

Children's encounters with professionals: recognition and respect during collaboration

Keywords: child welfare work, collaboration/partnership, recognition, disrespect, participation

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Abstract

In the context of Child Welfare, collaboration is used to ensure that families receive the best public services. In these working processes children have the legal right to participate. Research has demonstrated that children are sensitive to whether they feel they are treated with respect. The issue of partnership relations can be demanding. This article examines children's experiences with recognition in the context of service collaboration. Based on a Norwegian qualitative research project about professional-child interactions in the context of public services and a narrative analysis of two accounts, we have identified key professional actions associated with recognition in collaborative processes with children. A dialogical form of communication, as well as the exploration of children's troubles, abilities and skills, highlighted the children's experiences of recognition and respect. Further research should concentrate on how to ensure that recognition occurs during communication with children in Child Welfare Services.

Introduction

In the context of Norwegian Child Welfare Services (CWS), as well as internationally, collaboration between the public and private partners is considered good practice when dealing with service provision (Green Paper, 2009; Morris, 2004; Roose, Roets, Van Houte, Vandenhole, & Reynaert, 2013). Understanding children as partners in collaborative social work is rooted in the recognition of children's legal rights. The UN Convention insists that children who are capable of forming views have the right to express those views in all matters affecting them, and their views are to be recognized as important in accordance with the children's age and maturity (UNCRC, 1989, article 12). In a similar manner, Norwegian legislation calls for children to be given the opportunity to participate in decisions affecting them and that steps are to be taken to facilitate the necessary discussions (The Norwegian Child Welfare Act, 1992). According to the Act, participation means that children should receive information and be given the opportunity to state their opinions before a decision is

made in a case that affects them. This right is mandatory from the age of seven, and even younger children have the same right if capable of forming their own opinions. Similarly, as in the UN Convention, children's views must be taken into account according to their maturity. In order to implement these rights in actual practice, the Norwegian child welfare system may conduct individual conversations with the child and/or invite the child to take part in group meetings of responsible individuals, such as review groups or multidisciplinary teams (Hesjedal, Iversen, Bye, & Hetland, 2016; Willumsen & Skivenes, 2005).

However, CWS providers seems to struggle to make child participation happen in child welfare work (Bijleveld, Dedding, & Bunders-Aelen, 2014; Cashmore, 2002; Jensen, 2014; Larsen, 2011; Myrvold et al., 2011, p.357; Paulsen, 2016; Seim, 2007, p.78-79), with the result that children are disrespected instead of recognized (Honneth, 2008). It is also known that CWS professionals have been involved in serious mistakes that affect children (Laming, 2003; Stensrud, 2007). Poor professional conduct must be prevented because disrespect can inflict great stress on children's self-esteem, self-respect and self-confidence (Honneth, 2008) and cause the child to experience anger, guilt and worry (Winter, 2010).

Based on partnership contexts between different professionals and children, we focus on the emotions of recognition and disrespect. The aim is to call attention to children's ethical experiences, as children have demonstrated great skilfulness at informing professional practices (Kelly & Smith, 2017). We present two contrasting narratives that are useful in awakening our ethical commitments to the children served by CWS. Our research question is: How do children in contact with child welfare services experience recognition in their collaborations with professionals?

A review of the literature has demonstrated that the ethical conduct of professionals is particularly important, as the relations between children and professionals seem to be crucial in CWS collaborative processes. To reflect upon the issues of ethics, we draw upon Honneth's theory of recognition.

We will argue that dialogical communication and a balanced discussion of children's problems and resources are needed in order to enter into a real partnership with children. This paper produces important new knowledge concerning children's understanding of recognition and disrespect in their encounters with professionals.

In what follows, we present research about the child as partner in child welfare work, outline Honneth's concept of recognition and sketch the research methodology. Then, we introduce

contrasting narratives and reflect upon how the concept of recognition is linked to professional conduct in collaborative processes. Finally, we suggest some consequences for practice.

Children as partners

Scholars have argued that child participation must be understood relationally (Cossar, Brandon, & Jordan, 2016; Mannion, 2007) and dialogically as a struggle for recognition. Thus, professionals should respect children's views, as children prefer collaboration in decision making (Fitzgerald, Graham, Smith, & Taylor, 2010; Graham & Fitzgerald, 2010). The quality of the relationship, rather than specific methods, leads to a good result. A good relationship depends on a "connection" having been established between the social worker and the child, as well as the social worker drawing on him/herself (O'Leary, Tsui, & Ruch, 2013). One review found that the most important facilitator of children's participation was a positive relationship with the social worker. Children felt valuable once they realized that their opinions were appreciated. Unfortunately, many children felt that the social workers did not care about them; for example, appointments were broken, and communication was poor (Bijleveld, Dedding, & Bunders-Aelen, 2015). Relationship qualities that the children appreciated were a sense of support, respect, and inclusion (Bessell, 2015; Bolin, 2014; McLeod, 2010). Children had the strongest chance of participating and being open about abuse once a good and trusting relationship was in place (Jobe & Gorin, 2013; Paulsen, 2016). Children ask for reliable relationships; they want social workers to be open about their opinions, help them to express their own views by listening and asking open questions, and take their opinions into consideration (B. R. Hansen, 2003; Jobe & Gorin, 2013; McLeod, 2010; Pölkki, Vornanen, Pursiainen, & Riikonen, 2012; Thomas & O'Kane, 1999). Furthermore, the children distinguished between good and bad helpers (Bolin, 2014; Sandbæk, 1999). A good social worker was like a good friend – a nice person who treated the child like an equal and shared details of their life (McLeod, 2010). Other aspects of the relationship that the children appreciated were kindness, humour and a non-judgemental attitude (Bell 2002).

Social workers do endorse children's participation rights, but there seems to be a gap between ideals and practice (Archard & Skivenes, 2009). One obstacle seems to be the view of children as vulnerable; a second obstacle is the sense of being under ethical pressure because

efforts to ensure children are treated with care and dignity, for example, must give way to other pressures on the social workers, such as paperwork and demands for efficiency. Many professionals in today's welfare occupations struggle with dilemmas resulting from the cross-pressure between clients' needs and limited time and resources (Damsgaard & Eide, 2012; Munro, 2011; Vis, Holtan, & Thomas, 2012). Making good use of time seems to be particularly important. In regard to partnerships with children, activities and games have been proven to create good relationships in the context of child welfare (H. A. Hansen, 2009; Ruch et al., 2017).

The literature review has demonstrated that the concept of working together and the creation of good connections improve child participation. Children value respectful and equitable communication and pedagogical facilitation. However, even though social workers support children's right to participation in principle, we also know that child participation does not happen easily in practice. It seems that professionals have to ensure children's participation even when they are under burdensome time pressure, which creates the risk of professionals becoming disrespectful in their interactions with children. This means the ethics of recognition are also under pressure, which may have serious consequences for the children who are most vulnerable. Addressing this challenge calls for more detailed research into children's ethical experiences in collaborative processes.

Honneth's theory of recognition

Honneth (2008) distinguishes between three forms of mutual recognition that people may experience in social communities, as well as three forms of disrespect. The first form is the love experienced in close relationships between private individuals, families and friends. Experiencing love gives a person self-confidence. The counterpart to this is disrespect in the form of violence, torture, etc., which, according to Honneth, causes permanent harm to a person's self-confidence. The second form of recognition is that of rights in the legal sphere. This is built on an understanding that all people are equal in terms of rights, obligations and responsibilities in society. People who experience this form of recognition feel self-respect. The counterpart to this is disrespect in the form of exclusion from specific rights, which means that the person is not considered to be as morally sound as other members of society. This results in a loss of self-respect and 'the feeling of not enjoying the status of a full-fledged partner to interaction' (page 142). Honneth calls the third form of recognition solidarity. This form of recognition is linked to being respectful of other people's attitudes, opinions, skills and qualities, competence, role and status. The other person is expected to have a valuable

contribution to make to the community. People who experience such recognition find themselves valued socially, and they feel appreciated by the other members of the community. This form of recognition improves self-esteem; it makes it possible for a person to feel positive about him/herself and his/her skills and qualities. The counterpart to solidarity is disrespect in the form of denigration, shame and loss of honour. Honneth (2008) believes that the experience of disrespect is expressed in the community through social resistance, conflict and a struggle for recognition. The goal of the struggle for recognition is to re-establish the dignity of people who have been disrespected.

Like other scholars (Marthinsen & Skjefstad, 2011), we have found Honneth relevant because his concept helps to shed light on the ethical aspect of collaboration. His theory reveals how children in contact with child services deserve to be respected, regardless of their status and power in society. However, we must note that Honneth's theory has some shortcomings when applied in the context of child service provisioning. Although children have rights in public welfare cases, they do not have the same status as professionals in terms of rights, obligations and responsibilities. The professionals' mission is multiple, which means they have to balance, ethically and professionally, the issue of children's rights to participation with the issue of children's rights to protection (Burr, 2003, p.144).

Methodological approach

The empirical data were part of a Norwegian qualitative study approved by the Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD). The intention was to identify successful social work practices and challenges in the context of collaboration in child services. Parents and various professionals have contributed as well, but this paper is based on the interviews with children. The research was initiated by University College in central Norway and developed in partnership with three rural municipalities.

The CWS assisted in making connections with informants, and one important selection criterion was to select CWS cases involving different agencies. Fifteen families were interested, and out of these responses, ten children, aged nine to seventeen, both girls and boys, agreed to interviews. Other children ultimately did not participate, as it turned out that some parents would not allow interviews, and some children did not want to be involved. All of the children had been involved in collaborative processes with social workers and teachers and some had worked with a school counsellor, an educational psychological counsellor, a physician, a psychologist or a psychiatric nurse. The interviews were semi-structured and took a narrative form (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Riessman, 2008, p.23); they lasted an hour on

average and were carried out in the children's homes, at cafés or in libraries in 2014. The children were asked to talk about what they liked to do on a daily basis, their challenges, their contact with professionals and their own actions to cope with challenges. A visual conversation board, drawing materials, and a set of paper cone dolls were used as pedagogical support to ease the communication. During the interview event, some children involved the researchers in play and activities, and all of these activities empowered the children to answer questions and present stories. The children became more talkative when they were having fun. In order to strengthen the connections and allow more time to expand on narratives, all children, with the exception of one who was not accessible a second time, were interviewed twice. The children, particularly the older ones, seemed to be genuinely happy to have a chance to tell their stories.

Drawing upon Labov, the transcribed texts were examined in search of narrative units (Riessman, 2008p. 81-86). The examinations revealed that there were few complete narratives about children's interactions with professionals. In contrast, there were many stories about leisure, play, sport, pets and computer games. However, two youngsters, both in close contact with CWS, the school and the mental health services, were especially text-rich storytellers. The boy spoke about bad practises; his story serves as a warning message to child service professionals and is here called 'the warning story'. The girl presented both the good and the bad types of partnerships. To contrast the bad story, we present a story about the excellent professional role model, here called 'the role model story'. The examination proceeded by combining thematic and structural analysis (Riessman, 2008, p.53,77). The form, content and the creation of meaning in these stories were all of interest (Johansson, 2005, p. 286; Labov & Waletzky, 1967; Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 36; Riessman, 2008, p. 81-86). Applying Labov and Waletzky, a rewriting process followed that condensed the content and adapted it into reader-friendly language while trying to retain the meaning and the message. Following Honneth, we discovered specific elements that fostered good as well as poor practices, and we created four related categories of topics: frames of interaction, forms of communication, the content of conversations and the degree of participation. Forms of communication and content were crucial in both, see Table 1: Children's stories about collaboration with professionals.

Table 1: Children's stories about collaboration with professionals.

Categories of topics	‘The role model story’ and elements of recognition	‘The warning story’ and the elements of disrespect
Frames of interaction	Informal physical surroundings – social activities	_____
Forms of communication	Inclusive and dialogical	Corrective and devaluing
Content of conversations	Jokes – small talk – focus on the subject – praise	Sole focus on problems (negative comments) and lack of focus on resources
Degree of participation	_____	Lack of influence

The stories reflect professional practices that the other children also discussed. However, an analysis based mostly on two narratives created by two children and supported by empirical examples from the others does not allow generalisation. The strength of narrative explorations is the deeper understanding they provide of a social phenomenon (Riessman, 2008p. 74). Thus, the stories have brought the issue of ethical professional practices to the table in a revealing way.

The literature references used in this paper were collected mostly through searches in Norwegian, Nordic and international article databases based on keywords such as child welfare, children, partnership, participation, recognition and respect. The searches were mainly limited to the last ten years of scientific publications. However, to complete this methodological section, we note that this research has complied with the recommendations and guidelines for research ethics. Children and parents signed informed consent, and actions were taken to ensure that the children, parents and professionals remain anonymous.

Research findings

We present ‘the role model story’ and ‘the warning story’ separately. To increase the value of the accounts, we link them briefly to the other children in the sample as well. Talking about professionals as excellent or bad role models was a style that the other children had adopted, although their stories were rather incomplete.

The role model story

The narrator, alias Sophia, aged 15-17¹, was living at home, and the concern of child welfare services was related to considerable conflicts with her parents. She enjoyed her school subjects and planned to start at university when she was older. In her leisure time, she was happy to get together with friends or go to the gym.

Sophia described an event where she and two social workers went to a café. The story is set in a specific time and place, and thus appears to be credible: ‘Once when I lived with my aunt and uncle ... (...), we had a meeting at an unusual place. We went to Café Perla in Local Town ... (...).’ The young girl describes the physical setting of the meeting as different: ‘an unusual place’, almost as if she is revealing a secret. During the period before the event, she had been feeling ‘rather gloomy’. The account gives a glimpse of the girl’s pessimistic thoughts about the café visit: ‘Going to a café can’t possibly help’. These reflections make the story thrilling: considering that the events take place in an administrative context, the story creates a feeling of suspense regarding whether the outing will ease the girl’s misery. At the same time, tension is created over whether going to a café is a form of professional work. The action looks more like an informal social gathering for friends than a professional follow-up.

However, we learn that Sophia appreciates the outing: ‘They’re doing this specially for me’. The girl appears to feel that she has been genuinely seen, taken care of and recognised. She uses a metaphor to highlight the usefulness of encounters “outside”, in a neutral arena: ‘You feel like a faceless person when you’re in an ordinary meeting room’.

The girl reveals how the conversations became ‘relaxed’. In contrast, she felt that interactions in the office were ‘greatly limited’. Contrasting different forms of communication this way brings attention to the fact that formal and planned encounters and conversations may be demanding arenas for children. When meetings take place in the administrative building, the girl seems to experience the public mission in a detached manner: ‘I’m just another person you are responsible for ... need to help ... encourage’.

The story demonstrates that the communication in the café seems to be mutual, dialogical, and inclusive: ‘We talked ... (...)’, and ‘they laughed along with me’. The narrative shows the girl becoming a valued partner on her own, and not only because she is a child in the welfare

¹ The age of the children are given as a range because we want to make sure the narrator remain anonymous to our national readers of the article.

system. The outing seems to give the parties a break from ordinary casework. Figuratively speaking, the social workers exchanged their formal work dress for a casual cafe costume. They stepped out of their traditional helper–user mood and into a café guest frame of mind. The traditional allocation of roles, with the girl as the problem holder and the social workers as problem solvers, is wiped out, and the power asymmetry becomes less pressing, allowing dialogical and friendly interactions to bloom. It is understandable that the power asymmetry becomes more powerful when roles remain in the complementary mode. One message may be that social activities have qualities that strongly distinguish them from traditional meetings in the office, and this story calls for professionals to note the difference. The girl demonstrates how she and the social workers enjoy themselves, as if they are equals. Spending time together expands their connections: ‘It improves the relationship between the professional and the child (...)’, she said. Very similarly, Mia (15-17) noted a difference between one dominant teacher and another less controlling and bossy one, who cared for her like a friend: ‘My contact-teacher scolds, I can’t counter and I always pretend I agree. In contrast, I can talk normally with my teacher in English, as if we know each other very well.’

This story offers insight regarding the content of collaboration as well. The girl depicts a contrast to the standard service meetings: ‘It wasn't an ordinary meeting’. The issues discussed were different from the subjects typically examined. A new tension is created when Sophia reveals that the meeting was packed with enjoyable and entertaining subjects: ‘The social workers ... (...) told jokes. (...)’, ‘One of them began talking about all the trips she had taken’, and ‘they talked about themselves being on Facebook and Instagram’. The story reveals how the social workers chatted with the girl about private matters, a behaviour that contrasts with what is expected from a professional. The girl enjoyed hearing about the adults’ private lives: ‘I had a great time’. Nevertheless, the story does not end with professionals just having fun with a distressed girl: ‘When we went back, we took things a little more seriously. They began to talk about an emergency foster home’. It seems that the social workers care deeply about Sophia and take responsibility for her safety and protection.

At the very end of the story, Sophia presents an evaluation scene. She summarizes the outing as a success, almost like being offered a shoulder to cry on: ‘(...) ... the mood lightened. I couldn't stop smiling until the next evening because of this (...)’. Her trust in the social workers was strengthened: ‘I wouldn't have changed those people for anyone else’. However, jolly conversations and outings are not sufficient. The girl also expresses some reservations: ‘You don't need to do it this way every time’; ‘Otherwise it doesn't feel so serious any more’.

In similar manner, Angela (9-11) and Emily (9-11) spoke about teachers having ethical qualities, such as ‘comforting, nice, funny and very kind’. In contrast, Peter (9-11) disclosed that some teachers became angry; they yelled and smacked. Whenever they are struggling, children need to be taken seriously and respected. A truly professional conversation with a child must be dialogical and backed-up by small talk, informal interaction and playful fellowship. An underlying message of Sophia’s story may be to stress the importance of creativity and flexibility in regard to social work with children.

The warning story

The second narrator, alias Tylor, also aged 15-17², was living in public care. The welfare professionals’ worries were related to his long-term problems in school, both socially and academically. Tylor very much enjoyed surfing online and computer gaming.

This storyline was an emotional presentation, given by a boy who was particularly critical of the professionals’ assessments. As a child in the welfare system, he felt there was no room for mistakes at school. Figuratively, it seems that the professionals enjoy playing the game “look for five mistakes in the drawing”. The amusement in this activity is the fact that mistakes are hard to spot, and you have to take a closer look. Tylor felt like a picture with faults: ‘Other pupils can vanish for an hour or a whole day without the teachers noticing’, while he had to listen to the same story every time: ‘The professionals seldom noticed anything good’.

The boy seems to be at risk in the multidisciplinary team- meetings, as positive feedback is given infrequently. He uses metaphors to draw attention to this issue: ‘(...) away from class for an hour (...) conversation for ten minutes or more, not less’; ‘(...) turned up and did homework (...) was a two-minute conversation’. This describes a boy who is given 600 seconds of negative attention and 120 seconds of positive feedback. He also used the metaphor of a trap: ‘anything positive is hidden in a corner (...)’. It seems like the boy’s longing for solidarity is not addressed. All these flowery illustrations demonstrate the boy’s rebellion against the adults’ wanting him to cooperate or ‘play the game’. The account shows how the boy ends up with the red card, like a football player sitting on the bench, and hence he is excluded from being a qualified team player or partner at the meetings.

² Once again, the age of the children are given as a range because we want to make sure the narrator remain anonymous to our national readers of the article.

This story puts the issue of humour on the agenda too: ‘Whenever I tell jokes and use understatement, the teachers take offence at the fun’. They are clearly not on the same wavelength. Similarly, both Emily (9-11) and Peter (9-11) whined about some teachers not being able to laugh at the same jokes as the children. Emily said: ‘She is strange, and laughs at situations that are not fun at all.’ As for schoolwork, the boy and the professionals did not come to agreement either. Tylor’s experience was that the teachers cared more about the one question on the test he did not answer than the five he successfully completed. The story depicts a boy who was both misunderstood and put down.

The boy is afraid that he is getting a bad reputation, and he uses quotes to call attention to his experiences of humiliation: ‘My foster family is going to think: "Oh my God, what a boy!" Moreover, to emphasize how bad the meetings were, he uses a potent illustration: ‘My feeling is that the room is full of pessimists’. Listening to this phrasing makes it easy to become emotional and side with the boy. Working together with a bunch of “faultfinders” must be hard for a young boy, who has a long life ahead of him and must first carve out a career for himself. Hannah (12-14 years) described similar experiences. She believed the Educational Psychological Counselling Services worried themselves too much: ‘I had to talk to the educational counsellor every day, and I got mightily tired. My counsellor thought I had ADHD and everything.’

However, the message from Tylor is apropos: ‘Don’t focus on the negative, look at the positive. That is what helps. Give praise’. Tylor calls for more support and recognition by using himself as a witness of how effective praise and endorsement really are: ‘Me, for example, I’m not very good at receiving praise. When people give me praise, I might answer "Sure", but that is just on the outside. I’m not like that on the inside’. [Interviewer: How do you feel on the inside when people praise you?] ‘It makes me happy, although you cannot see it, I am still happy’. The story demonstrates how the professionals adopted a habit of communication with children that became corrective and devaluing. The account indicates how the professionals seemed to lose the sight of a child’s individual resources, interests and positive characteristics, and they ended up “creating” a naughty boy.

Last but not at least, the story shows the child’s influence to be poor. The professionals seem to define the follow-up work on their own: ‘I don’t agree that everything I do should be published on the It’s Learning portal. This bothers me’. The boy seems to feel he is powerless; he lacks the opportunity to influence the sharing of information with the family. To strengthen his position as a child and oppose this improper practice, he brings up the Children’s Act,

which declares that children have the right to privacy. Ian (15-17) had contrasting experiences. His experiences was like being the one putting the agenda regarding child protection concerns: 'My teacher called the child welfare service and I had a meeting with everyone where I said that my parents were drinking at home.' To conclude, Tylor's storytelling demonstrates a child's struggle for recognition, and it offers a powerful teaching about what to avoid whenever your goal is genuine collaboration with a child.

Discussion

The accounts and the other children's characterizations show that children distinguish between two categories of professionals: "the bad guys" and "the good guys". This mirrors the ethical archetypes we often find in stories told about family members, friends, neighbours or colleagues. The children's experiences reveal that some professionals master the ethical skill of recognition when interacting with children, while others exhibit disrespectful conduct. "The good guy," or the good professional type, seems to include the child as a true partner in the working process, while the bad type seems to bench the child and play the game alone. These ethical issues correspond to the literature discussing how children can become equal partners in social work practice and experience feelings of recognition (Kinge, 2006; Warming, 2011).

The narratives suggest professional actions of both excellence and failure (table 1), and this knowledge has some implications for child welfare practices, which will be discussed below.

Encounters in informal spaces, as well as social activities, nourished the children's recognition. This finding is in line with H. A. Hansen (2009) and (Kinge, 2006), who have stated the importance of activities and togetherness to strengthening relations with CWS children. Simply spending time together can re-energise the contact and lay the foundation for important conversations between the professional and child. Sophia's storytelling reveals this particular partnership dynamic. This means the social workers have to act creatively when it comes to selecting meeting spaces, and whenever useful in the situation, they should avoid meeting-agendas and public office spaces. However, the most important factor may be the way social workers communicate and prioritize the child's participation. Professionals acting dialogical made the child feel recognized, while monological encounters felt like disrespect. Sophia's storytelling demonstrates the importance of social inclusion, equality and mutuality (Bessell, 2015; McLeod, 2010). Her story challenges the traditional discourse about distance and strict boundaries in regard to private life in professional social work relations. Closeness

and authenticity are perhaps particularly important when dealing with the child in family social work (O'Leary et al., 2013). In contrast, Tylor was subjected to social exclusion (Honneth, 2008). His storytelling discloses the failure of professionals to show solidarity with his struggles to overcome problems in school. Instead of being open and explorative, they started to correct his shortcomings and mistakes. This made it more difficult for both parties to reach a common understanding of the case, and they missed the chance to develop common goals and find solutions together, which is crucial in collaborative processes (Aasland, 2014). The child and the professionals became incapable of communication. Correspondingly, children complain that social workers are poorly skilled at communicating with children; the children experience lack of care and inclusion, as well as unproductive conversations (Bijleveld et al., 2015).

Our findings call for child welfare professionals to frame the conversation as dialogical, as children prefer collaboration in decision-making (Graham & Fitzgerald, 2010). This approach addresses particular ethical dilemmas that must be overcome in regard to power. These children may find it difficult to trust public helpers, as they have been victims of neglect and abuse in their homes as well as in the professional care system (Laming, 2003; Stensrud, 2007). This means social workers must use their mandated power carefully by trying to minimise the use of power over children as a form of control and rather strengthen the use of power – together with the child – as a form of support (Dumbrill, 2006).

Skjervheim's (1996) theoretical concept about the participant and the onlooker may also inform the issues of power dynamic in collaborative processes with children. His theory warns about the onlooker role, referring to a social worker analysing the child and his statements as if he/she were an object or a fact. According to Skjervheim, putting oneself in the position of participant means something quite different. Playing the role of participant means looking at the child as a responsible and free subject, positioning oneself as a listening collaborator, and considering the child's statements. Positioning oneself as an onlooker creates the space for monologues to flourish, as was the situation in Tylor's story. That type of partnership position may create an expectation that the child should make statements or express opinions on demand, as during an interrogation. Consequently, the child may end up in a vulnerable position, with the feeling of being under pressure to answer and have an opinion. Additionally, this situation may threaten the child's loyalty to close caregivers and create an ethical burden.

However, decision making is important in service provision work. Children's troubles must be discussed. The narratives in this paper demonstrate the difficulties professionals face when they must balance talking about problems versus exploring children's resources.

Conversations that created a balance between the professionals' concerns and the child's resources cleared the way for recognition to happen. Sophia's account shows how a joint activity – the togetherness as well as the conversation about problems later on – created an environment of care and solidarity. Sophia appeared to feel included, socially valued, respected and seen as a whole person. The professionals were able to position themselves as participants (Skjervheim 1996) in her daily life, supporting her in coping with her family troubles. They were able to balance their discussions about difficulties and joy in life, and in this way, they kept an eye on both protection factors and risk factors (Kvelling, 2010). This way of acting corresponds closely with children's calls for support, respect (Bessell, 2015) and humour (Bell, 2002) in child welfare work. In contrast, Tylor's account reveals disrespectful professional communication. In his case, the professionals looked mostly at his difficulties, and this may negatively affect Tylor's self-esteem (Honneth 2008). Conversations with children in the context of child welfare may be supportive as well as burdensome (Ulvik, 2015). The content is co-created through a process, together with the child (Warming, 2011), and this requires social workers to act in a caring manner in regard to conversation themes.

In Tylor's account, the concept of child participation in decision making was put to the test. It seems that the boy is exposed to both ethical and legal neglect, and he seems very frustrated by his lack of influence. Considering the strong emotions in the boy's storytelling, social workers must be highly aware of children's participation rights and thus take responsibility for preventing the disrespect of children (Honneth, 2008). However, when taking children's legal participation rights into account in service provision, teamwork is a bit of a challenge. Including the child as a partner in multidisciplinary teamwork settings has been shown to be difficult in social work practice (Jensen, 2014; Willumsen & Skivenes, 2005). When adults' perspectives came to dominate the meetings, children took an oppositional stance (Jensen, 2014). This calls for social workers to bring out children's positive emotions by acting in a manner consistent with the professional type that provides good service, "the good guy." We believe Honneth's concept of recognition may come true with professionals putting themselves in the role as participants. However, the issues of asymmetric power dynamics have to be recognized as well because the social worker is the one who must balance the children's influence in accordance with the best interest of the child. We do not believe the

child alone can determine what is the best decision in child welfare work. In this context, Honneth's basic forms of recognition, love and care, have to be the guiding principles no matter what decision is made. We believe that a social worker has to act as a loving parent, even though he/she has the status of a professional.

Conclusion

Forms of communication, or the framing and the content, appear to be the key factors when speaking about recognition vs. disrespect in collaborative processes with children. The empirical data have shown that children, like adults, are familiar with the struggle for recognition. They can reflect ethically on which professional actions and relations they experience as providing recognition and which ones are disrespectful. "The good guy" represents the one we all long to be, and "the bad guy" is the one we fear and do not want to become. However, no one can act like a hero at all times. Making mistakes is human, but we must be ethically alert and brave enough to avoid disrespecting the child who is in need of welfare services. As Tylor narrates, there are pitfalls, but we have the chance to succeed if we act like the professionals depicted in Sophie's story.

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