiations of the degree and way in which they felt that they belonged in various places. The references to places used for differing purposes suggest that the children based their understandings of places on cultural frameworks of interpretation. A type of dualistic, stereotypical image emerged from the children's narratives, in which the rural and the urban were contrasted even if most of them had never lived in urban areas. However, in the children's narratives, the larger city facilitated another type of movement; there are more people with the same ethnic background, job opportunities and therefore mobility and development. Security formed part of the image of the smaller town, but it was further associated with boredom and limited opportunities, for making friends. The participants articulated the smaller town where they lived as being a place with very clear boundaries determining who could associate with whom and who lived where.

Social positions are negotiated in peer cultures, and the children look for positions in relation to each other. How one should be to be a good and "right" friend might differ between peer cultures. In this study, both the conditions of migration and the conditions of the smaller town were significant in determining positioning. The social context was important in how children ranked themselves in relation to others and whether some were regarded as less attractive to be with. Status in the peer group comes with power and are rights associated with power. Children enter

into silent agreements which dictate who has control and against whom they can defend their rights. Children seek contact with other children to build relations, but not all children do this with all other children. The children who are used to gaining access do not have to defend their interaction space to the same extent. Yassin said that ahead of almost every school break time, he needed to find out whom he could join, and this work took time and effort throughout the school day. If one cannot be with anyone in one's class, one often solves the problem by being with younger siblings or younger children at the school. Many of the children in the study indicated that they always joined other children with immigrant backgrounds, even if they were not in the same class. Being "good enough" in the eyes of friends and peers often becomes a question of survival. Those who have friends have a completely different starting point in their everyday lives, in and outside of school.

Following Corsaro's (2011) theory, the children reproduce the social order outside the school *in* school, but what he terms *interpretative reproduction* and *secondary adjustments* also become clear if the children present resistance to the school regulations through joint action, for example, if the group stated that nobody should be left out of games during breaks. During breaks, in the hall and on the playground, a physical and social room is created in which the children can take actions that they know are prohibited. The children's narratives also showed how they challenge and question the adults' authority. Which adults are at school and what they do and say are important, as Yassin and Rania noted in their differing ways. They both want to be noticed by adults and wanted adults as caring authority figures. Sometimes it can be difficult or even meaningless, for adults to do something about the peer community in school, and sometimes not. At times, it seems as if the teachers are kept outside; nothing can be done, and then there is no point in telling them anything. Some research has highlighted that teachers are overprotective of children with immigrant backgrounds, thereby contributing to constructing them as vulnerable (e.g. Romme Larsen, 2011). This is an important criticism, because children have needs other than being regarded as vulnerable. The question is whether the one action must exclude the other (Trondman, 2013). Several of the children participating in the study stated that the actions of adults at school matter. The question is, how and if adults at school can decide that everyone should be democratically included. One dimension of this dilemma is that one then also disturbs the conditions enabling children to retain the democratic community they created. Children protect their relations with other children against adult intrusion (Corsaro, 2011; Löfdahl, 2014).

As Peter Moss emphasises in his foreword to this book, enacted democracy is complex and changing, and conflicting understandings and answers should be treated seriously. It is important for all teachers to understand diverse children and childhoods. The children's narratives in this chapter show, in different ways, how children's possibilities and opportunities are determined by adults. However, because of the conditions of immigration, children are also part of global peer cultures, with other conditions and contents than the local ones. Migration involves being in strange new places, often repeatedly. Their childhoods are mobile, and the children also establish transnational peer relations. The construction of such relationships within these democratic conditions is a new and exciting research field.

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Chapter 14
Inclusive Practices for All: Child Perspectives

Janice Myck-Wayne and Melinda R. Pierson

Abstract The focus of this chapter is on children's perspectives of inclusion. Inclusion as a democratic principle is highlighted with research-based discussions on all children as citizens in a classroom, the impact of inclusion on children, children's attitudes about disabilities, the teachers' role in promoting inclusion, developing friendship skills in all children and strategies for teaching appropriate, inclusive social skills. Empirical evidence on training children to be more inclusive and to develop friendships with all children will be presented. Through inclusive settings, children with and without disabilities will develop a sense of belonging through full participation in society. The citizenship of children with disabilities in inclusive settings is vital to successful community building and acceptance amongst all people.

14.1 Introduction

This chapter argues that for young children to be full participants in a democracy, they need to be included in all aspects of the society in which they live. The right to be included with their peers in early education allows children with disabilities to fully participate in friendships, curriculum and equality. Inclusive early education provides for diversity in multiple perspectives, learning styles and differentiation of instruction. It acknowledges that there are alternatives to how an individual learns and understands. In terms of Dewey's concept of 'creative democracy', education should provide children with the ability to think critically (Garrison, 2012). Dewey (1916) posited that schools should be an authentic reflection of the community in which it is placed. In addition, Dewey argued that no part of this community should be ignored. This chapter connects to several dimensions of the model of democracy in ECE by Hägglund, Löfdahl Hultman, and Thelander (2017): children's arenas,

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including peer culture and friendship (Dimension D); curricula, *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* and other formal documents (Dimension B); and intentional practice of teachers working to apply inclusion (Dimension C). While the chapter provides a focus on children's perspectives of inclusion, it also presents unique and diverse methods on supporting young children with disabilities with appropriate interventions to be true citizens of the settings in which they participate. Section 14.2 positions inclusion as a democratic principle, connecting to policy and research literature. Our own empirical research of children's perspectives on social skills valued by children for friendship that highlights the need for social support and communicative interventions is detailed in Sect. 14.3, while Sect. 14.4 shares a range of research-informed interventions which support children to develop the skills valued by their peers.

14.2 Inclusion as a Democratic Principle

For the purposes of this discussion, the term *Disability* is defined according to the United Nations (UN) *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (CRPD) as 'persons with disabilities include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others' (United Nations General Assembly, 2007). The CRPD advocates for the human rights approach to disability. The human rights approach acknowledges that persons with disabilities have rights and others have the responsibility to respect these persons. It treats barriers in society as discriminatory practices as well as provides persons with disabilities a process for mitigating such barriers. The human rights approach provides social protections for persons with disabilities to claim their rights and live their lives as active members of society. Coupled with the four core principles of the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* (United Nations, 1989) – which includes non-discrimination, devotion to the best interests of the child, the right to life, survival and development and respect for the views of the child – children with disabilities are afforded the opportunities to participate fully in society. Participation begins at birth for both children with or without disabilities.

14.2.1 Developing Citizenship

One can argue that children can be considered citizens from the earliest ages. Bandura's (1986) *social learning theory* states that an individual's behaviours are formed and shaped through exposure to social opportunities. Those opportunities create the basis of social knowledge. The positive and negative consequences of socialisation allow us to form our social behaviour. Bandura argued that social

learning plays a strong role in shaping behaviour and that children imitate the behaviour they see, rather than follow the rules they are taught. According to Bandura, personality and behaviour are not established in infancy or as part of a genetic legacy but are a process of constant learning through interaction with the environment. Linked with Bandura's social learning theory is the concept of shaping social influences through social and environmental interactions. Vygotsky explained learning as being embedded with social events (Penuel & Wertsch, 1995). Learning occurs as the child interacts with people, objects and events within the environment (Kop & Hill, 2008). Children are competent learners socially, emotionally and cognitively (Nutbrown & Clough, 2009). Given that young children are interacting and learning socially and with the environment, they are active participants in society. Nutbrown and Clough contend that very young children are citizens 'because they are able to express ideas and wants and to contribute to decision-making that affects them' (p. 196).

Understanding that young children learn through social interactions, there should be no doubt that all children should be given the opportunity to fully develop cognitively, socially and emotionally. It is through inclusive settings that all children will develop a sense of belonging through full participation in society. This ensures that the youngest citizens have an opportunity to have a voice and be heard (Nutbrown & Clough, 2009). Inclusive education ensures that all students are welcome into the general education setting. The joint statement by the *Division for Early Childhood* (*DEC*) *and the National Association for the Education of Young Children* (*NAEYC*) defines early childhood inclusion as:

> Early childhood inclusion embodies the values, policies, and practices that support the right of every infant and young child and his or her family, regardless of ability, to participate in a broad range of activities and contexts as full members of families, communities, and society. The desired results of inclusive experiences for children with and without disabilities and their families include a sense of belonging and membership, positive social relationship and friendships, and development and learning to reach their full potential. The defining features of inclusion that can be used to identify high quality early childhood programs and services are access, participation, and supports. (DEC/NAEYC, 2009, p. 1)

14.2.2 Impact of Inclusion

Unfortunately, many children with disabilities exhibit difficulties in socialisation which limits their ability to experience the developmental and educational success possible for them. Nurturing social competence in early childhood is considered foundational to healthy relationships as the quality and quantity of peer interaction provides a context for learning and honing critical skills (Brown, Odom, & Conroy, 2001; Kwon, Elicker, & Kontos, 2011; Stanton-Chapman, Denning, & Jamison, 2012). Supporting the development of appropriate social behaviour is fundamental in promoting positive skills as well as preventing negative outcomes (Koegel & Koegel, 2006; Stanton-Chapman, Denning, & Jamison, 2008). It is largely agreed

that inclusive classrooms can serve as an ideal setting for promoting the development of social competence in children with disabilities. Research and policy alike recommend access, participation and supports for young children with disabilities in inclusive, natural environments (Buysse, 2011; Buysse, Goldman, & Skinner, 2002; Buysse & Hollingsworth, 2009; Hollingsworth, Boone, & Craise, 2009; Odom, Buysse, & Soukakou, 2011). In inclusive classrooms, the odds that children with disabilities will enhance their social skills increase when the children have opportunities to interact with typically developing peers. The research is clear that inclusive early education can positively impact children's development in the areas of cognition, language and social-emotional skills (Diamond & Hong, 2010; Guralnick, Neville, Hammond, & Connor, 2008; Kohler & Strain, 1999). The benefits of a child being educated in an inclusive setting clearly centre on a child developing a sense of belonging. In inclusive settings, young children with disabilities gain support in developing social and communication skills modelled by typical peers. Children without disabilities develop an increased appreciation and acceptance of individual differences an increased acceptance of diversity and develop a respect for all people.

Increased positive social interactions are considered the most important outcomes of inclusion for young children (Cross, Traub, Hutter-Pishgahi, & Shelton 2004; Yang & Rusli, 2012). Young children are expected to develop social skills through interactions with peers when they attend preschool programmes (Scott-Little, Kagan, & Frelow, 2006). It makes sense that having the opportunity to learn from, and regularly practise with, socially competent peer models in the environments where these skills are needed, rather than in isolated, artificial and/or socially deprived contexts, facilitates the fluency, maintenance and generalisation of new skills. At the same time, simply being in proximity to typical peer models does not guarantee the development of appropriate skills (Hyatt & Filler, 2007).

If benefits from being educated in an inclusive environment are to be expected, the inclusive programme needs to directly foster socialising and actively engaging with peers (Nelson, McDonnell, Johnston, Crompton, & Nelson, 2007). Natural and inclusive learning environments are indicators for quality instructional approaches when providing services (Bruder, 2010). The existing literature overwhelmingly argues that children with disabilities have greater potential to develop social and academic competencies when given an opportunity to experience peer-to-peer interactions with children that are typically developing (Diamond & Hong, 2010; Guralnick et al., 2008). Inclusive programming may have benefits which reach beyond the boundaries of those with learning differences and infiltrate the cultural differences of young children who are typically developing (Justice, Logan, Lin, & Kaderavek, 2014). Inclusive education and natural learning environments provide the opportunity for select activities and routines to occur, further eliciting the practice of skill development.

Inclusive classrooms that incorporate teacher-mediated peer interactions provide the optimal context for students with disabilities to develop social skills (Kwon

et al., 2011). Teachers and typical peer models in inclusive settings provide a higher level of opportunities for children with disabilities to experience complex interactions, involving reciprocity in turn taking and problem-solving. Further, as a child's development of self-efficacy incorporates the understanding and recognition of his or her abilities, inclusive practices provide students the opportunities to practise independence. Young children with disabilities are more apt to model peers (Bronson, Hauser-Cram, & Warfield, 1997; Diamond & Hong, 2010). Inclusion of children with disabilities in the general education setting, with the support of systematic instruction and appropriate prompting of social responses, provides the social participation opportunities to increase social competence (Gena, 2006).

14.2.3 Children's Attitudes Towards Disabilities

In early childhood, children begin to form self-identities and develop their social interaction skills. Simultaneously, young children are becoming curious about gender, race, ethnicity and disabilities (Nutbrown & Clough, 2009). Gradually, they become aware of how they are different and alike, and they begin to form opinions about those differences (Meyer, 2001). This aligns with Guralnick, Gottman, and Hammond (1996), who found that young children at the developmental age of 4 and 5 years old may be fairly malleable in forming attitudes towards their peers. Research by Hong, Kwon, and Jeon (2014) demonstrates that children in preschool may display preference towards a group of peers who have similar characteristics (e.g. gender, ethnicity and developmental status) and may show a negative bias towards peers with characteristics they observe as different from their own characteristics (Diamond & Tu, 2009; Nabors & Keyes, 1997). This developmental window provides the opportunity to support the formation of positive and inclusive attitudes towards all children. Research has shown that if the experience is structured, interactions with people with disabilities can help children form positive attitudes towards these individuals (Diamond & Huang, 2005; Favazza & Odom, 1997). Furthermore, the more frequent interactions proved that children developed more positive attitudes towards individuals with disabilities (Favazza & Odom, 1997).

Inclusive classrooms offer opportunities for young children to share in experiences and develop positive feelings about peers. Children with more positive feelings towards their peers with disabilities are more likely to play with and include their peers. In addition to sharing experiences, children need to understand the nature of disabilities. As children have meaningful and regular contact with people with disabilities, they may develop positive feelings about people with disabilities. In other words, young children may benefit from having more frequent contact with people with disabilities and more opportunities to learn about them in order to develop positive attitudes towards their peers with disabilities.

14.2.4 The Teacher's Role in Promoting Belonging in Inclusive Classrooms

In order to facilitate high-quality and frequent interactions, inclusive programmes need to be intentional in setting up classrooms. Mere proximity to typical peers will not promote a meaningful sense of belonging and citizenship (Hyatt & Filler, 2007). Teachers need to establish environments that promote a sense of community. However, teachers' attitudes and beliefs related to inclusion will impact how inclusive practices are implemented in the classroom. The attitudes and beliefs of teachers and care providers are important factors in terms of the facilitation of successful inclusion of children with disabilities. Their attitudes and beliefs factor into how the environment is structured including play facilitations and group dynamics (Wong & Cumming, 2010).

An important aspect of developing a successful inclusive early childhood environment is the skill and practice of the teacher. Teachers who believe they can influence student learning during play and social interactions will be more likely to support and nurture students with disabilities during their play (File, 1991). This includes providing adequate resources such as training in research-based strategies and collaboration between support staff and the teacher. For example, naturalistic instructional strategies are documented as effective components of successful inclusive programmes (Hollingsworth et al., 2009; Stanton-Chapman et al., 2012; Strain & Bovey, 2011). Naturalistic approaches involve embedding interventions within classroom routines throughout the day, giving children not only numerous, frequent and consistent opportunities to observe and practise new skills but also opportunities to refine and generalise these skills across people and activities, thus, strengthening the impact of the intervention. Conversely, when teachers are not comfortable or equipped with strategies, there often is a lack of use of informed practices, which serves to create significant barriers towards each child's success within the classroom (Shady, Luther, & Richman, 2013). Educational equity and access begins with communication and collaboration to develop shared visions for inclusive programme practices to ensure success for all children with disabilities (Timberlake, 2014).

14.2.5 Children's Social Experiences in Inclusive Settings

Social competence of children with disabilities can significantly impact their ability to develop and maintain lasting friendships and social relationships. Children identified with disabilities such as attention deficit disorders, emotional/behaviour disorders and learning disabilities are more likely to face peer rejection and social isolation from children without disabilities in all aspects of their lives (Boo & Prins, 2007; Chamberlain, Kasari, & Rotheram-Fuller, 2007). Supporting children with disabilities with strategies to improve their social skills directly impacts their positive outcomes in life including building successful friendships and overall social

happiness in multiple settings especially in inclusive settings (Blauvelt Harper, Symon, & Frea, 2008; Spence, 2003).

14.2.6 Social Skills Necessary for Success in Classroom and Social Settings

Children are expected to have a certain set of behaviours when they enter the school system, and certain behaviours have proven to be more important than others. Elementary school teachers have reported that self-control and cooperation in the school setting are important for social and academic success for all children (Lane, Givner, & Pierson, 2004). By focusing on strengthening social and emotional competence in young children with disabilities, social and academic outcomes can be improved. Webster-Stratton & Reid, 2004 highlight the need for social skills and problem-solving training. Without early intervention in these areas, evidence points to antisocial behaviours such as aggression which has been proven to be a characteristic that all types of children choose not to be around (Snyder, 2001; Webster-Stratton & Reid, 2004). Using peers to support those with disabilities during recess is another research-based intervention that has proven to increase comfort in social situations between students with and without disabilities (Blauvelt Harper et al., 2008). Thus, to experience the most amount of success in social settings, interventions for children with disabilities should focus on social skills in the areas of self-control, cooperation and friendship building skills.

14.2.7 Friendships and Social Relationships Amongst Children with and Without Disabilities

14.2.7.1 Frames of Friendship

Frames of Friendship are described and analysed by Meyer (2001) to determine the impact of inclusion on children's lives. She drew from the work of Fiske (1992) who studied the forms of sociality to create a framework for a unified theory of social relations. It was determined that there are six 'Frames of Friendship' for all children – those with and without disabilities – that were being observed. They are (a) Best Friend, (b) Regular Friend, (c) Just Another Child, (d) I'll Help, (e) Inclusion Child and (f) Ghost or Guest.

It is hypothesised that all people experience one of the 'Frames of Friendship' at different points in their social experiences. However, those with disabilities, especially those with severe disabilities, are more likely to be framed as either the Inclusion Child or the Ghost/Guest child (Meyer, 2001). Some 'inclusive' classrooms appear to not include the child with disabilities at all. Instead, the children in the room go about their day by completing their tasks and not including the child

with disabilities at all, except that the children are actually present in the same classroom. A Ghost or Guest child is one who is not fully included yet spends some time in the general education classroom, without being a main part of the daily activities. These designations are similar, yet the Inclusion Child spends the full day in inclusive settings, and the Ghost/Guest child splits time between inclusive and segregated settings. Clearly, neither social designation is desirable nor supportive of building appropriate relationships. Thus, research-based interventions for increasing friendships and social opportunities must be focused on all children even if they are placed in inclusive settings.

14.2.7.2 Social Experiences for Children with Disabilities

Inclusion of all children in social events and activities depends on behaviour. Children who have positive attributes and who display friendship characteristics such as kindness, the ability to share items and the willingness to share ideas about what to play next (cooperative behaviours) are more likely to be included in friend groups (Lane et al., 2004; Webster-Stratton & Reid, 2004). Children's play typically includes verbal content, imaginative activities and, especially with boys, extensive physical activity (Wooley, Armitage, Bishop, Curtis, & Ginsborg, 2005). Each of these characteristics can be problematic for a child with a disability. Children with disabilities need to know how to navigate social settings, and if they struggle with verbal skills and imagination or have any physical limitations, play can be difficult; thus, children with disabilities would struggle to be included in social scenarios.

Ensuring that children with disabilities have positive social interactions in inclusion, play settings must be facilitated by school staff as a matter of democratic rights. All children who were supervised well and children with disabilities who were supported socially had better social outcomes than when they were not in supported settings (Blauvelt Harper et al., 2008). The literature is sparse on inclusive play experiences, but some research discusses clear ways to eliminate the barriers of inclusion on the playground (Wooley et al., 2005) and also presents best practices in social inclusion interventions (Blauvelt Harper et al., 2008; Spence, 2003; Webster-Stratton & Reid, 2004).

14.3 The Authors' Empirical Work on Children's Perceptions of Social Skills in Friendship Building

14.3.1 Methodology

Little research exists in the area of young children's perspectives, especially related to social skills. Pierson, Schultheis, and Myck-Wayne (2015) have worked to add international literature in this area by involving several hundred pre-service teachers

from multiple countries in determining youth perceptions on different topics in schools. Pre-service teachers interview children on topics related to school subjects, teacher characteristics and friendship skills.

In two studies conducted by Pierson and Myck-Wayne (in press) and Pierson et al. (2015), friendship patterns in children with and without disabilities were examined. The background of the research further confirmed that children with learning problems are more likely to choose socially unacceptable behaviours in social situations, are less able to solve social problems, are less able to predict consequences for their social behaviour and are more likely to be rejected or isolated by their peers (Vaughn, Bos, & Schumm, 2013).

First grade (6- to 7-year-olds), third grade (8- to 9-year-olds) and fifth grade (10- to 11-year-olds) children with and without disabilities were surveyed on their perceptions of friendship skills. The research objective was to determine the four most important skills that make someone a good friend. This information would assist teachers and parents in social skills instructions to further the goal of children with disabilities being included as citizens in any social situation. One hundred seventy-one children were surveyed in total, with approximately 60 children (males and females) per grade level given a survey and interviewed in high and low socio-economic regions. Key social skills were chosen – based on previous research by Lane et al. (2004) and Guralnick et al. (1996) – to establish and maintain friendship. The key social skills were as follows: being a good listener, following playground rules, saying hello, sharing toys, not fighting with people, following classroom rules, saying nice things, making good choices and saying I am sorry.

14.3.2 Findings: Friendship Skills Most Valued by Grade and Gender

The social skill findings from the most current research conducted by Pierson and Myck-Wayne (in press) on friendship social skills with students in grades 1, 3 and 5 are summarised in Fig. 14.1. They revealed the social skills for friendship most valued across gender and age groups were that children ‘say nice things’ and ‘say that they are sorry’. The older children (grades 3 and 5) also highly valued the social skill of ‘making good choices’.

Thus, it appears the areas of social skills interventions, which help children to be able to ‘say nice things’ and ‘makes good choices’, should focus on making positive conversations, communicating feelings, expressing oneself and cooperating with peers in play and choice making. Teachers, instructional assistants, other school personnel and parents can use this information to be sure that students with disabilities know how to utilise these skills with their peers, so they have the most opportunity to be included in all social situations. When peers see their classmates as friends who care and can demonstrate specific friendship skills, inclusion and rightful citizenship will more likely be realised. The following section discusses the literature on recommended social skills interventions.

1st grade boys (age 6-7years) n=31	*1st grade girls (age 6-7) n=29*	*3rd grade boys (ages 8-9) n=29*	*3rd grade girls (ages 8-9) n=28*	*5th grade boys (ages 10-11) n=36*	*5th grade girls (ages 10-11) n=28*
"says nice things" *"says I am sorry"* *"follows classroom rules"* *"is a good listener"* *"does not fight with people"*	*"says nice things"* *"says I am sorry"* *"shares things"* *"is a good listener"* *"says hello when he/she sees me"* *"makes good choices"*	*"makes good choices"* *"is a good listener"* *"says I am sorry"*	*'says nice things'* *'shares things'* *'does not fight with people'* *'says I am sorry'*	*"makes good choices"* *"says nice things"* *"shares things"* *"says hello when he/she sees me"*	*"says nice things"* *"makes good choices"* *"shares things"* *"is a good listener"*

Fig. 14.1 Social skills valued in friendship. (Pierson & Myck-Wayne, in press)

14.4 Social Skills Interventions to Support Young Children with Disabilities in Inclusive Settings

14.4.1 Specific Social Skill Training

Ample research exists on social skill training to support children with disabilities (Boo & Prins, 2007; Webster-Stratton & Reid, 2004; White, Koenig, & Scahill, 2007). Specific skills must be taught which includes skills such as initiating conversation, maintaining eye contact and appropriate questioning techniques. Specific programmes should use naturalistic settings to create opportunities to practise and generalise skills learned. Webster-Stratton and Reid (2004) present *The Incredible Years Dinosaur Social Skills and Problem Solving Child Training Program* which has been proven to reduce problem behaviours and increase social, emotional and academic competence in preschool- and elementary-aged children.

Additional skills that children with disabilities also work on with different social skills training programmes include practicing alternative responses rather than

reacting out of anger, coping skills, understanding ways to be helpful and friendly to others, listening skills and learning how to enter and be a part of a group.

Social skills can be taught exactly how other parts of the curriculum are taught. Cartledge and Milburn (1995) highlight the key components of instruction in this order: (1) define the behaviour to be taught; (2) assess the student's current proficiency in the behaviour; (3) teach the needed skills by presenting examples, asking questions and providing feedback; (4) evaluate the results of teaching and then reteaching when necessary; and (5) provide opportunities for practice, generalisation and maintenance over time.

14.4.2 Peer Training

Blauvelt Harper et al. (2008) highlight the importance of using recess as a time to improve social skills of children with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) by training peers to help support and improve their social interactions. By following a peer-mediated, naturalistic environment, children with ASD improved their social peer interactions and were less likely to engage in routine and predictable play activities. Peer training can be used at all age levels and encourage other children to interact and know how to best incorporate play with children who may be different from them. Teacher involvement is key for reinforcement and continued focus on appropriate behaviours and social skills. Important research is currently being conducted on using peer trainers to improve the social skills of young children with disabilities (Tse, Strulovitch, Tagalakis, Meng, & Fombonne, in press; White et al., 2007). Skills such as the sharing of ideas, offering help, recommending changes in play options and giving compliments can be taught using peer trainers.

14.4.3 Social Stories and Comic Strip Conversations

Social stories and comic strip conversations have been used as forms of intervention to support the social and behavioural deficits in young children. They are short, concise and individualised narratives and/or pictures that depict a corrective and more appropriate response to a social situation (Gray, 2015). They were both developed for the purpose of responding to what children with various disabilities face in regard to understanding social situations by setting forth certain guidelines that provide educators and therapists the opportunity to help them understand the social norms of behaviour (Pierson & Glaeser, 2007). They are easy to use and support positive ways to communicate new behaviours in all settings to young children.

14.5 Conclusion

All children should be given many opportunities to fully develop cognitively, socially and emotionally. Research has demonstrated that, through inclusive settings, children with and without disabilities will develop a sense of belonging through full democratic participation in society. All citizens will have an opportunity to have a voice and be heard when supported by others in their lives through inclusive settings at school and in the community. The citizenship of children with disabilities in inclusive settings is vital to successful community building and acceptance amongst all people. All citizens must have an opportunity to have a voice and be heard when supported by others in their lives through inclusive settings at school and in the community.

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Chapter 15
Toddlers Enacting Democracy Through Communication in Preschool

Ebba Hildén

Abstract This study focuses on toddlers (1- and 2-year-olds) and the way they communicate as a way to enact democracy within preschool practice. Research has shown toddlers are sometimes hindered to participate and enact influence as teachers considering them immature, and sometimes toddlers' communication is foreseen because teachers are not aware of toddlers' different ways to communicate.

Through video observations of interactional situations during free play in a Swedish preschool where toddlers interact, different nonverbal and verbal expressions were observed. Questions deal with as follows: in what ways can communication between the youngest preschool children be understood as enacting democracy? What implications are there for preschool practice?

Drawing on the phenomenological theories of Merleau-Ponty (Kroppens fenomenologi [The phenomenology of the body], Daidalos, Göteborg, 1997), where the lifeworld is experienced through the lived body, which consists of a unity of emotions, thoughts, physiology, motor activity, and sensations, the different expressions were analysed. The results show that these children communicate through a variety of different expressions where the combination, the timing, and the coordination with time, space, and relations are important. Five different themes are exemplified by actual situations from the data material. These themes are creating something together, acknowledging someone, negotiating participation, negotiating place and object, and retelling. The children enacted democracy through participation, influence, negotiating possession, and everybody's equal value.

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15.1 Introduction

This study focuses on toddlers (1- and 2-year-olds) and the way they communicate to enact democracy within preschool practice. Democracy deals with issues like enacting ones right to participate, where participation refers to the right to speak your mind, be listened to, and have your point of view taken into account (Quennerstedt, 2011) but concerns other issues as well. The aim of this study is to highlight some of these different issues and to contribute knowledge about toddlers enacting democracy.

In Sweden, preschool teachers express that democracy and democratic values are something that they constantly work with within preschool practice (Pramling Samuelsson, Williams & Sheridan, 2015), but when asked to identify values, studies have found that verbalising values can be difficult and that values are in the area of the hidden curriculum (Bigsten, 2015). A large-scale study involving 45 preschool teachers and nurses from five Nordic countries showed that democratic values were discussed even less often (Puroila et al., 2016). According to the preschool curriculum, democracy should form the foundation, and human rights and fundamental democratic values are to be respected and acted upon by preschool teachers. Studies indicate that early childhood education (ECE) teachers do not always act in such a manner that it enhances toddlers' participation and involvement, even though they may talk in a highly supportive way of toddlers' right to participate (Hudson, 2012). Some teachers believe that issues concerning participation and having the opportunity to influence preschool practice do not concern children under the age of 3 due to their immaturity (Bae, 2010).

While dealing with this problem, researchers highlight some important issues. According to Emilson (2008), teachers must have the ability to adopt the perspective of the child, be emotionally present, and have the ability to be playful. When all of these three aspects are present in communication between children and teachers, power structures are challenged, and participation on equal terms is possible. Also, in order for the toddlers to be able to enact their right to participate, teachers must be aware of the different ways in which toddlers express their views and have a positive attitude towards toddler participation (Dunphy, 2012).

15.1.1 Toddlers' Communication

Toddlers communicate mainly in a bodily way, using a vast variety of expressions, for example, through movement, by using their voice, by making sounds, and by using facial expressions. Toddlers are competent social actors who interact with each other in a bodily fashion, by using eye contact, laughter, and smiles and moving the body close to other children (Løkken, 2009). Toddlers often repeat each other's gestures when communicating with each other, and when doing so, toddlers achieve a dialogue; they perform turn taking, maintain joint attention, and create play routines (Hildén, 2014).

Even children as young as 1 year old are regarded as social actors who communicate and interact well with each other. The toddlers are able to attune to other peers with the ability to show empathy and take the other's perspective. When initiating and making contact with other toddlers, 1-year-old children use large toys that attracts the others' attention (Engdahl, 2011).

The gaze and maintaining of eye contact are of great importance in order for the toddlers to be able to communicate with others (Engdahl, 2011). Toddlers constantly gaze at the others which keep them updated on what the others are doing and use the gaze in order to show their interest in an ongoing game or play (Hildén, 2014). Even children age 7–12 months have been shown to be able to seek eye contact with other playing children (Endo, 1992). Toddlers follow each other's gaze, maintain eye contact, and point with their fingers. The gesture of pointing is used not only in order to make others aware of which toy they want but also in order to show what their intentions are and create a joint attention (Shin, 2012).

15.1.2 Toddlers Enacting Democracy

The democratic values that toddlers focus on in their communication within preschool practice constitute the value of ownership of toys, others' well-being, and sense of belonging. Their bodily communication implies the importance for teachers in preschool to acknowledge both the bodily communication and the values embedded in such processes (Pálmadóttir & Johansson, 2015). When analysing different areas of toddlers' rights in preschools practice, Quennerstedt (2016) found areas like ownership, influence, and equal value. Ownership disputes involve negotiations between toddlers concerning who gets to play with a certain toy. When dealing with influence, toddlers take action to express their will and to make their point of view noted by using a variety of different expressions. Equal value was identified as an area that evolves taking turns, as one example. In summary, these rights are always enacted in a co-construction with the preschool context.

Preschool practice offers a wide range of opportunities to learn about and develop democracy skills, for example, by dealing with different conflicts (Johansson & Emilson, 2016). Conflicts force children to clarify their intentions and to reflect on their own ethics (Björk-Willén, 2012).

Teachers' interpretation of the nonverbal communication of the toddler can contribute to the enlargement of toddlers' influence in preschool practice. An available environment, combined with an allowing atmosphere, is important. Also important is the teachers' ability to see and acknowledge the initiative of the toddler in the moment: adopting and adjusting the activity to that initiative. In order to do so, the teachers must use a waiting and listening approach (Wassrin, 2016).

Zachrisen (2016) found that when communicating with toddlers during play about democratic values, teachers focused on having a dialogue with one child at a time, forgetting to enhance and support the child-child communication, which limits the children's opportunities of experiencing democracy as something that is

being done in a group. Often the communication between teachers and toddlers consists of fostering and regulating communication (Hallam, Fouts, Bargreen & Caudle, 2009). At times, teachers do not recognise when toddlers are trying to communicate (Gjems, 2011). Children that are not expressing themselves verbally have a harder time to make themselves heard and are at times even neglected and foreseen by teachers in preschool (see, e.g. Thuresson, 2013). There are also indications of teachers lacking awareness of the many different ways in which toddlers communicate (Bae, 2010). The general comment from 2009, concerning the UN *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, states the importance of teachers to recognise the nonverbal forms of communication that toddlers might use (UN Committee on the Rights of the Child: General Comment No. 12, 2009) and states that teachers must adopt a child-centred attitude by listening to and respecting children's views (UN Committee on the Rights of the Child: General Comment No. 7, 2005).

Based on this previous knowledge, the study presented in this chapter deals with the following questions: In what ways can communication between the youngest preschool children be understood as enacting democracy? What implications are there for preschool practice?

15.2 A Phenomenological Approach

This study is conducted with a phenomenological approach concerning methodological questions and considerations but is also built on the philosophy of Maurice Merleau-Ponty regarding the theoretical point of view as well as for the analysing of the empirical data. According to Merleau-Ponty (1997), we are born into the lifeworld as social beings where we from birth communicate with others and with the world. The communication with other subjects requires an intersubjectivity in which we are depending on the inseparable unity of the world, our self, and other subjects. The lifeworld is a unity of the whole existence in which we all experience, act, and learn both about ourselves and also about the world and about others. The lifeworld is never static but is always evolving, depending on and influenced by the subject. When entering the world, this is done through the lived body, which is an undivided unity of emotions, thoughts, physiology, motor activity, and sensations. Related to the aim, this enables explanations behind the expressions, by giving even the youngest children a meaning, a purpose, and an intention. It offers a wider picture where meaning, language, expressions, bodily movements, and experiences are a unity.

15.3 Method

Video observations were conducted, sometimes as a participant who communicated verbally and physically directly with the children and sometimes as an observer who took part sitting beside the communicating children. Field notes were taken frequently, as a complement to the video recordings.

When obtaining the video recordings, one handheld camera was used. That gave me the opportunity to focus on what the children were focusing on but also to adjust and change the focus during the recordings.

The study took place at a preschool both inside and outdoors. The participating children were between the ages of 1:3 (1 year and 3 months) and 2:3. Six children from the same preschool group participated. Thirteen different occasions and a total amount of 10 h of film were obtained. Usual ethical practices and considerations were followed involving informed consent, privacy, and confidentiality. The guardians of the children were asked to give their consent, but I also wanted the assent of the children. In order to do so, I used an ethical radar (Skånfors, 2009) when making the video recordings. Being open to the different ways the children would use to signal if they wanted to be part of the video recordings or not was key. I chose to acknowledge and respect those signals. Information about the study and the focus of the video recordings were given to teachers as well as the guardians of the children. The names of the children involved as well as the location and name of the preschool are confidential. When presented, the names of the children were altered as well as the pictures in which different types of modifications were used to hide the identity of the children.

Both verbal and nonverbal communications between children were focused on, with emphasis on the nonverbal communication such as the body's positioning and movement in the room in relation to other individuals and in relation to objects, the usage of the eyes, facial expressions, audio expressions, and gestures. Situations during free play where at least two children interacted were studied. Sequences with different communicational outcomes were obtained from which sequences, where the children gained contact and maintained the contact, were chosen. For example, some of the times children gained eye contact with another child but did not move towards the child. They noticed each other, but the contact did not lead to any further interaction between the two children. In the sequences that were chosen, the children took at least two steps towards making contact with another child (gaining eye contact and moving the body closer to the other as being the most frequently used first two steps). Another important factor for the sequence in order to be considered a situation where children gained contact was if the children received a response.

15.4 Results

The empirical data shows 51 relevant situations in which toddlers communicated with other toddlers. When analysing the data, these situations were categorised into five themes:

- Creating something together
- Acknowledging someone
- Negotiating participation
- Negotiating place and object
- Sharing an experience with someone who was not present

In these situations, the toddlers enacted their democratic rights to participate when communicating with each other in different ways. Their turn taking in communication can be regarded as a way to enact their mutual right to equal value. Negotiating is also a way to experience and *do* democracy, learning about how to argue and how to get your views to be taken into consideration.

15.4.1 Creating Something Together

During my visits at the preschool, I often noticed that the children were playing the game of peek-a-boo. To play the game, one covers one's face, it can be with their own hands or by hiding behind something, and when coming back into view says "peek-a-boo". In illustrations in Fig. 15.1, it was just about time for the morning gathering. All was calm at the preschool, and the children were walking around in the rooms. Many children were present. In the middle of the largest room in the preschool, there was a large toy car made from wood. The toy car could easily fit four children. Maja (1:7) was walking towards the toy car. She passed it just as Linnea (1:4) got out of the toy car.

Peek-a-boo is a well-known game that many children have played together with adults or with each other. The game builds on gestures as well as words that are repeated and is always a combination of different gestures, looking at each other and turning of the body towards one another, where the coordination of the different modes are essential. The described situation above shows that looking at each other is important to be able to coordinate movements. Both Maja and Linnea first scrunched down, then stretched out, and finally scrunched down again, which enabled them to see each other's eyes. In this situation, playing this familiar game together enhanced an already agreed way of acting. The situation above also shows how important smiles, laughter, and joy are for toddlers in their way of communicating. Smiling is a way of showing each other that they mean well but also a way to show appreciation and signal to each other, this is fun! The game of peek-a-boo is a confirmation between the children that they understand each other and that they have created something together.

15.4.2 Acknowledging Someone

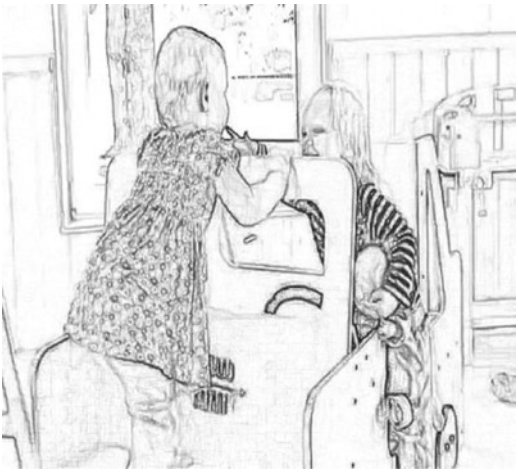
The interaction illustrated in Fig. 15.2 took place in the hallway between the kitchen and the hall. It was a quite calm day at the preschool, and many of the children were at home for different reasons. One of the teachers was showing a short video clip of Barba Papa on the computer. This teacher was in the kitchen. Lucas (2:1) was the only child in one of the smaller rooms, together with me. First, he looked at me and then he walked towards the hallway. He was on his way to the kitchen when he passed the doorway. In the doorway Linnea (1:4) stood, on the left-hand side of the doorway.

(Video observation: 111007 M2U00752 04:50) Linnea and Maja look at each other´s eyes at the same time. They both stop and stand still looking at each other for a few seconds.

Maja is the first one to move and she continues walking towards one of the sides of the toy car. She walks towards Linnea but looks down on the floor. Linnea stands still, looking at Maja walking towards the toy car. Just before Maja is arriving at the side of the car, Linnea looks down on the floor. When Maja arrives at the side of the toy car, she looks at Linnea.

Fig. 15.1 *"Peek-a-boo"*

Maja crunches down a bit, smiles and says "peek-a-boo". Linnea also scrunches down a bit (in order to be able to see Maja through the front window of the toy car) and answers with a smile "peek-a-boo". Linnea then steps up on the hood of the toy car, stretching up with her hands on the window frame, looking at Maja and says "peek-a-boo" once more with a smile. Maja looks at Linnea, says "peek-a-boo", starts laughing and with her right hand touches Linnea's mouth.

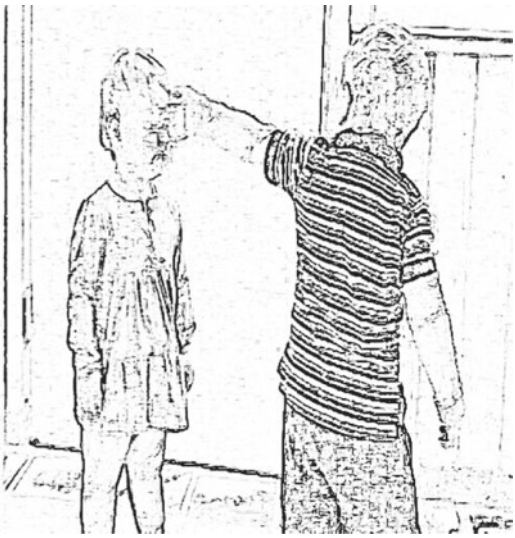


Maja also pushes slightly when touching Linnea's mouth, which forces Linnea's head back a bit. They both look at each other and smile while they both lower their bodies, scrunching down and look at each other through the front window of the toy car. Linnea says "peek-a-boo" and steps down on the floor with her back towards Maja, repeating "peek-a-boo" twice in a high pitch voice while running away.

Fig. 15.1 (continued)

In this situation, Lucas showed Linnea that he recognised her and that he saw her standing in the doorway. He looked at her and she looked at him. The way he touched her, with a light stroke on the forehead, was very gentle. He meant no harm, he just wanted to say "hello". When she turned and ran towards the hall, he followed her. The children coordinated their bodies according to the other and showed each other what they are focusing on by turning towards each other. In the beginning of the described situation, Lucas had his body directed towards the kitchen to the right. When Linnea turned around and ran towards the hall (to the left), Lucas chose to turn around and face Linnea instead of the kitchen. Lucas knelt down beside Linnea looking up at her, once again in a very gentle way, which showed her that he meant no harm.

(Video observation: 111110 M2U00808 00:00) Lucas walks through the room and meets Linnea in the doorway. They look at each other. While continuing walking towards the kitchen (to the right in the hallway), Lucas slightly strokes Linnea's forehead, just above the eyelids, with the fingertips of his left hand.



Linnea stands still while being touched, blinks and then suddenly turns, turning her back against Lucas and runs through the hallway towards the hall (to the left in the hallway). Lucas continues walking towards the kitchen with his body turning to the right while looking at Linnea to the left. Lucas stops and turns his body towards Linnea, who is now running towards the hall. Linnea stops at the gate, which hinders the children from running out the front door. Lucas runs towards Linnea, kneels beside her, and looks up at her. Linnea gives him a short glance, turns around and starts to run through the hallway towards the kitchen. Lucas follows. When entering the kitchen Linnea turns and looks at Lucas.

Fig. 15.2 Acknowledging someone

15.4.3 Negotiating Participation

Negotiating participation involves many different actions, for example, showing others that you want and can participate in an ongoing play or game. In this next situation, I was sitting with my video camera in front of the large wooden toy car, illustrated in

Fig. 15.1. Linnea (1:4) was playing alone in the toy car. The other children were playing with different things in this room and it was rather calm. Leo (1:2) was playing with the cabinets in the kitchen. Some of the teachers were talking in the background.

In the situation shown in Fig. 15.3, Linnea played in the wooden car wiggling her body making a squeaking sound. Linnea first did this wiggling three times, and then Leo came along and performed the same wiggling. In a way, this can be understood as a way for Leo to respond to Linnea, showing her that he had seen and heard her gesture. The repeating of the other gestures was also seen when Leo touched Linnea's hair and later on Linnea touches her own hair in the same spot as Leo. It was clear that it takes two to negotiate. By making a sound at the same time as touching her, Leo was enhancing his message to Linnea, negotiating his participation in the ongoing game that Linnea was performing.

15.4.4 Negotiating Place and/or Object

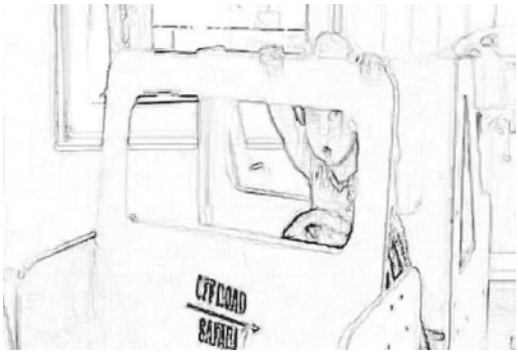
I was sitting alongside the wall in one of the smaller rooms at the preschool. Lucas (2:1) was also in the room, playing with a toy truck made of plastic. When Oskar (2:2) entered the room, Lucas looked up at him and continued looking at him while Oskar walked up to some other older children sitting in another part of the room. Oskar reached out towards the toy car that the older children were playing with. One of the older children rapidly pulled the toy car closer to his body, and Oskar turned around and walked up to Lucas.

In Fig. 15.4, the children negotiated who should have access to the toy truck. Oskar showed Lucas that he was interested in the toy truck by walking up to Lucas and looking at the toy. Lucas then responded by folding his body over the toy truck. Lucas also signalled that he was not open for any communication by constantly avoiding eye contact with Oskar; instead, he stared at the toy.

15.4.5 To Share an Experience with Someone Who Was Not Present

The theme where the children share an experience with someone who was not present is not a common theme in the data material. One situation appeared, and in this situation, the children were playing outside. Linnea (1:3) was walking towards a small hill close to the fence. She pointed towards the hill with her whole arm, looked straight into the camera, and smiled. It sounded like she was laughing. I looked up to the hill (to which she was pointing), and I saw a cat walking away, on the other side of the fence. The cat walked away and disappeared out of sight. Linnea stopped and walked back towards me and made a whining sound, "häääää!" She frowned and looked worried. I said, "There is the cat! Yes, the cat was here!" (see Fig. 15.5). Linnea continued walking towards me when Olivia (1:7) entered from the slide.

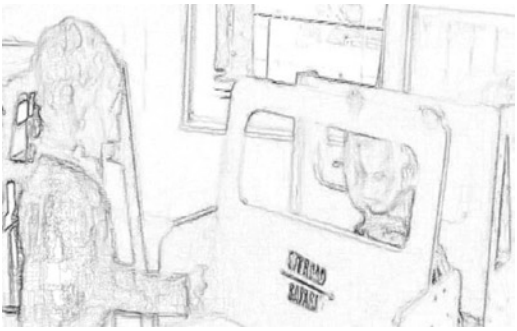
(Video observation: 111007 M2U00752 01:55) Linnea holds her hands on top of the front window frame of the car. With her hands on the window frame, she wiggles her body back and forth, which makes the window frame produce a squeaking sound.



She steps up on the driver seat standing in an upright position. When standing up she wiggles again, this makes the wooden window frame make a squeaking sound again. While standing up she looks to her right instead of at the camera in front of her.

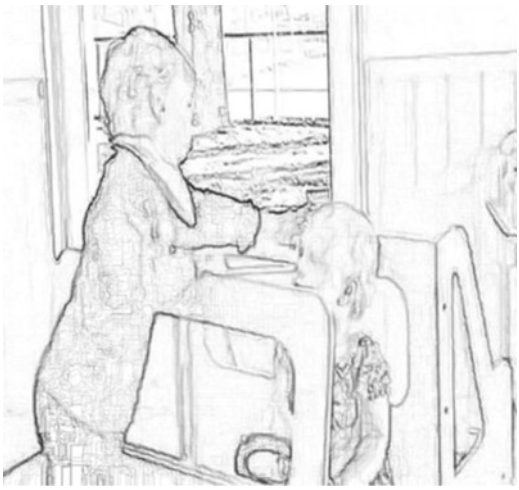
Fig. 15.3 Negotiating participation

Linnea wiggles at a slower paste and stops completely, still with her hands on the window frame and still looking to her right. She makes a pause before sitting down in the seat with her eyes focused to her right. The camera now focuses in the direction of Linnea´s attention. Leo is walking towards Linnea. First, he looks in Linnea´s direction and then on the floor.



When he comes closer to the car, he looks up at Linnea again and steps up on the front of the wooden car with his hands on the front window frame. At the same time as Leo has arrived in front of the car Linnea takes her hands off the window frame in a sudden move and keeps them in her lap. Leo wiggles his body in the same way as Linnea did before and therefore the window frame once again makes a squeaking sound. Leo and Linnea look at each other. Leo then stops the wiggling and slowly puts his left hand on the right-hand side of Linnea´s head touching her hair while making a sound "njööö".

Fig. 15.3 (continued)



Linnea looks at Leo. One of the teachers is talking and Leo turns his head around. He steps down on the floor. Linnea slowly takes her right hand and touches her hair on the same spot as Leo did.

Fig. 15.3 (continued)

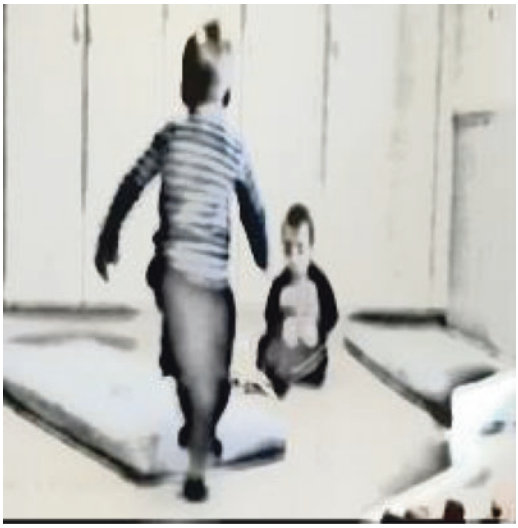
It was clear that Linnea pointed towards the place where the cat disappeared, many times. She also enhances the gesture by saying "thaaa" (the Swedish word for cat is: "kat"). Olivia repeats this pointing both with her whole arm and with her fingers. This is not as clear pointing gesture as the one using the index finger, which might indicate that Olivia find it hard to understand what Linnea want to tell her. Frowning one's eyebrows is a gesture that often indicates that you find something odd or that you do not understand. As a response to this, Linnea starts walking towards the hill, maybe in order to try to clarify what her intentions are. This leads to Olivia starting to walk towards the same place, but Linnea stops, turns around, and walks back.

The understanding of one another in communication is something that demands the effort and willingness of two people, which is obvious in this example. Despite all of the work and the good intentions, communication failed in this situation. All of us that have tried out playing a game of charades know that describing something to someone without using words can be very difficult.

15.5 Discussion and Conclusions

This chapter represents an intersection of dimensions from the model of democracy in ECE by Hägglund, Löfdahl Hultman, and Thelander (2017). Dimension C (what teachers do in ECE settings as didactic activities) and dimension D (children's

(Video observation: 111012 M2U00769 09:30) Oskar walks up to Lucas. Lucas is sitting on the floor right in front of Oskar.



As Oskar comes closer to Lucas, Lucas pulls the toy truck closer to his own body. Oskar stops in front of Lucas and stands still while looking at Lucas. Lucas is holding on to the toy truck and has folded his upper body over the toy truck, staring intensively at the toy truck, with his head turned down. Oskar waits for a couple of seconds and then turns away, turning his back against Lucas and walks out of the room.

Fig. 15.4 Negotiating use of a toy truck

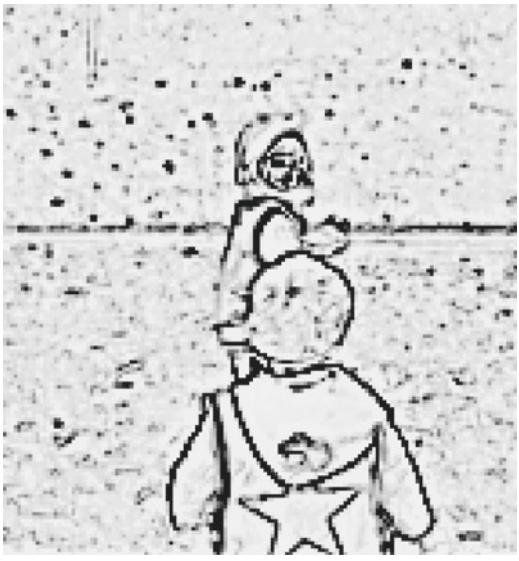
(Video observation: 111005 M2U00725 02:37) Olivia looks at Linnea. When their eyes meet, Linnea stops and stands still. Olivia walks away from the slide and turns her whole body towards Linnea, who also turns her body towards Olivia at the same time. They both stop with their bodies positioning right in front of one another. Linnea holds up her right arm, index finger pointing towards the hill, and says "thaa".

Olivia continues looking at Linnea and lifts up her right arm with the fingers sprawling and frowning her eyebrows.

Olivia turns her upper body and faces the hill.

Fig. 15.5 The cat

Olivia faces the hill for a short time and then turns her face again towards Linnea. Linnea then takes a few steps towards Olivia.



Olivia turns her whole body towards the hill and starts to walk towards it. Linnea starts to walk in the same direction, points with all her fingers to the hill, but changes her mind, turns around and walks back towards me making a whining sound.

Fig. 15.5 (continued)

Fig. 15.5 (continued)

arenas, including peer culture and friendship) support the focus in this chapter on how toddler communication can be understood as ways to enact democracy as well as the didactic implications for preschool teachers.

Toddlers enact democracy in preschool practice by communicating in many ways. The situations show that eye contact and positioning of the body are two main factors for communicating with another child. Standing face-to-face, having the same pace and rhythm, and repeating each other's gestures are important aspects. The situations mentioned in the results of this chapter show the high complexity of the coordination of gestures that toddlers use in their communication. It is an advanced coordination of their own gestures as well as others' gestures, time, space, and body, which – combined – constitutes toddler communication. The toddlers are sensitive and open to others and competent enough to adjust their ways of communicating. This communication can be regarded as toddlers enacting their right to participate and having influence.

In the dialogues, the expressions are performed in a turn-taking manner, awaiting the other's response. These dialogues can consist of single words and of repeating each other's gestures, making sounds, positioning, and directing of the body. In the situation where Linnea is playing in the large wooden car and Leo comes along, Leo responds by wiggling the frame of the car window making a squeaking sound. When having a dialogue where one talks while the other listens, and then the other talks and the first one listens, toddlers are enacting each other's democratic right to equal value.

Communication between the children involves negotiating possession, as shown in the described situations. When communicating nonverbally, negotiation and arguing are performed in the same manner. By facing and directing their bodies towards the other, the toddlers declare an interest in a space, an object, or participa-

tion. In the situation with the plastic toy truck, Lucas folds his body over the toy, pulling it closer to him and hindering Oskar to get a hold of the toy truck.

In contemporary Western society, it is important to be able to communicate verbally, and many arenas constitute verbal communication. Toddlers communicate mostly in other ways than verbally; therefore, the way teachers interpret young children's communication is important. To interpret the toddler communication correctly, teachers must be aware of the many ways toddlers communicate. To be aware of toddlers' many different ways of communicating means recognising the capacity and the competence of toddlers. This is important in order for the toddlers to be able to enact their basic human rights, and to enhance understanding of such communication is an important democratic challenge for preschool.

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Chapter 16
Preschool Children as Democratic Subjects: Agents of Democracy

Katarina Ribaeus and Lovisa Skånfors

Abstract In this chapter, we focus on children's democratic practices in two Swedish preschool settings, drawing on the child dimension in the theoretical model presented in the introduction of this book. The specific aim is to contribute knowledge about children's own constructions of democracy. Our research questions are the following: How do children negotiate democracy, and what does this entail? The chapter takes its point of departure in the intersection between our previous dissertations (Ribaeus K, Demokratiuppdrag i förskolan [Democratic mission in preschool]. Doctoral dissertation, Karlstads universitet, Karlstad, Sweden, 2014; Skånfors L, Barns sociala vardagsliv i förskolan [Children's everyday social life in preschool]. Doctoral dissertation, Karlstads universitet, Karlstad, Sweden, 2013) which in different ways have focused questions about 3- to 5-year-old preschool children's agency and influence and preschool teachers' democratic practice. The empirical material consists of reanalysed data from our dissertations. We use the model *Institutional Events of Democracy* (Ribaeus K, Demokratiuppdrag i förskolan [Democratic mission in preschool]. Doctoral dissertation, Karlstads universitet, Karlstad, Sweden, 2014) to identify and understand children's constructions of democracy. The results show how children in various ways construct and negotiate democracy in terms of *participation*, *power relations* and through *political influence*, illustrating children as democratic subjects and agents of democracy. We conclude by arguing a need for a more explicit emphasis on democracy in early childhood education.

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16.1 Introduction

In this chapter, children's various democratic practices in two preschool[1] contexts are in focus. Basic democratic rights, for example, the individual right to participation, are supposed to be the foundation of the preschool practice in many countries such as Sweden, as expressed in the curriculum for the Swedish preschool (The Swedish National Agency for Education, 2016) and in the *Convention of the Rights of the Child* (United Nations, 1989). According to Moss (2007), preschool is an important democratic context where issues relating to the children need to be lifted. However, democracy does not merely exist. Rather, it is a constant negotiation in relations between teachers and children in preschool, which will be highlighted in this chapter.

The dominant discourse during the last decades, focusing on economic and political liberalism, includes some understanding of what it means to be a child, insight on education and learning, on evaluation and on institutions for children. The preschool can, from this perspective, be seen as a place where a certain result is to be produced. In recent years, many countries have shown increased interest in preschool activities. To some extent, this involves using preschool as an opportunity to, at an early stage, govern and shape children into future citizens. Preschool has simply begun to be seen as an important investment, as money invested here yields an extraordinary public return (Rolnick & Grunewald, 2003) especially when it comes to disadvantaged children (Heckman, 2011). When it comes to traditional citizenship theory (Marshall, 1950), children under 18 years of age have not formally been seen as citizens. Instead, they have been seen as "not-yet-citizens", that is, citizens in the becoming, since they have been regarded as incapable of completing their civil rights and obligations. Moosa-Mitha (2005) believes that we must be able to think of a way of taking children's civic status seriously without using adults as a benchmark against which their citizenship is compared. In contrast to the traditional view of citizenship, she thinks that a citizenship based on diversity, a Different-Centred Citizenship model, could offer this. The model offers suggestions of what it means to be a citizen based on multiple intersectional subject positions rather than citizenship as being just a rights carrier. Citizenship is therefore about recognising differences – even regarding the youngest citizens in our society (Moosa-Mitha, 2005). This raises questions about how preschool, specifically the children in preschool, contribute to the children's successively developing democratic citizenship. Important starting points in this chapter are taking the children's perspective and acknowledging children's agency. Children are social actors, constantly acting in relation to their surroundings, and have opportunities to affect it, to exercise agency. Emphasis is on children as capable of expressing ideas and making choices, even though structure also affects children (Corsaro, 2005; James & James, 2008; Mayall, 2002). The concept of child as agent further recognises children's interactions as

[1] The concept preschool is used as a direct translation of the term used in Sweden for early childhood education for children 1–5 years of age.

having meaning, which can be subtle but also constitute more widely spread societal changes. Quoting Mayall (2002) in her discussion on children as social actors and agents:

> A social *actor* does something, perhaps something arising from a subjective wish. The term *agent* suggests a further dimension: negotiation with others, with the effect that the interaction makes a difference – to a relationship or to a decision, to the workings of a set of social assumptions or constraints. (Mayall, 2002, p. 21)

Children's opportunities to affect their surroundings are also pointed out by Corsaro who says that children through their actions "are actively *contributing to cultural production and change*" (Corsaro, 2005, p. 19) which means that children affect beliefs and practices about democracy. In our research, we are interested in the democratic content that children produce and reproduce in their social worlds. The Swedish preschool has gone, and is still going, through big changes, which means that the conditions for the preschool teachers' work have changed. Issues on democracy are perhaps especially important now in relation to the increased number of newly arrived migrants in Sweden (and other countries) and as xenophobia grows stronger, as mentioned by, e.g. Wieviorka (2018). We are interested in defining the teacher's role in engaging children in democratic education and on the recognition of children's right to democratic education. However, the specific aim of this chapter is to contribute knowledge about children's own constructions of democracy. Our research questions are the following: *How do children negotiate democracy, and what does this entail*? We take our point of departure in the intersection between our previous dissertations on preschool (Ribaeus, 2014; Skånfors, 2013), which in different ways have focused on questions about children's influence and agency and preschool teachers' educational democratic practice.

16.2 Research About Democracy in Preschool

Democracy and values education are contemporary topics. In this section, we have narrowed our search to preschool research in a Nordic perspective resembling our Swedish preschool context. For instance, when it comes to research on values education in preschool, it has been shown in a study about 1- to 3-year-old children's communication of values during play (Pálmadóttir & Johansson, 2015) that conflicts – meeting other children's perspectives – and others' well-being and belonging were important, acknowledging play as an important context for learning about values. During 2016, the *International Journal of Early Childhood* published a special issue (Johansson, Puroila, & Emilsson, 2016) focusing on values education in Nordic preschools. In this issue, Zachrisen (2016) writes about interactions between practitioners and children in relation to democratic practices. The results show that group interactions (practitioner relates to children both as individual and as part of a group) are more valuable than dyadic interactions (between practitioner and individual children) when it comes to children's experiences of democratic practices.

Teachers' various ways of interacting with the children could mean that differing values are conveyed to the children about democracy. For instance, group interactions offer more opportunities for the children to develop a feeling of community, whereas dyadic interactions could lead to children experiencing each other as competitors for the preschool teacher's attention rather than as playmates (Zachrisen, 2016). Values that teachers prioritise in communication with children include, for instance, care, discipline and respect as shown by Sigurdardottir and Einarsdottir (2016). The results in their study also show that the preschool teacher's role, when it comes to values education, concerns use of language, being a good role model and facilitating discussion. In Johansson, Emilson, et al.'s (2016) study about rights and gender in child and educator interactions, individual and collective rights were communicated in interactions between children and teachers. Individual rights were connected to integrity and the institution, and collective rights were connected to shared institutional rights. The children mostly wanted individual rights, whereas the teachers often aimed for collective rights; children's individual rights sometimes were overruled by teachers' intentions and institutional rules.

The teachers' role is also highlighted by Ribaeus (2014) who shows democratic education in the preschool as primarily being about the preschool teachers' attitudes in educational practice. This can be understood as educating through democracy according to Biesta (2007). It is in the response to these teacher actions, in both free and controlled situations, that children's opportunities for influence and participation are formed. However, democratic education in this specific setting is also about educating *about* and *for* democracy. This is partly an effect of preschool teachers working to educate *through* democracy but also because the controlled activities include educating children about democracy and giving them tools that are intended to be used in the future. To a certain extent, democratic education is also about educating from a *here-and-now* perspective (Biesta, 2007). In Ribaeus' analysis of children as democratic subjects, a subject that is complex and sometimes somewhat contradictory emerges. A desirable subject is seen as individualistic in some respects (children should be able to stand up for their own opinions) and as social in others (children have to learn to listen to others). It is also seen as political (children should be able to influence an activity by acting on their own initiative) (Ribaeus, 2014). The children in Ribaeus' study, as well as in, for example, Dolk (2013), did not just let themselves be objects to adults' educational agenda. They acted as subjects with agency by taking their own initiatives, occasionally resisting some of the things that teachers wanted them to participate in or suggesting examples of what they wanted to do instead. Sometimes that meant making their own decisions, even when they were not supposed to. Ribaeus' study also shows that the children are relatively invisible in the preschool teachers' talk. The preschool teachers did not talk much about the children except when there was a problem they had to solve. Instead, they

talked about practical aspects, such as the overall organisation. As opposed to Johansson, Emilson, et al. (2016), Ribaeus' results show a strong focus on the individual child and to some degree a focus on the collective.

Research has also focused on preschool children's right to participation. For instance, Bae (2009) investigates 3- to 6-year-old preschool children's opportunities for participation and self-expression in interactions. The results show how democratic relations involve aspects such as helping others, showing solidarity, choice and accepting misunderstandings. Furthermore, aspects such as emotional responsiveness, taking the child's perspective and considering children's initiative were important in preschool teachers' work for freedom of expression and opportunities for participation. Research about children's peer cultures and social life in preschool has also touched upon issues that relate to children's rights, as they involve issues on social participation (including inclusion and exclusion) and power (e.g. Skånfors, 2013). Skånfors shows in her study about children's social life in preschool that children's relations and social value seem to be uncertain. Children establish and maintain social relations in relation to diverse social resources (proper age, specific competence and established relationships). In her study, children also sometimes resisted the preschool's social norms by withdrawing in different ways.

16.3 Theory: Institutional Events of Democracy

Previous research has shown there is a need for new concepts and ways to analyse democracy in early childhood education. To understand how democracy is constructed among the children, we use the model *Institutional Events of Democracy* (Ribaeus, 2014). This analytical model, shown in Figs. 16.1 and 16.2, helps teachers to identify and understand how the children in the preschool context negotiate democracy. All kinds of events that occur in the preschool practice are included in the analysis. A democratic event is defined as an interaction that can be observed and involves democracy in a broad sense. It includes both social and political actions. The model includes three categories (individual, social and political), focusing on children's activities in preschool. An extra category (formal) has been added, focusing on teachers' actions. The institutional democratic events, presented in Fig. 16.1, can also form democratic practices.

The institutional democratic events, illustrated in Figs. 16.1 and 16.2, are not entirely distinguishable from each other. Many types of events can occur at the same time, in the same situation. Analytically, it is possible to try to distinguish them, but in real life they cannot be totally separated.

Category	*Focus*	*Democratic Events in Practice*
Individual	Children's actions	Situations where a specific child can express individual actions, make their own decisions or take an initiative without interference from adults
Social		Situations where children interact with each other and jointly create their own conditions and exert influence over the preschool organisation.
Political		Situations where children's individual or joint actions and initiatives are met and taken up by the teachers. The teachers have to take an active part, unlike the first two kinds of events. The teachers also have a position of power in relation to the children, hindering the child/children from making a decision of their own. The children can make suggestions but have to wait for the teachers to decide. Nevertheless, it has to be a situation where the child is a subject in some way and the event has been initiated by the child and not the teacher.
Formal	Teachers' actions	Situations initiated by teachersthat are character-isedby teachers acting and interacting with each other or with the children. Children are however seen more as objects than subjects. These events include both planned and spontaneous activities that are introduced or initiated by the teachers.

Fig. 16.1 Democratic events in preschool practice

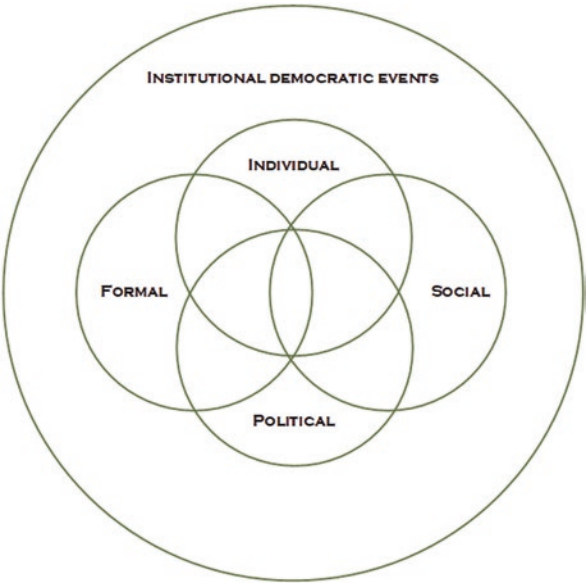

Fig. 16.2 Institutional Events of Democracy in preschool. (Model based on Ribaeus, 2014)

What they have in common is that they are all regarded as institutional democratic events that, together or by themselves, can form democratic practices. In the analysis of the empirical material presented in this chapter, we use the concepts *individualistic*, *social* and *political* democratic events, to highlight children's actions in practice. *Formal* democratic events will be touched upon in the final discussion in this chapter.

16.4 Method and Analysis

The empirical material in this analysis consists of reanalysed data from our completed dissertations (Ribaeus, 2014; Skånfors, 2013). This data consists of observations of 3- to 6-year-old children in two different Swedish preschool[2] settings, using both field notes and film recordings. We have followed research ethical aspects (Swedish Research Council, 2017) such as informed consent from parents and teachers, assent from children and confidentiality, to protect the participants' identities. In the analysis, we reread the empirical material several times to discover patterns in the children's activities, which related to democratic issues. This reanalysis of data on the topic of democracy has not been previously published. Using thematic analysis, we identified three analytical themes involving children's various ways of negotiating democracy, which will be reported in the next section:

- *Participation* – which refers to situations where children negotiated participation in play, which sometimes led to exclusion of certain children
- *Power relations* – which refers to situations where children's interactions involved sharing of props, solving various problems and explicitly discussing power
- *Political influence* – which refers to situations where children jointly exercised influence outside the preschool walls

16.5 Results: Children's Democratic Practices in Preschool

In this section, we present situations illustrating children as democratic subjects. The section is divided into three analytical themes, participation, power relations and political influence, which involves children's various ways of negotiating democracy. These themes are based on an analytical categorisation of a complex reality, and content in these themes could therefore overlap. We will present empirical example of children's individual and collective ways of negotiating democracy. In the illustrations, the participants' names are fictitious. The children's ages vary between 3 and 6 years. The preschool teachers' names are written in capital letters.

[2] All Swedish children between 1 and 5 years old have the right to attend preschool. In the autumn of 2017, 84% of children 1–5 years old were enrolled in preschool.

16.5.1 Participation

Our results show how children in our study often negotiated issues relating to participation. Their interactions often involved discussions and negotiations about who can or cannot join which sometimes led to exclusion, as shown in the following example:

Maria, Vilma och Ally are in the theme room. Tanja comes in with a stroller. They play for a while.
Tanja*: Elin says that she can join but I don't want that. Because then there will be five children, and I don't want it to be five children because then it'll not be calm.*
Tanja tells Elin that she cannot join, and Elin responds that anyone can join. Sanna comes, asking Tanja if she can join.
Tanja: *No, then there'll be too many children.*
Sanna: *But I am a child.*
Tanja: *But there'll be too many children if you join; there will be seven children.*
Sanna: *But that's three children.*
Tanja: *But it'll be seven; it'll be too many children if you join. But you can't come in, but you can be a neighbour and come visit sometimes.*
A short while later, the girls start playing cat. Sanna asks if she can be in the "cat cage".
Tanja: *No because only cats can be there.*
Sanna: *But I am a cat.*
Tanja: *No but cats don't fit in there.*
They talk about where they will sleep. Sanna says that she can also sleep there.
Tanja: *It's not decided yet how it is gonna be.*
Sanna: *But then I don't want to play with you.*
Tanja*: But I'm playing with Vilma and Ally. You don't sleep here. This was not your home; you were just a neighbour.*

Focusing on Tanja, this can be understood as primarily an *individual democratic event* (Ribaeus, 2014), in which Tanja is the one who is able to exercise influence in the situation by setting the rules. Sanna, on the other hand, has difficulties affecting the situation to her advantage. She cannot join in. This could be understood as if participation in play for the children is conditional and connected to inclusion, for some, and exclusion, for others. It is also connected to power, concerning who is in control and who is not. These negotiations can be a kind of *social democratic event* (Ribaeus, 2014). Sanna's opportunities to participate are limited by Tanja and the conditions she brings to the surface. The example also shows how the preschool context in a wider perspective is a complex and important arena for understanding the children's negotiations about participation and social influence. In the situation above, Tanja's comment "I don't want it to be five children because then it'll not be calm" suggests that the open and lively context in preschool also plays a part in the children's strivings and opportunities in affecting their everyday life. Rooms and other spaces in the preschool context are (mostly) available for every child. It could be a challenge for children to negotiate the right to certain spaces, activities and groups of children in relation to the collective norm "anyone can join" and possibilities to *withdraw* (Skånfors, 2013) with certain children. The situation above also shows that it could be important for children to be able to stand up for themselves, having a strong voice, and their rights to exercise agency and have influence.

16.5.2 Power Relations

The results also show how children's interactions include discussions of problem-solving and power. The children discussed issues of power in terms of who gets to decide on shared activities of different kinds and over whom. For instance, one girl said to a boy who gave her orders that "you don't decide what I do" which could be understood as a way for the children to empower themselves. They also solved problems in the peer group and discussed power as something that should be shared, as illustrated below:

> Maria, Vilma och Ally play with four mattresses in the big room. Some boys come and want to play with the mattresses, but Ally says that they can't have any. They discuss this for a while. Lasse and Rickard say they want two. (…) Vilma eventually offers the boys two mattresses. Lasse says thanks. The boys are about to leave as Miriam asks the girls if the boys can take the mattresses.
> **Vilma**: *Yes, those two.*
> **Miriam**: *They'll have two, and you'll have two. Hey, that's great.*
> **André**: *Two for us, two for them.*
> **Miriam**: *That's great; then you fixed that.*
> The boys leave.
> **Ally**: *But we want… I want so many…*
> **Miriam**: *Yes. You have to share, you know… a little bit. You can't have them all. That's the way it works here in our preschool. It's not like at home.*
> A short while later Vilma and Ally pretend to be sharks. Elin asks if she can join in, which she can. They play for a while. Some dispute arises, and the girls turn to Miriam. Soon, the girls return, talking about who is in charge. Ally says that all of them are in charge.
> **Elin**: *But you have to listen to your friends sometimes, that's how it is… you know, that is how it is but…*
> Ally and Elin say that everyone is in charge.
> **Ally** (turns to Elin): *You can be in charge too and you* (points at Vilma) *and me.*
> **Elin**: *I think everyone can be in charge all the time.*

The situation could be understood as a *social democratic event* (Ribaeus, 2014) in which children negotiate props and power. Jointly, they find a solution to the situations at hand. All of the children wish to play with the mattresses, and therefore they must share them. From that perspective, power seems to be shared between the children (with the possible exception of Ally). The situation also illustrates how the children discuss power in terms of "who is in charge". Some of the girls start to argue about something and turn to the preschool teacher Miriam for help. With reference to the comments made by the girls involving everyone's right to make decisions and the importance of listening to others, it is furthermore possible to understand the situation as the teacher making the girls aware of the notion that power needs to be shared. Here the importance of the preschool teacher's role is clear. At the same time as the teacher acknowledges and gives credit to the children for solving the challenge with the mattresses, she is attentive, asks questions and guides the children in different ways.

16.5.3 Political Influence

Different expressions of children's co-constructions of democracy have been presented in this chapter. It has involved how children make choices, individually or as a joint effort, when they are given the opportunity, but also highlights how children can take initiatives in the framework of preschool activities. Our third and last theme concerns political influence, which refers to situations where children jointly exercise influence outside the preschool. In the following example, it is illustrated how children take initiatives on their own and simultaneously make their voices heard outside the preschool's walls.

At the preschool playground, some of the fences were broken. The preschool teachers tried to get them mended, but nothing has happened for a long time. In the meantime, when the children participated in a project about children's rights, they had many thoughts about their possibilities to exercise influence. As part of this, they wanted to see if they could get the fence repaired. With the help of their preschool teachers, they wrote a letter to the local council's service committee, stating that the municipality should consider the best interests of the children. The letter was sent to the municipality. In the letter, the children made a risk analysis of the situation and what the broken fence could lead to and noted the following risks:

> Children can escape from the playground.
> You can hurt yourself. Then you have to go to the doctor.
> Cats can come into the playground, and then some children become allergic.

They also attached pictures of what the fence looked like. The letter was handed over by teachers at a meeting, and they took a photo so that the children could see the letter being handed over to the head of the service board. The service manager again tried with arguments that there were no means to mend the fence. The preschool teachers told him that they found it difficult to explain to the children that the opportunities for meeting the best interests of children are linked to money. He was invited to tell the children himself and accepted the invitation. There was a suspicion among preschool teachers that the service manager felt that the preschool teachers had written the letter:

> He was sure that the preschool teachers were behind the letter, that there was not much child influence really. But we sat in the background when he talked to them. He was sitting on a small chair and was trying to explain. But it did not work. The children contradicted him. It was amazing. 'But the cats can still jump over the fence', he said. But then they just looked at him, so he understood that 'ooh no'. It was so good. And now we have a new fence. In fact, the service manager has gained an unforgettable life experience. He is still talking about it today. (Margareta, Service Director)

A new fence was promised, although it took some time before it finally came into place. The children realised that their work had not been in vain. The service manager even returned for a post-visit. The preschool teachers initiated a project about children's rights and the *Convention of the Rights of the Child* (United Nations, 1989), learning more about how the political system works. However, the children themselves suggested that they could send a letter to the municipality. The children

had some assistance from the preschool teachers, though they themselves controlled the content and design of letters and conversations with the service manager. However, they could not decide for themselves if they would send letters to the municipality in the first place. From this perspective, this example is a *political democratic event* (Ribaeus, 2014). This story also illustrates possible consequences when children are informed about their rights, empowering children's democratic agency.

16.6 Concluding Remarks and Reflections

In the Swedish preschool today, a key task is to educate children. Preschool teachers have opportunities in their daily practices to educate children *about* democracy and educate *through* democracy by acknowledging and taking the children's initiatives into account. Preschool teachers, as we have shown, can empower children by teaching them about their rights and helping them, as highlighted in our example about the fence. One important aspect of pedagogical work is analysing the daily preschool practice to make various democratic events visible there.

The specific aim of this chapter was to contribute knowledge about children's constructions of democracy. As our results show, democracy and values do not merely exist but are constantly made and negotiated by the actors in preschool, both by and in the relations between the preschool teachers and the children. From that perspective, democracy is an everyday lived experience for children. Our results in this chapter show how children are democratic subjects (Biesta, 2007) and agents (Mayall, 2002), actively negotiating and constructing democracy in different democratic events. For the children, their democratic practices variously involve actions of inclusion, opportunities for influence in different ways and shared power. The results could be understood as if individual and groups of children in their peer cultures are beginning to understand that democracy and influence are not about always getting what you want. Sometimes, you have to share power, props or space and give other children influence too. The results furthermore show that children's practices also seem to entail activities of exclusion and reduced rights when it comes to social participation and power. This could be understood as if children may not be able to act in a democratic way in every situation, as the social life sometimes involves not being able to join in and not having as much power. This has been highlighted in previous studies focusing on children's influence (Ribaeus, 2014) and peer cultures in preschool (Löfdahl & Hägglund, 2007; Skånfors, 2013) where it has been shown how children construct *conditions* for influence and social participation in different ways. This chapter has shown that preschool children are a critical group to consider when discussing democracy in society, linking to the child dimension of the theoretical model by Hägglund, Löfdahl Hultman, and Thelander (2017).

Democracy and values represent an important foundation for the Swedish preschool practice, as pointed out in the curriculum for the Swedish preschool (The

Swedish National Agency for Education, 2016). Is there a risk of us viewing democratic issues as something just permeating the context? On the one hand, democracy is everywhere, but at the same time, this places democracy at risk of being nowhere, thereby making the work with democracy less visible and more difficult to evaluate. Is there a need to relate democracy and values education in preschool to a certain subject in order to strengthen this content? Many concepts related to democratic issues are emphasised in paragraphs in the Swedish preschool curriculum (The Swedish National Agency for Education, 2016) regarding values and goals, such as democracy, influence, ethics, respect and openness. These important concepts are mentioned in various places in the writings in the curriculum and could be understood as hanging somewhat loose without a clear connection to a defined subject. When turning back to the fourth (titled "formal") category of the analytical model provided in Figs. 16.1 and 16.2, focusing on the preschool teacher's actions, we offer the idea that the democratic and value-based concepts mentioned above could be included within the subject of social science. At present, social science is not highlighted as a specific subject in the curriculum for the Swedish preschool (The Swedish National Agency for Education, 2016). We find this interesting, since other subjects, such as science, maths and sustainable development, are emphasised as defined areas in the curriculum as well as in the preschool context. We argue that this could be understood as a noisy silence (Linde, 2009). The terms *teaching* and *subject* have historically been a primary school-related discourses in Sweden but have recently also been discussed and underlined as valid in preschool (The Swedish Schools Inspectorate, 2016). This calls for a discussion about if and how specific subjects, in this case democracy and values education, are verbalised in relation to preschool and preschool teaching. Social science could be a powerful subject with the potential to create change in the citizens of today and tomorrow. Recognising our youngest citizens as democratic subjects and agents means seeing them as able to affect the society in the here and now and in the future. In a world challenged by political instability, increased mobility of refugees and number of newly arrived migrants and xenophobia, democratic education could be more important than ever. Recognising and valuing democracy as a specific topic within preschool education could strengthen the children's possibilities to learn about, through and for democracy. We argue that children have a right to democratic education.

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Chapter 17
Preschool Children's Resilience: An Ecological Perspective in a Taiwanese Context

Kuan-Ling Lin and Donna Pendergast

Abstract There are extensive empirical studies exploring adolescent and young adult resilience and identity formation, yet comparatively little attention is devoted to researching the development of children's resilience during their early years. Furthermore, the concept of resilience, including consideration of protective and risk factors, has been investigated primarily in Western settings, with little known about resilience in non-Western cultures, including in Taiwan. Paradoxically, there is wide acceptance that the influence of cultures and contexts is an important factor of relevance to resilience and identity research.

In contributing to exploring the notion of democracy and specifically the theme of empowerment in this book, in the case of this chapter through student voice and focusing on the experiences of three 5-year-old male preschool children, we contribute to building a greater understanding of challenges and resilience in preschool children in a non-Western context. We do so by exploring narratives from Victor, Howard, and Ian considered through the lens of Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory. These case studies illustrate the relationship between preschool children's emergent identities and resilience in their early years and extend our insights into culturally influential elements on young children's resilience development associated with their emergent identities. We found that culturally influential elements include families, media, and multiple religious traditions in Taiwan. By giving voice to these students, we are contributing to developing democracy in the early childhood sector, specifically through our educational research practice that enables children to have a voice via participation and hence influence, leading to empowerment as a key component of democracy.

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17.1 Introduction

The way we view ourselves – our identity – has been confirmed to be important for our resilience development. Indeed, there is considerable research around the globe in a range of cultural contexts that links and explores the concepts of resilience and identity. For example, having a powerful identity is one of the seven aspects identified as essential for promoting adolescents' resilience (Ungar et al., 2007). Similarly, Skovdal and Andreouli's research in Western Kenya (2011) revealed that when 11- to 17-year-old teenagers were recognised by their local community as competent caregiving children of their families, they built positive social identities, and their resilience was enhanced. These studies point to the vital relationship between identity and resilience. However, most identity studies globally focus on the phase of adolescence and young adulthood, likely because researchers historically regard late adolescence as a key stage of identity formation, reinforced, for example, through Erikson's theory (McAdams & McLean, 2013). There is hence a relative void in research generally about preschool age children's identity and specifically related to resilience (Ahn, 2011; Puroila & Estola, 2014). Furthermore, the concept of resilience and most of the protective and risk factors have primarily been investigated in Western literature, such that little is known about the understanding of resilience in non-Western cultures.

Furthermore, the concept of contemporary democracy, as conceptualised in this book, provides a lens to view this study about resilience and preschoolers' emergent identity. As previously outlined in this book, democracy as we perceive is not a fixed concept, nor does it have a single definition; rather it is multi-faceted and can be viewed to be more of a continuum with core values such as agency, equity, participation, and influence (see Chap. 1). In our study we were interested in preschool children's personal stories, their narratives, generated through storytelling, identity and resilience development. We were interested in their stories in a specific context – Taiwan – and considered through the lens of ecological systems theory, developed by Bronfenbrenner in the 1990s. In doing so, we are contributing to the theme of this book in the section related to democracy as empowerment, in this case through encouraging student voice and focusing on the experiences of three male preschool children – Victor, Howard, and Ian – each faced with resilience challenges. We explore the three preschool children's emergent identities and their resilience development through the lens of BEST by considering firstly, the relationship between preschool children's emergent identities and resilience and, secondly, by exploring the influential elements and interactions on the preschool children' resilience associated with their emergent identities, again through the lens of BEST. Therefore, this chapter connects to dimension C (teacher intentional practice) and dimension D (children's arenas), within the model of democracy in early childhood education by Hägglund, Löfdahl Hultman, and Thelander (2017).

This research was conducted in Taiwan, where young children aged 2–6 years can choose to enrol in a preschool (Ministry of Education, 2013). Although early childhood education (ECE) is not compulsory, approximately 80% of children in

Taiwan attend preschool or childcare centres, and approximately a third of the children enrol in a public preschool (Ministry of Education, 2015). According to the *Early Childhood Education and Care Act* in Taiwan (Ministry of Education, 2013), one of the main purposes of ECE is to ensure the development of children's physical and mental health. Because this study is embedded in preschools in Taiwan, two contextual factors should be acknowledged: the limited research on resilience undertaken in Taiwanese contexts and the ongoing emphasis on academic-orientated curriculum (e.g. mathematics, Mandarin Phonetic Symbols, literacy and numeracy) across ECE settings and sectors in Taiwan. The term "preschool" is used in this chapter, rather than other ECE settings, as it reflects Taiwanese discourse in this study.

17.2 Theoretical Model: Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (BEST) and Resilience

In our study, resilience refers to a preschool child's progressive development towards adjusting to life difficulties (Lin, 2016). Preschool children' life difficulties mean challenges with achievement of the child developmental tasks, such as language acquisition, attachment with important caregivers, fundamental development of child movement, appropriate emotional expressions, and learning social skills (Masten & Gewirtz, 2006; Masten, Gewirtz, & Sapienza, 2013). These developmental tasks are influenced by different interactions in ecologies.

In keeping with our understanding of resilience, we have employed BEST as it provides five comprehensive systems to examine the potential risk and protective elements of resilience that are embedded in the context of this study. The five ecological systems Bronfenbrenner defines are the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1993, 1994; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006), which are delineated later. BEST also highlights the reciprocal relationships between the individual and these systems and the subsequent influence on the outcome of human development (Bronfenbrenner, 1993, 1994; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). The relationships and interactions specifically between an individual and immediate settings, called a proximal process as the engine of BEST in child development, are emphasised (Bronfenbrenner, 1994; Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). As a result, through the lens of BEST, it is clearly seen that the preschool children's narratives of resilience are embedded in these ecological systems, and the interactions between influential elements on the children's resilience can also be analysed.

BEST in our study provides a systematic framework to explore the possible influential elements and interactions on children's resilience development in Taiwanese public preschool contexts. It contributes to the theme of democracy and in particular the dimension of empowerment by providing a lens to enable children to have a voice via participation and hence influence, leading to empowerment as a

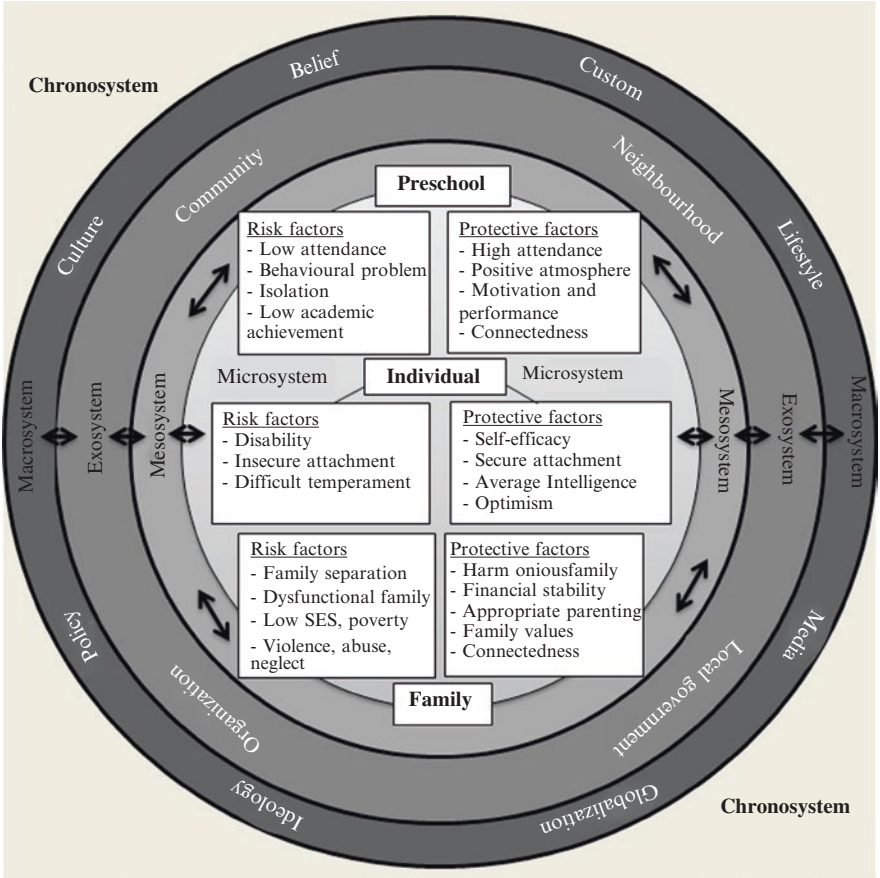

Fig. 17.1 Theoretical framework: an individual's influential elements through the lens of BEST

key component of democracy. This research design offers a challenge in as much as it directly privileges the voice of very young children, talking about their resilience in ways that empower them directly. The model is presented in Fig. 17.1, bringing together the BEST model alongside the risk and protective factors identified from the wider literature as relevant to preschool children (Lin, 2017). Each of the five systems will be explored in turn in terms of the connection with resilience and the unique context of the Taiwanese culture.

17.2.1 Microsystems and Resilience

The microsystem refers to a series of social roles, physical activities, and the closest interpersonal relationship between an individual and their surroundings, such as a family, school, and peer groups (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1994). Most importantly,

the microsystem is the most direct and influential system in child development (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1994). In this study, therefore, the particular risk and protective elements embedded in both families and preschools involved in the microsystem are explored (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1994).

17.2.1.1 Family as a Key Influence on Children's Resilience

The vast majority of researchers agree with the importance of family in fostering children's resilience (Masten, Best, & Garmezy, 1990; Masten et al., 2013; Walsh, 2016). Walsh (1996, 2016) argues that family strengths as a source of resilience should be identified in order for the family members to cope more effectively with crises, from within or outside the family. This development of resilience for coping with crises is particularly important for children in a single-parent family or a family raising a child with a disability (Walsh, 1996).

Additionally, extended families are the common family structure in a Taiwanese cultural context. An extended family refers to at least three generations living together and sometimes including paternal unmarried siblings (National Statistic, 2012). This traditional form of family structure in Taiwan is likely to feature in this study, despite the substantially decreasing percentage of the extended family (National Statistic, 2012). Living in an extended family means that young children's resilience can be affected both by their parents and grandparents. However, little research attention is directed towards identifying the influence of grandparents as significant caregivers (Breitkreuz, Wunderli, Savage, & McConnell, 2014; Downie, Hay, Horner, Wichmann, & Hislop, 2010). Breitkreuz et al. (2014) highlight extended family members as significant resources in the development of children's resilience. In Taiwanese culture, grandparents frequently and actively engage in their grandchildren's daily care, particularly in an extended family (Chen, 2016). Consequently, it is not surprising that the influence of grandparents on grandchildren's development was evident as a unique cultural factor in this study.

17.2.1.2 Preschool as an Important Influence

Childcare centres or preschools are environments with which young children directly engage (Bronfenbrenner, 1993; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). In Taiwan, children stay at preschool at least 7 h a day; therefore the preschools and preschool teachers are "significant others" for the children. The influential elements of preschool include preschool teachers' teaching pedagogy (e.g. storytelling), curriculum (e.g. learning activities), and the interaction between the teachers and children.

17.2.2 Mesosystem and Resilience

The mesosystem delineates the connection between individual microsystems (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1994). This means that the interaction between protective and risk elements in the individual microsystem also takes place in the mesosystem. As teachers and parents could be influential elements mentioned in the microsystem, mesosystems would explore interactions between preschools and families.

17.2.3 Exosystem and Resilience

The exosystem comprises of the extensive process of the mesosystem, including two or more settings, such as a community, neighbourhood, organisation and even departments of a government (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1994), and the mass media (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). The relationship between an individual and the exosystem is further apart than the relationship between an individual, the microsystem, and the mesosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1994). With Bronfenbrenner's categorisation of the exosystem, this study explored local religious communities, such as temples or shrines, where the Taiwanese society has been influenced by Buddhism and Taoism (Chiu, 1999).

Mass media was also categorised as part of an exosystem of BEST (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). In 1977, the media was an indirect influence on an individual's development, whereas in the twenty-first century, due to the development of technology and globalisation, the global penetration rate of media usage is predictably greater. This study included documentation of the influence of using media in preschool children's narratives, such as watching TV and movies and playing games on tablets or smartphones.

17.2.4 Macrosystem and Resilience

The macrosystem refers to the overarching systems as cultures, beliefs, customs, lifestyles, and political systems, where explicit and implicit ideologies are developed (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1994). The influence of a macrosystem is indirect on child development and through particular agencies, such as caregivers, teachers, or neighbours. As the macrosystem foregrounds the importance of cultural influences, this study conducted in Taiwan pays attention to the richness of Taiwanese multiple traditions and cultures.

Multiple religious traditions are part of Taiwanese lived experiences. Taiwan has the second largest degree of religious diversity in the world (Grim, 2015). There are

more than 27 religions registered in Taiwan, with Daoism and Buddhism having the largest number of followers (Department of Statistics, 2013). Daoism, initially developed from Laozi's philosophy in ancient China, forms the concept of multiple beliefs (Chiu, 1999). Daoism has gradually become entwined with Chinese folks' beliefs and traditions (Chiu, 1999). Additionally, Buddhism is also one of the most influential religions on lived experiences of the Chinese people and has similar concepts of multiple traditions like Daoism. Taiwanese people practice their beliefs at prestigious temples, public or private shrines, or at home where some families set up their Gods' room for daily worship. These religious congregations are part of Taiwanese communities located in public and residential areas. Multiple religious traditions might indirectly influence preschool children's narratives.

17.3 Narrative Methodology

According to Clandinin and Connelly (2000), a narrative inquiry highlights the importance of personal experiences and social interactions in terms of how personal lived experiences take place across both individuals and social interactions. To have an in-depth understanding of preschool children's emergent identities and their resilience development in Taiwanese preschools, the use of a narrative methodology enabled the exploration of children's resilience stories. This narrative study was designed to capture preschool children's construction of identities by sharing their lived experiences in relation to resilience.

For this chapter, we selected narratives of three children from the qualitative narrative findings of a much more extensive three preschool study of resilience among children aged 5 in Taiwan. As ethics permission from Griffith University, we used their pseudonyms to present their narratives of resilience: Victor, Howard, and Ian. Reflecting on the purpose of this study, the focus of these three narratives was associated with the ways the children manifested their resilience by showing their identities in diverse ecologies.

We drew upon multiple sources of data such as classroom observations, interviews with teachers and participant children and their parents, children's documents, and field notes. All data were transcribed to texts and translated from Mandarin to English. Selected excerpts are shared in this chapter to reflect representative features on BEST. To analyse the children's narratives, two analytical frameworks were developed. An analytical framework was adopted from Riessman's dialogic/performance analysis (2008) in order to focus on how children's identities were presented and what the relationship between their identities and resilience is. Next, a theoretically thematic framework integrating BEST was utilised to analyse influential elements and interactions on preschool children' resilience associated with their emergent identities.

17.4 Victor's Story

Victor was diagnosed with Asperger's[1] syndrome at 5 years of age, which was a risk to his resilience development. Due to his violent emotional outbursts and agitated reactions to the attempted thwarting of his persistent behaviour, Victor was implicitly labelled as a student with poor interpersonal skills by his classmates and teachers and was unable to engage in group-orientated learning. In Miss Betty's interviews, "Victor caused some troubles in terms of classroom management, especially in a group activity". In Extract 17.1, Victor had difficulty finding a partner to sing a song together, and from his peers' perspective, Victor had negative interpersonal relationships with them.

Extract 17.1: Joyce Was Scared of Victor's Tantrums

Allen	*(pointed to Victor and shouted.) "Miss Betty,* ***Victor does not have a partner.****"*
Simon	*(also pointed to Victor.) "****No one wants to be with Victor.****"*
Miss Betty	*(looked at Victor and asked him.) "Who do you want to sing a song with?"*
Victor	*(was still silent but pointed to Joyce.)*
Joyce	*(saw Victor pointed to her. She shook her head and told Miss Betty) "****I don't want to be with him (Victor) in a duet. I am so scared of him.****"*
Victor	*(When Miss Betty tried to match Victor with another child who did not find a partner, Victor cried out.) "I want to be with her (Joyce). (When Miss Betty looked for someone to be with Victor, he was upset.)* ***I don't have*** *… (unfinished sentence)."*

Although Victor did not recognise himself as an unpopular child, Skovdal and Andreouli (2011) argue that the way people are seen by others "is integral to our sense of self" (p. 617) Hence, Victor was negatively labelled as another risk of Victor's resilience development because it adversely affected his interpersonal building with his classmates.

After teachers' storytelling was undertaken for approximately 4 months, however, through observing and listening to teacher's storytelling and his personal interest of reading, Victor eventually demonstrated his outstanding storytelling in his class to show he was a competent reader and storyteller. In a storytelling time, Victor raised his hand to be the first storytelling volunteer. Victor selected a story, which the two teachers had not told in the class, but placed in the reading centre, and told this story literally and fluently in front of his classmates. After his storytelling, he asked his classmates three questions. Victor's ability to ask questions related to the story and his knowledge of the correct answers when his classmates' answers were wrong demonstrated that he had reading competence and comprehension.

[1] Asperger's disorder was recognised in DSM-IV in 1994 but has merged into Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) by American Psychiatric Association in 2013. However, Victor's diagnosis report still shows Asperger's disorder. This study uses Asperger's disorder as the original data Victor's parents provided to us.

Extract 17.2: Victor's Storytelling

Miss Sunny	*"Please tell us your name and the name of the storybook."*
Victor	*"**My name is Victor**. (paused and laughed because the microphone sounded strange.) Today **I want to tell a story**, called "Your Fault." Don't laugh. Don't laugh." (When the children heard that Victor's voice amplified by the microphone, they found it was weird so they were laughing. Victor was also laughing as he has never heard his voice using a microphone.)*
Miss Sunny	*"OK. If you cannot stop (laughing), I am going to take the microphone away."*
Victor	*"No. I want to use it (microphone). **I can do this** (tell the story)." (He started telling the story) "All the animals in a forest are gathering near the only pond. They find that there is no water in the pond now." (After Victor began the story, his classmates became quiet.) "All the animals in a forest are gathering near the only pond…(omitted. The story went for 7 minutes and 22 seconds.)"*

From a denial self "I don't have" to positive sentences of "I want" *and* "I can" as Victor's self-affirmation, he demonstrated his reading competence. This outstanding performance changed his classmates' and teachers' negative perceptions of Victor, to a positive recognition of his skill as an outstanding storyteller.

Extract 17.3: Victor's Storytelling (Cont)

Miss Sunny	*"Thank you Victor again. **He is awesome, isn't he**? OK. Who is next (to be a volunteer storyteller)?" (No one raised his/her hand, so Miss Sunny asked again.) "**You don't have to be like Victor who reads literally**. You can just tell what you see in a story."*
Shelly	*(suddenly expressed her impression loudly.) "**Victor is so smart. He can read all the characters**."*
Victor	*(laughted). "See. **I know I can do it**."*

Victor's storytelling performance was a turning point of the development of his resilience because he built his identity as a competent storyteller. Consistent with Grotberg and Bernard van Leer (1995) resilience project of "I have, I am, I can", Victor's language of "I can" represented an important source of social and interpersonal skills. This is a significant narrative identity of Victor with Asperger's syndrome because "I can" builds a new beginning of Victor's interpersonal relationship. This finding is also in line with cross-cultural research conducted by Ungar et al. (2007); they have discovered that when adolescents viewed themselves as resilient, they also show their strengths in their identities. Therefore, this "I can" language empowers Victor's positive identity.

17.5 Howard's Story

In addition to a complementary relationship between children's emergent identities and resilience, our study discovered that children's self-recognition of emergent identities could promote the development of their resilience. In Howard's situation, he was struggling with his parents' divorce and constructed the meaning of "They

are not living together" and showed his narrative identity as a single child of "I have two homes". From struggling to achieve an understanding of his parental separation, Howard spoke about his parental separation in the group discussion. This represented meaning-making of his self-identity as a child living in multiple homes.

Extract 17.4: Speak Out About Parental Separation in a Group Discussion

Howard	*"Only my mother will come because my father is not living with us.* ***They are separated****. My father is in Tainan. It is too far to join our show."*
Ivy	*(A girl sat beside Howard, whose eyes were wide when she heard Howard's reply.) "Did your parents* ***separate****?"*
Howard	*"****Yes, they did (separate). They are not living together.****" (He nodded his head and responded to Ivy quickly.)*

Howard had demonstrated unstable emotional expressions, such as bursting into tears without a specific reason or becoming upset after visiting his father fortnightly, and the teachers associated these behaviours with the confusion of his parental separation. The teachers provided resilience-orientated stories related to parents' divorce, and after reading these, Howard's unstable emotions dropped, and he actively spoke out about his parental separation in public. Through acknowledging his family separation and living in two homes, Howard's resilient identity emerged. This was because through role models of resilience-orientated stories, Howard learnt positive meaning of having two homes as he mentioned that, "I reckon living in two homes is good news because parents' would not quarrel". Howard's positive view of his parental separation contributed to his self-recognition. This finding in Howard's case accounts for the idea of Skovdal and Andreouli (2011) that self-recognition shapes our identities. Therefore, Howard's self-recognition was the first step of accepting his identity as a single-family child. Because of that, it facilitated the development of his resilience.

17.6 Ian's Story

Ian's identity as a "good" boy is implicitly demonstrated in the interactions with his grandmother and with media (cartoons) he engaged with for entertainment. Ian's story features a strong cultural connection to belief systems in Taiwan related to multiple religious traditions. Ian's narratives drew on the influence of media and showed his fear of supernatural beings. He distinguished between good or bad ghosts, robots, and monsters, and the cartoon he watched frequently showed good and bad parties fighting each other where eventually the good party won. Ian perceived a clear answer to the judgement of good and bad subjects in his discussion of media he watched.

Extract 17.5: Ian's Fear of Monsters Affected by the Media

I	*"Where did you see monsters?"*
Ian	*"I watch a cartoon. There are* ***good*** *robots and* ***bad*** *robots. I like to watch them fighting."*

I *(tried to clarify his opinion of robots and monsters.) "You watch the TV cartoon and you like robots. Do you like monsters?"*

Ian *(was urgent to explain.) "**No.** I said that **I like good robots but I don't like monsters. They (monsters) are all bad. The good robots would fight with monsters. And save the Earth… Good robots always win.**"*

Ian's narrative of good and bad robots suggests that his moral development was influenced by media. In the next example of his narratives, Ian presents himself as a "good" boy. This is congruent with Hardy and Carlo (2011) who propose that "moral identity is a construct at the intersection of moral development and identity formation" (p. 495).

Extract 17.6: Ian's Draw-and-Tell Interview

I *(pointed to Ian's drawing.) "Your monster and ghost look smiley, don't they"*

Ian *"I think **some monsters are good like me**... mmm like (those in) the story shows. **I can** shake my hands with them. But …mmm but **I cannot be friends with bad monsters.**"*

Apart from the influence of the media on Ian's identity, his interaction with his grandmother directly affected his moral development. Due to living with his grandmother, her telling of folktales and stories relating to religious role models (e.g. Buddha) and evil ghosts was embedded in Ian's lived experience.

Extract 17.7: Ian's Lived Experience with His Grandmother's Storytelling

Ian *(interrupted our conversation.) "My grandma told us (Ian and Sean) that if we don't eat vegetables, greedy ghosts would come to take us away. If you don't go to sleep at night, ghosts would bring you to an island. Because all the children not going to bed stay there … you know? … and then you would never come back again. **I don't want to be like that.**"*

In Extract 17.7, Ian was frightened by his grandmother's ghost story. Taiwanese folktales, as stories expressing folk beliefs and religions, consist of numerous stories of ghosts. These stories have been used commonly to threaten and exhort children to behave well. Consistent with the narrative research of Puroila, Estola, and Syrjälä (2012), in which young children believed Santa sent gifts to a well-behaved child not to naughty ones, the folktales in Taiwan have similar features. As folktales and religious stories convey the meaning of morality (Daniel, 2012), Ian's emerging concept of the morality in his identity illustrated that he wanted to be a "good" person.

Personal identity formation can be reinforced within microsystem contexts where children interact directly. In this study, the daily interactions between individuals and their contexts reinforced the influence on the formation of children's identities. In Ian's case, his emergent identity is highly influenced by his grandmother's folktales and religious stories and also by the daily practices of her religious beliefs in Taiwanese multiple religious traditions. The content of the folktales and religious stories reflect certain beliefs of multiple religious traditions embedded in Taiwanese society, and Ian's grandmother practiced these traditions in her Gods' room on a daily basis. Ian's grandmother's regular religious practices at home

apparently reinforce his belief in good and bad supernatural beings. Hence, Ian's direct and daily interactions with his grandmother's storytelling and religious practices account for the influence of Taiwanese social and cultural contexts on his identity formation.

17.7 Reflections

The findings of this study support the proposition that children's narrative identity formation emerges as early as preschool age (Ahn, 2011; Puroila & Estola, 2014), and in late adolescence (McAdams & McLean, 2013). In addition, the formation of children's narrative identities manifests the development of their resilience and vice versa. This complementary relationship between children's identities and resilience is reflected in different aspects of the unique social and cultural context in which the individual children experience during their daily life. Consequently, these findings reveal the complementary relationship between children's narrative identities and narratives of resilience. Yet, the complementary relationship between children's resilience and identities is rarely explored in their early years. This may be because McAdams and McLean (2013) argued that the formation of narrative identity was not until late adolescence, which is the stage of Erikson's development of identity. However, as the findings of the contemporary narrative researchers (e.g. Ahn, 2011; Puroila & Estola, 2014) are congruent with this study, evidencing that the formation of young children's identity emerging in their narratives can be recognised and interpreted as early as the time from which they start expressing themselves. The examples of Howard, Victor, and Ian shared in this chapter are evidence of this phenomenon of children exploring their identity and developing resilience in their early years. Documenting narratives of identity and resilience enables us to further understand and reflect on children's strength and skill.

Children's narratives are embedded in unique contexts (Ahn, 2011; Puroila & Estola, 2014; Puroila et al., 2012). Through exploring the content of children's narratives of resilience, this study contributes to the understanding of how young children's identities are influenced within Taiwanese social and cultural contexts, with practices such as telling folktales, folk beliefs, and religious beliefs, and living in a society that practises multiple religious traditions. The formation of emergent identity is influenced by the interactions (proximal processes) between the individual and his/her surroundings and contexts as microsystems, mesosysems, exosystems, and macrosystems. The analysis of children's narratives of resilience through the lens of BEST connects influential elements and interactions on the three preschool children' resilience and emergent identities. These influences encompass a broad range of risk and protective factors, including their case families, media, and multiple religious traditions.

Our exploration reveals that extended families provide valuable cultural heritage, which promotes young children's resilience and emergent identities in microsystems. In particular, grandparents – as significantly influential caregivers in the

Taiwanese context – have a key role, and this has been frequently overlooked in the Western literature (Breitkreuz et al., 2014).

Additionally, the original BEST model identifies media as an indirect influence on child development within an exosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). However, as we analysed, the interaction between Ian and the media operating as a proximal process profoundly influenced his resilience and emergent identity. We are living in an era of easily accessible cutting-edge technologies and affordable digital products; hence the media ubiquitously influences our daily life in the twenty-first century (Agarwal & Dhanasekaran, 2012). This was evident in our study, and, hence, we propose that media should be privileged to reflect contemporary times, shifting from an indirect to a direct influence in a microsystem.

Lastly, this study reveals that multiple religious traditions as the Taiwanese way of practicing their folk beliefs and religions were a significant influence on children's resilience and emergent identities. Although the traditions are evident in the unique social and cultural context in Taiwan, this macrosystem component has not been recognised in BEST developed in a Western culture. Moreover, these cultural and religious traditions are not only an influential element on resilience development but also affect young children's moral development, which is the earliest enlightenment on their moral identities (Hardy & Carlo, 2011).

In conclusion, this study contributes to an understanding of the relationship between preschool children's emergent identities and resilience in their early years and extends an insight into challenges and culturally influential elements on young children's resilience development associated with their emergent identities. These culturally influential elements include families, media, and multiple religious traditions in Taiwan. Therefore, this study enlarges the content of BEST from the perspective of the social and cultural context in Taiwan. This study contributes to the theme of democracy and in particular the dimension of empowerment by providing a lens through which children have a voice via participation and hence influence, leading to empowerment as a key component of democracy. This reflects democracy as having relational ethos that can and does pervade all aspects of these young children's lives.

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Part V
Conclusion

Chapter 18
Challenging the Challenges: Democratic Spaces and Opportunities in ECE

Annica Löfdahl Hultman and Valerie Margrain

Abstract This volume started with expressing concerns of what might challenge democracy in early childhood education (ECE) settings of today – all over the world. We have, throughout the work as authors and editors, been more and more aware of the different ways early childhood practices are challenged by the contemporary issues mentioned in Chap. 1 of this volume. We have learned not only the fact that there are challenges but also gained insights into how ECE practitioners, children and researchers deal with these challenges. The subtitle of this volume says *Engagement in Changing Global Contexts*, and in this concluding chapter, we will further elaborate the engagement expressed by the authors. By referring to the conceptual framework from Chap. 2, challenges will relate to the different but linked dimensions in the democracy model provided by Hägglund, Löfdahl Hultman and Thelander (2017). Our lessons learned and our conclusions deal with ideas about children and childhood, about the way policies structure children's lives and the everyday life in preschool for teachers and for children. As already stated in the introduction, the democracy model takes the position that democracy in ECE is influenced from the ideas and actions in all four dimensions of the model: historical views, curriculum and other formal documents, intentional teaching practices, and children's arenas. In addition, democracy is challenged by content in the same dimensions. Each chapter of this book has presented an individual discussion and analysis of empirical research, and our intention here is not to repeat what has already been written but to highlight synergies and connections. The structure for this analysis builds around three concepts that we use to highlight what is important to challenge the challenges: *reciprocity*, *togetherness* and *empowerment*. We also argue these three concepts form new core values of democracy especially in ECE and as such need to be considered and questioned.

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18.1 Introduction

This volume started with expressing concerns of what might challenge democracy in early childhood education (ECE) settings of today – all over the world. We have, throughout the work as authors and editors, been more and more aware of the different ways early childhood practices are challenged by the contemporary issues mentioned in Chap. 1 of this volume. We have learned not only the fact that there are challenges but also gained insights into how ECE practitioners, children and researchers deal with these challenges. The subtitle of this volume says *Engagement in Changing Global Contexts*, and in this concluding chapter, we will further elaborate the engagement expressed by the authors. By referring to the conceptual framework from Chap. 2, challenges will relate to the different but linked dimensions in the democracy model provided by Hägglund, Löfdahl Hultman and Thelander (2017). Our lessons learned and our conclusions deal with ideas about children and childhood, about the way policies structure children's lives and the everyday life in preschool for teachers and for children. As already stated in the introduction, the democracy model takes the position that democracy in ECE is influenced from the ideas and actions in all four dimensions of the model: historical views, curriculum and other formal documents, intentional teaching practices, and children's arenas. In addition, democracy is challenged by content in the same dimensions. Each chapter of this book has presented an individual discussion and analysis of empirical research, and our intention here is not to repeat what has already been written but to highlight synergies and connections. The structure for this analysis builds around three concepts that we use to highlight what is important to challenge the challenges: *reciprocity*, *togetherness* and *empowerment*. We also argue these three concepts form new core values of democracy especially in ECE and as such need to be considered and questioned.

In each section below, we will highlight our lessons learned and insights from the different chapters on these concepts. Some chapters deal with one or two of our chosen concepts, while others deal with all three simultaneously.

18.2 Challenge the Challenges: Lessons Learned

What has been common in the volume contributions is an attempt and a will to, if not to solve, challenge the challenges related to democracy in ECE. A cautious lesson learned is faith in a gathered power of children, practitioners and researchers together to have possibilities to create change. Such changes potentially bring possibilities for all engaged in ECE to take a step forward towards arenas that are more democratic regardless whether the focus is on views on children, curriculum and other structured documents, didactic arenas or children's spaces and places. The concepts *reciprocity*, *togetherness* and *empowerment* as core values derive from our analysis of definitions of democracy, as applied by authors in this book to early childhood practice and discourse.

18.2.1 Reciprocity

Reciprocity recognises existing practices, strengths, theories and considerations for democracy in ECE and childhood, highlighting democratic participation of children in cultural contexts. When trying to find how authors express reciprocity, we notice how democracy and education seem to be working closely together as reciprocal terms. Thereby, our recognition is linked to Dewey's (1938/2012) ideas of how democracy and education are closely interrelated. However, as noted in several chapters, there are gaps between policy and practice. For example, in reality not all children are able to access educational rights accorded by national policy documents, curriculum and local policies. We know that globally many children are marginalised and sociopolitical-economic contexts mean that not all children receive "fair go pedagogy" (Munns, Arthur, Hertzberg, Sawyer & Zammit 2012). Democratic aspirations are challenged if the children do not have access to the dominant education language and when they experience poverty. Some chapters highlight limitations of inclusion and access for children who have disabilities and also gifted children. When taking a meta-perspective, both gifted and disabled children face similar challenges. Their rights to have their special individual learning needs considered are not always recognised. We can trace this back to dimension A in our theoretical model and challenge views on children that do not fully articulate democratic rights of children or take advantage of children's own voices. If children's voices are neglected, as has been shown in relation to consent/assent in research when reporting on children, how can we expect them to be aware of other people and to ensure they in turn ask for other people's views when grown up? Not being aware of ethical drift means not being aware of the implications for democracy as ethical drift is also a drift away from a view of children as participating citizens able to make decisions. In this particular example, we can extend ideas in the theoretical model by elaborating how researchers will act in their research practice (dimension C) and critiquing how the children themselves be comfortable with participating in research if their voices are of less value (dimension D).

We can also note in the chapters a positive tone on how we can work to challenge such views and establish more reciprocal educational arenas for all children. We can learn from the conclusions and discussions in the volume of how new ways of thinking of children and their contributions to their own arenas and development are important. Researchers and practitioners need to challenge themselves regarding the way they describe results and assessment findings and the way children are labelled by standardised and common concepts – such as disabled, gifted or normal. There is also a need to challenge academic practices by ensuing that we consistently report on children as competent growing citizens while maintaining advocacy for support from the surrounding adult society. For example, what is "a disability" and in what situations can we look behind the disability and see the child as just any child in need of peer support. A challenge to the exclusion/inclusion dilemma and the gap between policy and practice is to highlight the advantage for all children to get opportunities to share their experiences and develop positive feelings about

peers. Similarly, practitioners should benefit from meeting all kinds of children. We can also critically review who is included and excluded within discourses about "all" children.

An alternative consideration is to ask if ordinary classrooms are exclusionary – and thereby challenging democracy. In some chapters, we learn how to appreciate diversity; highlighting pluralistic perspectives creates new understandings about children. Analysing tensions between searching for "right" ways of seeing quality alongside differing ways to work and learn together makes students aware of reciprocal perspectives. Our early childhood research practices engage with reciprocity through the challenge of meeting ethical practices. The "give and take" challenge is to avoid imposing on children and families, while seeking their views and respecting family decisions. Yet vulnerable participants, marginalised groups of people – including children and minority groups, Indigenous peoples and those from diverse language backgrounds – may be the least able to genuinely give informed consent. ECE researchers have a unique opportunity and responsibility to demonstrate ethical and inclusive practice. So, does this mean that intervention studies, which seek to change some family and community practices, need to be reconceptualised? Are such studies necessarily positivist and in turn is that necessarily a challenge? If policy makers and community have a reciprocal commitment to positive child outcomes, how can progress be evaluated in innovative ways?

18.2.2 Togetherness

Togetherness illustrates how democracy may be evident (or absent) in early childhood practices and interactions across a range of curriculum contexts and perspectives, noting that it can take many forms. The term has been used with reference to children's social interactions; alongside the note that the concept is applicable to wider educational arena, ECE participants come together in many ways: teachers and children; teachers, families and community; leaders and practitioners; children of diverse ages and abilities; intercultural relationships; researchers and participants; and people involved with macro and micro policy. We have learned throughout the book, from several examples of research and practice which connect to togetherness, how democracy appears to be challenged everywhere, both in expected and unexpected situations. Yet alongside challenge is also opportunity and responsibility; togetherness allows us to explicitly address aspects of bicultural, multicultural and Indigenous learning and attention to issues of inclusion and exclusion.

Togetherness is also about having friends and being able to relate to those friends. However, if the child has an agenda of their own – and does not relate to peers when expected to do so by adults – what meaning of togetherness will emerge? What right do children have to be alone, to seek different-age peers or to voice opinions about other children? What views of children will emerge in ECE settings? Is the competent child defined predominantly as being a socially relating child? Alternatively, is the non-relating child necessarily viewed as an incompetent child? Relating to what

Peter Moss writes in the foreword of this book – is the competent child a democratically competent child or a politically economic competent child? Moreover, from whose perspective is togetherness a preferable concept? Even if we as editors agree on the positive tone of togetherness, we must highlight and recognise all participants, even the child who resists engaging in adult lead activities, such as language participation, or who resists following the adult rules in ring games. The forms of communicative interaction of young children vary, including verbal, gestural or documentary. It is for sure a challenge to be more open-minded and adopt a pluralistic view on how we can learn from the children themselves and enrich our understanding of their communication.

Even though a common aim amongst authors seems to be to get closer to children's perspectives, this intention is sometimes challenged by theories, methods and available action repertoires. When children enter new cultural arenas and new peer cultures, the norms and values of the meaning of togetherness are challenged by transnational norms and values, bringing diverse views and engagements amongst children as well as amongst adults. In a similar way, we might talk about the very youngest children in ECE settings as entering new cultural arenas, trying to grasp the meaning of being together and the meaning of having influence in relation to peers and adults. We argue togetherness to be the second new core value of democracy in ECE, however with a cautious gaze on what togetherness might mean to the democratic person (Biesta, 2007). Assessment practices and intentional education didactics simultaneously support and constrain democratic actions. Will the concept of togetherness contribute opportunities for democratic actions or contribute and strengthen accountability discourses in ECE – and whose agenda drives this accountability?

Solutions are hard to express, but authors' ways to challenge the challenges seem to plead for adults and practitioners' engagement in children's differing practices. What do children really want to engage in? How will migrant children or toddlers experience their new everyday life in preschool? Learning from diverse discourses and perspectives is concurrently a challenge and enriching experience. Understanding of togetherness will bring us closer to recognising democracy as lived experience in ECE.

18.2.3 Empowerment

Empowerment considers ways in which practices can be further advanced and sustained, with positive transformational opportunities for the benefit and future benefit of children and wider ecological systems. We have learned from this book how to regard children as active agents and as democratic subjects and to value their resilience. However, democracy will not just happen by chance. To make ECE places and spaces parts of children's developing democratic knowledge, democracy education needs to be explicitly considered and included in ECE, as with reimagining school change (Thomson, Lingard & Wrigley, 2012). In line with our theoretical

model, children can be empowered through adults and practitioners' conscious work to acknowledge children's agendas and perspectives. We have noticed how empowerment might be challenged if gaps appear within an ecological system, if adults in families, in ECE and in other social contexts are unable to recognise the uniqueness of children's contexts. However, we have also learned how to challenge such challenges through explicitness of discourses, curriculum and policy and through recognition of voices from children, parents and others in community who have the power to teach us about democracy in ECE. Explicit attention to democracy minimises the risk of what Lingard (2007) referred to as "pedagogies of indifference".

It is fundamental to contemporary ECE philosophies and approaches to advocate for partnership between adults: teachers, parents, specialists and community. A challenge persists as to how to maintain respect for all involved in the ecological system when there are differing views on how informed or empowered each of the groups are and the motivations behind their views. Such considerations influence decisions that adults make which influence children's democratic rights, for example, decisions about when and where to access ECE and school, perceptions of quality ECE, views on play, support for friendship and community participation and views on what learning is valued. When we argue empowerment to be the third new core value of democracy in ECE, we stress the need to relate to all the dimensions in the theoretical model (Hägglund et al. 2017) as an ecological system in order to fully enable empowerment as a core value. Awareness of the strength of societal views (dimension A of the model) on children and education for children will support resistance against less democratic views on childhood, children and competence. This resistance in turn provides space for new and democratic formulations in curricula to counter or reconceptualise political and economic drivers (dimension B). Partnership between adult agents in ECE (dimension C) will have synergetic effects on ECE as democratic arenas and on children's opportunities to enact democratic actions (dimension D).

In some chapters of this book, children's voices have been shared in primary form from observational data, in others from documentation such as learning story assessment. In other chapters, children's voices have been shared in secondary form through the comments of early childhood teachers, parents or other family. One challenge that we are able to consider is how we provide diverse ways for children to communicate their views and intentions. For some children, including infants and toddlers, children from migrant backgrounds, or children with disabilities, children need to be empowered with diverse or alternative communication mechanisms. These can include gestures, digital technologies, family advocacy and artistic expression.

Another challenge to review of the collective children's voice data is to move beyond merely documenting and listening and instead to ensure that we respond in our practice and advocacy. In early childhood, sociocultural approaches to pedagogical documentation are deeply connected to relational work with children and families and used to empower rather than label (Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 2013). Yet we have more work to do in empowering children and families who are margin-

alised. For example, as we critically reflect across the body of work in this book, we wonder about the dominance of Western voices and names, the "othering" of groups we wish to support and the tension between equality and equity. Such critical reflection connects our responsibility for empowerment back to the concepts of togetherness and reciprocity; thus the sections are connected and not discrete.

18.3 Revisiting Perspectives on Democracy: A Dynamic Endeavour in ECE

This book adds to the advocacy and commitment of many previous and contemporary researchers. The vision of Dewey to articulate education as an arena for nurturing democratic principles and the articulation of Biesta that education is a political arena have been pivotal. There is rich and powerful opportunity for educational participants to contest, resist and reconceptualise socioeconomic and political drivers (Apple & Beane, 2007; Dahlberg, et al., 2013; Moss, 2015, 2017) and discourses of power (Munns et al., 2012). As we reflect on the sum content of the book, we can apply our own contestation and reflection to our own body of work as we ponder such questions as: How have non-Western children been referred to? What gender balance exists within the case studies and narratives? How have school agenda infiltrated ECE research? What images of children are presented? How have issues of child assent to research been elaborated?

As Chap. 2 of this book outlined, the work of James and James (2004) provided seminal influence on the development of the model for democracy used in this book. James and James (2004) represented various notions of identity, agency, change, determinism, local and global influence as influencing regulation, social order and the rule of law. Democracy, as defined in Chapter 1 of our book, is both a matter of legal citizenship rights and represented through values and social practices. The model of democracy in ECE by Hägglund et al. (2017), illustrating four dimensions of democracy that influence ECE, has provided a key framework for the authors of this book in their discussions and for the structure of the book itself. Readers may find the dimensions of the model to be a useful framework for their own reflection on local challenges and practices.

However, as we reflect on the discussions from authors in this book, it is clear that while reflecting on the dimensions is valuable, practice is never confined to a single dimension. Instead, the ambition to reconceptualise and transform education as a democratic arena is an organic, dynamic and interactive process. While the Hägglund et al. (2017) model never suggested that practice was confined to one dimensional box, we nevertheless share an alternative image of the dimensions here to show the dynamic connectedness of dimensions. Figure 18.1 illustrates the same four dimensions as presented throughout this book but reconceptualised for a different purpose, to show the dynamic nature of ECE democratic practices and influences. As we have learned from the chapters in this book, interactions occur in the

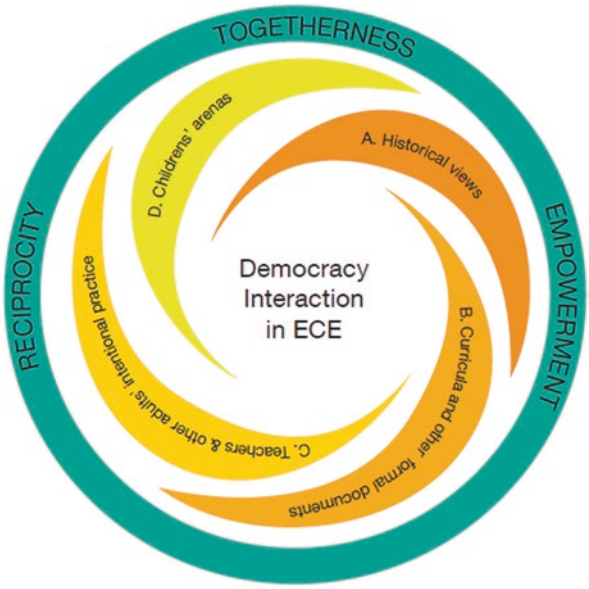

Fig. 18.1 Democracy interaction in ECE: An interactive perspective. (Adapted from Hägglund, Löfdahl Hultman & Thelander, 2017)

context of concurrent – and sometimes competing – influences: historic, curriculum, didactic or peer influences. The use of curved lines in Fig. 18.1 is intentional to show the dynamic overlap between dimensions as they exist in ECE and as they unfurl, overlap and extend. The spiral also symbolises that teaching and learning are circuitous as we revisit concepts and learn from experiences, open-ended as we become exposed to new ideas and evidence and organic as we engage in a messy, people-centred profession and power-constructed world. Figure 18.1 also includes the concepts articulated in this concluding chapter: reciprocity, togetherness and empowerment. The figure shows these three concepts as wrapping around the interactive democracy dimensions. However, in reality they do not make a closed circle as the process is open and ever-developing. We hope that readers of this chapter will value the two differing images representing the same dimensions of democracy as providing yet another example of valuing diversity and alternative perspective.

18.4 Conclusions

Research presented in this volume represents years of empirical and academic work, analyses and reflections about engagement in changing global contexts, gathered around the theme of democracy in ECE. Engagement from all over the globe about the topic specifically highlights what might challenge democracy and how to deal with challenges. Democracy is not a fixed concept, not in society and certainly not in ECE. Even if we initially mentioned core values such as equity, children's rights, participation and influence, this volume shows how democracy in ECE deals with

content deriving from big social issues to small issues amongst the very youngest children's interactions in play.

Authors have shown how discourses on children and childhood influence practitioners work in a range of ways. Images of the competent child may serve as a concrete example of how positively charged concepts, actually meant as support for democratic acts, help challenge democracy. Authors stress how children's rights to be listened to and to have influence on their everyday life as stated in curriculum and policy documents can sometimes turn into counterproductive practices. The uniqueness of each individual child may get lost in educational strivings to let all children take part in what practitioners consider desirable uniformity or group culture. Following this, authors have shown the need to appreciate diversity amongst children in their ECE settings when striving to grasp children's perspectives and to celebrate cultural funds of knowledge (Gonzales, Moll & Amanti 2005). Thus, children's peer cultures might serve as arenas in which practitioners can get insights to norms and values that shape children's democratic – or absence of democratic – practices.

Examination of the empirical data shared in the various chapters of this book, and wider literature, endorses a consistent espoused commitment to children's rights and quality ECE. This suggests democracy for children ought to be both typical and fundamental. Analysis of the chapters suggests that it is not the aspiration of democratic experience of children that is at issue, it is the application of this in settings where there are contradictory considerations of democratic practice. The space between the aspirational and the actual is challenged by considerations of diversity amongst children, group versus individual needs, differing cultural and community perceptions and socioeconomic and linguistic factors as well as the surrounding political economic trends elaborated by Peter Moss in the foreword of this book. The realities of practice, in which there are diverse level of ECE qualifications, policy, curriculum, philosophy, resources and routines, all contribute to space between assumed practice and lived experience. Working on this text has highlighted that the space between aspiration and lived experience is more than a problem or failing. As editors, we embrace the challenge and opportunity of this space as a place where opportunity for reflection and innovation may occur.

So far, we can point at how the four dimensions in the conceptual framework all are present when issues of democracy are presented and how they holistically intertwine. It is our hope that readers of this volume will be inspired by the authors' different ways of describing what might be challenging democracy in ECE and even more to be inspired of how to challenge the challenges. We have suggested three new core values of democracy in ECE: reciprocity, togetherness and empowerment. We argue that these three concepts are helpful when realising democracy but that they also need to be considered and questioned and never taken for granted. Democracy needs space, not only in rhetoric about democracy but as aspects of all four dimensions in our theoretical model, in societal discourses, in documents on children and childhood, in didactic agendas and research design as well as in the children's own cultural arenas.

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