

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the school, the teacher and children that participated in this study. Thank you for being welcoming and giving me the freedom that I needed to do the research. I am grateful to all you boys and girls who let me be apart of your group. Thank you for inviting me to play with you, I had a great time. Thank you for sharing your experiences and thoughts with me.

To my supervisor Randi Dyblie Nilsen, thank you for all your help in the last year. You have motivated me so much. Thank you for all your constructive comments and wise suggestions, I have learnt a lot from you.

Thanks to Iselin and Toini, my faithful friends and room mates. Your prayers, encouragements, your sincere interest in my study and your friendship means so much to me. This would have been a much less fun experience without you. And thanks be to Jesus Christ who always hopes, believes and plans good things for me, I am eternally grateful.

My fellow students, especially you that have 'suffered' along side me everyday the past six months. Gro Pernille, Ida, Simi, Matias, Therese, Oketch and Rozita, I am very grateful for sharing this experience with you, for all the meals, the discussions and laughs we had. Thank you for cheering for me.

Abstract

Starting school is a milestone in children's lives and the transition from day care to school involve changes in many aspects of their everyday lives. The children spend much of their time at school and therefore I have chosen this forum for studying children social interaction and play. Meaningful relationships and play activities are highly valued by children and should therefore be given attention.

The main purpose of this study is to explore the rich and complex child culture that children share in their social networks. The children's interaction during free play and learning situations can teach us more about children as competent social actors. The shared and separate features of boys and girls playgroups will also be investigated.

The study is based on fieldwork conducted in a Norwegian, urban school from August to October in 2011. I participated in the daily activities of a Year 1 class four days a week. My participants consisted of five boys and ten girls around six years old. They were all ethnically Norwegian from middle-class backgrounds. The data was produced through participant observation and group interviews. The theoretical framework of my study is sociology of childhood. I have made use of several theoretical concepts in my analysis such as 'Play culture' (Mouritsen, 2002) and Social competence (Hutchby & Moran-Ellis, 1998).

The major findings were that the children spoke of meaningful relationship and play activities as essential components of their everyday lives. Even though many of the children had yet to establish friendships at school they expressed that they preferred 'being together' more than 'being alone'. This communal value guided the children in their construction of friendships and also their application of social rules implemented by the teachers. My observation of the children's interaction confirmed Mouritsen's (2002) perspective of social competence as a "Constantly negotiated dynamic developed in situations" more than "more or less stable personal characteristics" (Ogden, 2001). The children made use of their cultural and material resources to promote personal or communal interests.

List of content

1	Introduction	1
2	Background.....	3
2.1	Introduction.....	3
2.2	The institutionalization of childhood in Norway	3
2.2.1	Day care	3
2.2.2	The modern view of childhood	4
2.2.3	School	6
2.2.4	SFO- After school programs.....	6
2.3	Personal development or knowledge and skills, or both?	7
2.4	From day care to school- transition policy in Norway	8
2.5	School-readiness: from skills to social competence.....	9
2.6	My study	10
3	Methodology chapter	13
3.1	Introduction.....	13
3.2	Fieldwork at a primary school.	13
3.3	The amount of data.....	14
3.4	The access process	15
3.4.1	School	15
3.4.2	Group	15
3.4.3	Play culture.....	15
3.5	The research role.....	16
3.6	The least adult role.....	17
3.7	The various role	17
3.7.1	A guest	17
3.7.2	No authority	18
3.7.3	Not a teacher.....	18
3.7.4	The helper	19
3.7.5	The participant.....	19
3.7.6	The adult	20
3.7.7	<i>But you are an adult!</i>	21
3.8	Methods	21
3.8.1	Doing research <i>with</i> children and not <i>on</i> them.....	22
3.9	Participant observation	22
3.9.1	Practicalities (how).....	23
3.9.2	Advantages of using participant observation.....	23
3.9.3	The challenges of using participant observation	24
3.10	Group interviews.....	25
3.10.1	Practicalities	26
3.10.2	Advantages of using group interviews.....	26
3.10.3	Challenges of using group interviews.....	27
3.10.4	Conclusion.....	27
3.11	Ethics	28
3.11.1	Informed consent from parents.....	28
3.11.2	Informed consent from children	28
3.11.3	Protection from harm: The responsible adult.....	29
3.11.4	Sensitivity.....	29
3.11.5	Respect cultural traditions, knowledge and customs.....	30
3.11.6	Reciprocity	30

3.11.7	Respect privacy	30
3.11.8	Ensure confidentiality	31
3.12	The analysis process	31
3.12.1	Transcribing	31
3.12.2	Finding and organizing themes	31
3.12.3	Reading literature seeing my data in new light	31
3.12.4	Organizing the data into analysis chapters	32
3.13	Conclusion	32
4	Theory chapter	33
4.1	Introduction	33
4.2	The sociology of children and childhood research tradition	33
4.2.1	Childhood is constructed	33
4.2.2	The active child	34
4.2.3	Children's similar and different experiences	36
4.2.4	Understanding gender	37
4.2.5	Children's social relationships: Worthy of being studied	38
4.2.6	Understanding children's interaction	39
4.2.7	Child culture	40
4.3	Theoretical concepts	40
4.3.1	Play culture	40
4.3.2	Children's agency	42
4.3.3	Social competence	43
4.3.4	Friendship	45
4.3.5	We-ness	46
5	Analysis: The transition from day care to school	49
5.1	Introduction	49
5.2	The school	49
5.3	Timetable	49
5.4	Homework	50
5.5	Schoolyard	50
5.6	Outdoor school	51
5.7	Friends group	51
5.8	Older children	51
5.9	The sponsor program	53
5.10	The transition	53
5.11	Looking back at day care life	54
5.12	Looking back: Evaluating the process	56
5.13	Conclusion	56
6	Constructing social rules and friendships	59
6.1	Introduction	59
6.2	Constructing social rules	59
6.3	The YES rule	59
6.4	The STOP Rule	61
6.5	The flexibility rule	62
6.6	Constructing friendship	63
6.6.1	Naming their friends	63
6.7	Making friends	64
6.7.1	Sharing space	64
6.7.2	Sharing interests	65
6.8	The purpose of friendships	66

6.9	Friendly and unfriendly behavior.....	67
6.10	Conflict.....	68
6.11	Conclusion.....	69
7	Play culture.....	71
7.1	Introduction.....	71
7.2	Anna's birthday party.....	71
7.3	Boys and girls interaction.....	72
7.4	Inside the classroom.....	73
7.4.1	Homework.....	73
7.4.2	Jigsaw puzzle.....	75
7.4.3	Hangman.....	76
7.5	Outside in the schoolyard.....	77
7.5.1	Kiss- chasing.....	77
7.5.2	The 'daddy' play.....	78
7.5.3	Sweethearts.....	80
7.6	Play.....	82
7.7	The diplomat role.....	84
7.8	Girls play culture.....	85
7.8.1	Initiating play.....	85
7.8.2	Play in small groups – easier to influence.....	86
7.8.3	Always progressing play.....	87
7.8.4	Sharing crayons.....	87
7.9	The mum and children play.....	88
7.9.1	A play in progress.....	89
7.9.2	Deciding your own role in the play.....	90
7.10	Play in large groups.....	90
7.10.1	Playing games.....	92
7.11	Negotiation and conflict in girls play.....	93
7.11.1	Conclusion.....	95
7.12	Boys play groups.....	95
7.12.1	Playing soccer.....	96
7.12.2	Choosing teams, again and again.....	97
7.12.3	Negotiating the rules.....	99
7.12.4	Conflict.....	100
7.12.5	The diplomatic role.....	101
7.12.6	Where did the children get the inspiration?.....	102
7.12.7	The boys club.....	103
7.12.8	Play in smaller groups.....	104
7.12.9	Conflict in play.....	105
7.13	Conclusion.....	108
8	Discussion.....	109
8.1	Introduction.....	109
8.2	<i>How does children experience starting school?</i>	109
8.3	How do they construct social rules and friendships?.....	110
8.4	<i>What are features of boys and girls interaction and play?</i>	110
8.5	Social competence, to never give up?.....	111
8.6	The map metaphor.....	112
8.7	Social competence in conflict.....	113
8.8	The role of conflict in peer cultures.....	115
8.8.1	The Italian school.....	115

8.8.2	The African American preschool	115
8.8.3	The upper-middle-class American private preschool.....	116
8.8.4	Discussion	116
8.8.5	From: <i>They do not want me there..</i> To: <i>Who are you to say I, or anyone is not to play in this!</i>	117
8.8.6	Protecting collective rights.....	118
9	Concluding remarks	119
9.1	What did I learn from my own study?.....	119
9.2	Good and bad	119
9.3	What did I find particularly interesting?.....	119
9.4	Limitations	120
10	Literature list.....	121

Better Together!

Children's experiences of starting school in Norway; focusing on social interaction and play.

One should never give up finding a friend.

Because they make us happy!

It is OK to argue, sometimes.

(Children's thoughts about friendships from interviews)

1 Introduction

Children's daily life in general, and school life in particular was the topic that I wanted to learn more about. As school is an established component of the Norwegian childhood I wanted to find out more about children's perspectives of their own lives. The transition from day care to school is a major event for children, it involves the end day care life and the beginning of school life. How children understand and organize their social relationships is worthy of being studied in its own right. I also believe that children are experts in their own lives and therefore I wanted to hear their perspectives (Hardman, 2001:504). I conducted fieldwork for two months at a primary school, in an urban area in Norway. I used participant observation and group interviews as methods for data production. There were 15 children that participated in the study, five boys and ten girls. The research questions are:

- *How does children experience starting school?*
- *How do they construct social rules and friendships?*
- *What are the shared and separate features of boys' and girls' interaction and play?*

The children's interaction and play will be the main focus of this study. I have chosen to analyze boys and girls shared and separate play groups. How the children display social competence in the transition, interaction and play will be analyzed and discussed.

The aim of my study is to gain more knowledge about children's experiences of starting school and how they understand and organize their social lives. My hope is that the study will enrich the view we have of children and childhood so that we can understand them better.

2 Background

2.1 Introduction

School and day care are shared and significant components of the Norwegian childhood. In this chapter I will look into some developments in the Norwegian school system the later years. I will look into the developments of policies and structure of the Norwegian day care and school. I have explored governmental White papers and official reports to find information about school and day care politics. I will mention some of the assumptions, research and values that have shaped the development of these institutions.

First of all the structure of school and day care has not developed into what it is today by default. The sociology of childhood views childhood and all its features as socially constructed. The development of school policy is guided by theories, statistics, research, values and economics. According to Young (1971) the curricula of these institutions are “spatial theories of cognitive and bodily development and, as such, they contain world-views” (In: James, Jenks & Prout, 1998:42). The curricula are linked to questions of power, personal identity and views about human nature. It is built on assumptions about how people ought to be (James, Jenks & Prout, 1998:42).

2.2 The institutionalization of childhood in Norway

There has been substantial change in the organization and content of both day care and school the last 40 years. I choose to include day care in this section as it has a crucial role in the institutionalization of the Norwegian childhood. I will briefly present some statistics, developments and day care policies that are relevant for my study.

2.2.1 Day care

A Norwegian child aged 1 to 5 spends approximately 35 hours in day care every week. 36 years ago in 1975 only 7 % of all Norwegian children attended day care but today the amount has grown to 90 % The majority of children spend a substantial amount of their childhood in institutions first day care and then school and after school programs (Statistics of Norway, 2011).

Women’s participation in the labor market is one explanation for the increasing number

of children that attends day care (Statistics of Norway, 2005:15).

Tora Korsvold in her article: *A new construction of childhood?* about the developments of welfare state policy in early childhood education and care in Norway and Sweden argue that: “The demand for female labor and for equal democratic rights between men and women in society changed the already weak position of the male breadwinner in Scandinavia and had a great impact on children’s lives” (2007:7).

If we approach the topic from a social constructivist angle we can conclude that the institutionalization of the Norwegian childhood is also a result of a changing view of children and childhood. Ideas about what is considered “best for children” have changed throughout the 20th century. The attitude changed from seeing day care as an alternative for parental care if the mother were forced to work, to day care being good for children between three to six years for a small amount of time, to day care being 'the best for the child'. Korsvold comments:

“Parental care was still important, but children needed more than this: they needed to develop the social competence for a future public life. A stay in the day nursery was now seen as an important element of childhood in modern society, which demanded of it’s citizens that they should co-operate with others in changing environment, having in their possession a certain individual competence and uniform qualifications. A new construction of childhood has been created, namely the ‘modern public day care child’ (2007:16)

2.2.2 The modern view of childhood

Today, the day care sector is governed by Kunnskapsdepartementet (The Ministry of Education and Research: (KD)) and the institution is seen as a pedagogical institution and the first and voluntary part of the education course. The aim of day care is to be an institution with a holistic pedagogic approach to both care and learning (KD, 2010, *Hele barn i gode barnehager*).

Day care and childhood in general is not only a preparation for adulthood but also has its own intrinsic value. This emphasis is something that Norway and the other Nordic countries are applauded for internationally (St.meld.no.16 (2006-7)). This resonates well with the sociology of childhood’s view that children are human beings and not merely becomings; that children become fully human only as they achieve adult maturity (Jenks,

C. 1996) Halvorsen continues to say that children together with explorative adults they should participate in their own learning process, at the stage they are (KD, 2010, *Hele barn i gode barnehager*). In the Day care Act (Barnehageloven) there is an entire section dedicated to children's right to participation. They have the right to state their opinion concerning the daily running of the day care and they should participate in the planning and evaluation of the activities. The child's views should be given weight in relation to their age and maturity. The right to participation originates from UN's Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) article 12. The adults are expected to "Show respect for children's perspective and expressions but also exercise adult authority, provide care and protect the child" (KD, 2011, *Barnefamilienes hverdag forandret*).

In the Framework plan for day care from 1995 there are defined some of the social skills that children are supposed to learn throughout their day care experience. Children should be able to initiate and maintain relationships with other people and develop positive norms for social interaction. They should also be cooperative, and show consideration and care for others. Taking other roles and point of views are also important. Attributes such as independence, creativity and flexibility are emphasized. (Barne- og familiedepartementet, 1995, *Rammeplan for barnehagen- en kortfattet presentasjon*).

The government has spent many resources on building the day care sector the last decade. The goal has been to achieve full day care coverage, by building and opening new public and private day care centers and setting a maximum price for parents' tuition. Today every child has the legal right to a place in a day care in the municipality where they live (KD, 2007, *Om lov om endringer i barnehageloven*).

Day care for all children is seen as a mean towards social cohesion: "Research indicates that day care can help reduce the large differences in learning outcomes caused by, socio-cultural background and promote better results for children from minority backgrounds, disabled children and children that are in danger of developing reading and writing difficulties" (St.meld.no.30 (2003-4)). I have chosen to include day care, as it is the first and voluntary part of children's education. As my study focus on the children in the first period of their school experience it can be beneficial to know a little about the institution the children transitioned from.

2.2.3 School

My informants started school the year they turned six and their primary, compulsory education lasts for 10 years but this is a newly established law. In 1997 the primary education was extended an extra year and before that children started school at the age of seven.

The school tradition in Norway has a much longer history than the day care tradition. The Norwegian formal school tradition is 250 years old and has been subjected to continual change. In 1889, the government provided seven years of compulsory education and in 1969, the primary education was extended to nine years starting from the age of seven (KD, 2011, *The Norwegian Education System*). Now days almost all students continue to do a three to four-year high school program and many also study at colleges and universities. We can say that Norwegians are a highly educated.

As the duration of school has changed, the hours per week spent in school have also increased gradually. In the timeframe from autumn 2002 to autumn 2004 the hours per week for Year 1 to 4 increased with altogether 8 hours. And 2005/2006 it was opened to expand with four more hours. The aim was to improve the training for primary school by focusing on strengthening the students' basic skills in reading and writing. This would help students who don't receive sufficient support at home. For example, students from minority backgrounds could get help with their homework, through longer school days they would spend more time in a Norwegian-speaking environment.

From August 2010 the government decided to give the schools resources for helping students with their homework. Every child from Year 1 to 4 is obliged to 2 hours of free tutoring every week. "The aim was to make sure that all students have the same possibility for success in their education; despite how much help they receive at home. The teachers and the SFO staff are responsible for facilitating the tutoring" (KD, 2010, *Lykke til med Leksehjelp*).

2.2.4 SFO- After school programs

Parents' workdays are longer than the school days and it is not recommended for young children to be alone all afternoon (2 to 5 pm). From 1999 all municipalities were obliged to provide after school programs for students from Year 1 to 4, and up to Year 7 for children with special needs (KD, *The Norwegian Education System*). Numbers from

Statistics Norway (SSB) show that 60 % of six to nine year-olds attends SFO, there are more six and seven year-olds (75 %) than eight and nine year-olds (47 %) (SSB, 2011, *Many prefer kindergarten*). The opening hours are before school from 6.30- 07.00 to the school starts and after school from about 1.30 to 4.30 pm. The aim of the program is to be a place for: “Play, participation in cultural and recreational activities appropriate for the age, level of physical ability and interests of children” (KD, 2011, The Norwegian Education System).

2.3 Personal development or knowledge and skills, or both?

In the White paper *Kultur for læring*, one refers to reports evaluating the quality of Norwegian education rating Norwegian students nationally and internationally. It continues with a discussion of the role of school in the society. What is most important? Some say that it is focused too much on academic achievements and too little on social learning outcomes. It can seem like there is a conflict between socially related goals like democracy, formation (*dannelse*) and equality on one side and concrete knowledge and skills on the other side. Further it is argued that a person needs both to succeed and hence the school's mandate is to prepare children and young people for how to function in a future society. The school should develop citizens that are critical of the societal development, but also optimistic about the future. It is emphasized that the school should help the student develop skills that are necessary for mastering adult life, that including work life and other aspects of adulthood (St.meld.no. 30 (2003-4)).

It is very future-oriented thinking, one is educated to have a better chance of succeeding in adult life. There is also a classical socialization theory connection because it says that 'the school should develop citizens' it seems like one is seeking to develop a particular product and if one adds the right ingredients and follow all the steps, the end product will be successful.

Further the White Paper discuss the concept of ‘competence’ referring to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD) definition: “Competence is the ability to manage complex challenges or to perform a complex activity or task” (St.meld. no. 30 (2003-4)). In order to simplify the goals for education one tried to define the basic competencies that are the main learning outcomes and necessary in all the subjects taught in school. The most important academic skills are the

ability to express one's self orally and in writing, to read and calculate and also the ability to use digital tools (St.meld. no.30 (2003-4)).

School is an important part of the Norwegian childhood. The purpose of school are present and future oriented. Education is seen as a mean toward social cohesion and many of the policies that are developed are explained as important steps toward this goal. The purpose of school is to prepare the students socially and academically for adult life. School is seen as prerequisite for a good future for individuals and for the society in general. I will now take a closer look at the transition between day care and school, as this is the focus of my study.

2.4 From day care to school- transition policy in Norway

To help children and parents have the best possible transition from day care to school the Ministry of Education and Research has published a guide called *From the oldest to the youngest*, written as a guide for day care centers, schools, parents and the municipalities stating the role each plays in making the transition as smooth as possible for the child. It is stated that: "Transition phases are vulnerable and can both strengthen or weaken a child's development, self-image and life-competence" (KD, 2008, *Veileder: Fra Eldst til Yngst*: 9). Further the guide describes that:

"Transitions can be described as a process of changes that the child and its family experience as the child moves from one setting to another, leading to changes in roles and expectations. The transition effects the structure surrounding the child; parents, family and friends; it is a sensitive stage where cooperation between the partners involved has of great significance (KD, 2008, *Veileder: Fra Eldst til Yngst*: 8-9).

We can read about things that the institutions can do in order to insure that the transition is a good experience for the child. It is important that the phase of day care finish in a good way. With this in mind many day care centers arranges sleepovers, goes on excursions or have a goodbye parties for the children where parents are invited. In the same way, it is important that the SFO programs are well prepared for the newcomers. To be familiar with the school before it starts is important. It is common to have a

'preschool day' in May where the children meet their teacher, class and school building. One is also emphasizing that there should be a correlation and a progression in the learning content in day care and school as such the day care teachers should inform the schoolteachers about what they have been learning in day care. The teachers should meet up and discuss expectations, competence and progression and other practical issues. Parents are asked to approve of the information about the child given from the day care to the school and be active participants in the process. The municipalities are responsible for initiating, planning, controlling and following up the cooperation between the institutions (KD, 2008, *Veileder: Fra Eldst til Yngst*: 9).

The Green Paper (NOU) no. 8 called *Med forskertrang og lekelyst* a study done by Rambøll in 2010 is referred to. The study stated that 96% of the day care centers that participated the study had school preparatory activities for the five years olds (NOU:8, 2010). Further it shows that day care centers focus on school related activities connected to social competence such as listening to instruction, raising your hand when you want to say something and waiting for your turn. Secondly, they focused on activities that promoted basic skills like reading, writing and calculating. Many would take the children on excursions and sleepovers as this can help them become more independent. Some day care centers taught school related words and concepts. To visit school and SFO are common activities as well (Rambøll, 2010, NOU:8, 2010).

2.5 School-readiness: from skills to social competence

In the Green Paper: *Med forskertrang og lekelyst* also refer to another study by Ogden done in 2009 that discusses school-readiness and it is argued that the view has changed. Previously, one would focus on skills: that the child was independent, could repeat simple sentences and had the ability to have a conversation with simple content. These were focused on as well as the ability to listen to a story read out loud and tell a short story. To write one's own name and to know simple social greetings, songs and rhythms are also important.

The new view on school readiness is more connected to personal and social competence. Social competence is important for managing the transition from day care to school, the term is described as: "Knowledge, skills and attitudes that make it possible to establish

and maintain social relations. Social competence is about managing interaction with other people and includes verbal and non-verbal behavior” (Ogden, 2009, In: NOU:8, 2010) Social competence includes:

“Empathy as in relating to and caring for other people’s feelings. Self control; to regulate feelings, wait for you turn, make compromises and agree on something. Self-expression; to present oneself and state own opinion. The ability to cooperate, to share, to help and to follow common rules. Accountability referring to sticking to agreements and commitments” (Ogden, 2009, In: NOU:8, 2010).

I found this interesting because it is related to my topic, about the social aspect of starting school. As I read this I realize that these competencies might not be age specific, there are adults that are not in possession of these attributes. The concept of social competence will be discussed further in the theory, analysis and discussion chapter. I will now move one to my own study, to show you the immediate context of my informants.

2.6 My study

In order to find out about how children themselves experience the transition from day care to school I conducted fieldwork in a school with a group of Year 1 students. In order to gain insight into the children’s experiences I choose to use observation and group interviews as methods. The timeframe of my fieldwork was from the start of school on 22nd of august to the end of October 2011. I choose an urban school with students from Year 1 to Year 7. The school district was small in square meters meaning that many students lived in close proximity to the school. The student body and my informants in particular were homogeneous as a group ethnically Norwegians from middle-class backgrounds. My informants were from many different day care centers in the area. All of my informants attended SFO, which began three weeks before school, and therefore some of the children were familiar with each other when starting school.

The Year 1 students are divided into three groups where every group has their own teacher, classroom and dressing room. Throughout most of the teaching time the groups are separated but they also spend much time together during excursions, physical education (PE) RLE (Religion, philosophy, and ethics) activity sessions, music class and concerts. In these sessions they are either one large group or divided into three mixing the original groups. In Year 2 the three groups will converge into two.

The SFO is located in the school facilities; the program offers a hot or cold meal, free-

playtime and help with homework. The program often arranges different events like band practice, sport days, outdoors trips and so on. More information about the school day and facilities will be presented in the analysis chapter.

3 Methodology chapter

3.1 Introduction

The method chapter will describe the research process: the access process, my research roles and methods used. When describing the methods I will discuss the advantages and challenges I found applying these methods in my fieldwork. At the end I will also discuss the ethical considerations that guided my research. I have chosen to focus on the social aspect of starting school- how the children experienced transitioning from day care to school. I wanted to learn more about how the children organized their social worlds. Children's interaction and play will be the main focus of my study. I have also chosen to focus on boys and girls shared and separate play culture.

The research questions are:

How does children experience starting school?

How do the children construct social rules and friendships?

What are the shared and separate features of boys and girls interaction and play?

3.2 Fieldwork at a primary school.

To learn about children experiences I choose to do fieldwork at a primary school from late August to the end of October, the first period of the school year for my participants. I spent 30 days at the school from 08.30 to 13.30 participating in the children's daily activities. My research process and methods is inspired by Ethnography, which can be explained as:

“A type of research where the knowledge that is produced depends on the researcher taking part in close social interaction with informants over extensive periods of time. It is because of its intensive and long-term character that ethnographic work provides important insights into the nature of the researcher’s relationships with their informants” (Christensen, 2004:166).

In order to learn from the children it was necessary that I got to know them and their daily lives, two months is not a long time compared to other ethnographic research but it gave me some time to get to know the children. Judith Ennew et al (2009) give a

good summary of what we should strive to accomplish when we do research with children:

“Use child- centered methods, use words that participants understand, develop research approaches that are sensitive to children's ways of behavior and thinking, allow sufficient time for building trust and explaining research, spend enough time with children to learn from them about what they do and why, avoid taking sides with authority figures if the research is carried out in schools or institutions” (Ennew, 2009: 2.15).

These principals guided my fieldwork process; it was an ongoing process that is

Day	Methods
1-17	Participant observation
18,19, 20	1 st series group interviews
18-24	Participant observation
25	2 nd series of group interviews
26-27	Autumn break
26-30	Participant observation

negotiated between the researcher, the participants and the teachers at the school. Here is an overview of my fieldwork period. I observed 4 days a week and I will organize the fieldwork in days instead of dates: 22nd of August being Day 1 and the 28th of October Day 30. I do this to show if something happened early or late in the research process so

that one can look for change and development.

3.3 The amount of data

At the end of the fieldwork I had completed 30 days of observation, each day was about four to five hours long. I took field notes every day, carrying a notebook. In the afternoon I typed the notes into my computer, I tried to organize, summarize and reflect on the various observations of the day. The observations were organized under headlines written in reference to the time and place it occurred. Altogether the field notes consisted of 88 typewritten pages. I performed two series of interviews with five groups in each series for about 15 minutes per group. These interviews were transcribed word- by- word and added up to 48 typed pages written in 'interview style'.

3.4 The access process

3.4.1 School

I considered following a group of children from day care to school but realized that the process of accessing a day care and various schools, the consent from parents and children in such a short time were too much for one person to do. I therefore limited my study to doing fieldwork at one school only.

I introduced my project to six different schools, showing up at the administration office with an information pack that included: 1) An information letter about my study program, my research topic, what I expected from the school, my desired research role and ethical considerations (see appendix 1) 2) An information letter to the parents containing much of the same information (see appendix 2). Two of the schools responded positively, inviting me to do my fieldwork at the school: one rural and one urban. In the rural school I knew some of the children and adults. I choose the urban school, as it was furthest away from my own experience. I could have included the SFO in my study since it made use of the same facilities but I choose to limit it to school hours only.

3.4.2 Group

I got access to the school and the principal told me that I was free to do the research with all the Year 1 students (45 children) or just one group. I choose one group, as it might be easier to relate to a smaller sample of children and one teacher in one classroom. The principal also gave me the contact information of Elizabeth (fictive name), a Year 1 teacher. I contacted Elizabeth and planned to meet up with her on the first day. It was important to me that both the parents and the children knew that I was a researcher from the start (Ennew, 2009:2.10). Elizabeth introduced me briefly to the children and the visiting parents on the first day. During the meeting with the teacher we talked about the research project, what I expected of her and the school and also the research role that I wanted to have. I found that she was interested in my study and very open to what I shared. We decided that we would have more meetings if necessary.

3.4.3 Play culture

I tried to join a circle game on the first day but one of the boys, Simon (fictive name), did not let me into the game, I therefore sat down and watched from the sideline. I was

reminded that I should wait for the children to invite me.

On Day 2, someone asked me: *Are you somebody's mum?* I said: *no*, they continued: *Are you a teacher?* I answered: *No, I go to school just like you; it's called the university.* One boy replied: *My mum goes to university too!* Another one said: *My cousin too, do you know Ida?* Later that day a boy came over to me as I was writing in my book and asked: *What are you doing?* I answered: *I am writing a book about how it is to start school*, he replied: *Oh, for the first graders?* I said: *Yeah*, he continued: *But I am a first grader!* He shared some of his experiences. The children noticed that I was there and asked questions but it took a while before I got access to their 'world'.

On Day 4 I was sitting by Simon's table and he asked me to help him erase something he had written because he was not happy with. I said I thought it looked good and that he had done well, he looked at me and gave me a big smile saying: *Thank you!* I think this was a breakthrough in our relationship. On Day 9 we had 'outdoor school'. The boys were gathered in the playhouse eating their lunch and I asked if I could come in. Simon replied: *Sure, come in!* He told a story about nose bleeding and a fork in the eye, and the other boys said that it could not be true, he would have died. Simon turned to me saying: *It is possible right?* I replied: *Yeah, I think that it is possible.* When a girl tried to come in to the house Simon and the boys shouted: *Get out! It's a boys' party!* This is just one example of how I got access to the play culture; I will give more examples in the following.

3.5 The research role

From working in a day care, leading groups of children in organizations and being a family member I am used to playing an active role around children. I am used to play an adult role with responsibility when interacting with children: I initiate play and games, solve conflicts and instruct the children. I knew that I had to develop a whole new role as a researcher. I am glad Elizabeth was 20 years older than me; it made it easier for the children to separate our roles. In another group the teacher was around my age and I think it would be harder to distinguish myself from the teacher role.

Judith Ennew et al (2009) writes in the research manuals how to do right- based research with children, that we are encouraged to “establish as much equality as possible”, in a school location it is important to work with how the children perceive you as a researcher, they point out that:

“Researchers are not teachers and should not act like or sound like teachers. Researchers should not sit on chairs while children sit on the floor, should avoid emphasizing their larger physical presence by standing over children, and they should not sit behind a desk. They should neither shout orders at children nor use the patronizing 'special voice for children' that so many adults use” (Ennew, 2009:2.16).

3.6 The least adult role

When speaking of participant observation there are various opinions on to what extent the researcher can be a participant in the participants' world. There is the role of the 'detached observer', which assumes that the social, intellectual and cultural worlds of adults and children are so different that the adult cannot enter the children's world. 'The marinal semi- participatory role' claims that there is no absolute distinction between the two worlds, however the power imbalance between adults and children can never disappear completely (Mandell, 1991, In: Hutchby & Moran- Ellis, 1998). I wanted to strive towards playing a role that Mandell calls 'the least adult role' claiming that: “all aspects of adult superiority except physical differences can be cast aside, allowing the researcher to enter into to the children’s world as an active, fully participating member (In: Hutchby & Moran- Ellis, 1998). My research role was constantly negotiated as I interacted with children and adults. I strived to play the least adult role, in some situations I succeeded and in some I could have done things differently. I will now describe some of the roles that I played throughout the various stages of the fieldwork period.

3.7 The various role

3.7.1 A guest

The transition period from day care to school can be a turbulent period for the children as many changes take place. The children did not get to choose whether or not they wanted me there. I figured it was best to see myself as a guest who would be subject to the norms that children played by: that I would join in when I was invited and answer when children asked me questions, at least in the beginning when we were unfamiliar with each other. I presented myself to the children saying that I was given a big homework, to

write a book about how it is to start school. I carried a notebook around so it actually looked like I was writing a book. The children were interested in the book; they opened it, drew pictures and asked me to read from it.

3.7.2 No authority

As I was negotiating my role in interaction with the adults I found myself in uncomfortable situations, especially in the beginning. On Day 3, Elizabeth left the classroom to get something, asking me to: *Keep an eye on the children*. The children were clearly testing me: some of the boys left their seats to get water and spy on the other group through the glass window. The rest of the group remained seated but talked loudly. I remained passive in the situation and actually laughed with the children when someone said or did anything funny. When the teacher came back and asked if they behaved I gave them 'thumbs up'. I was glad when Elizabeth appointed help groups (*ordenselever*) to do this job. Surprisingly enough when the help-groups were in control, the children were 'dead- silent'. When giving reports the groups were very strict reporting any talking and mischief.

The role of 'no authority' did affect my relationship with the adults as well. I was constantly refraining myself from interfering and controlling the children's play and interactions. As I took this passive open role it was hard to 'step out of it' when I interacted with adults because the children were present. It was hard to say no when the teachers asked me for small favors, like looking after the children for a short time or run small errands. As time went the role I played were more set, I was more comfortable, the children started to trust me more and the adults adapted as well.

3.7.3 Not a teacher

I was always sitting close to the seating groups in the classroom and sometimes I was more accessible than Elizabeth. The children often asked me for help, I tried to be passive in these situations, as I did not want to be perceived as an assistant teacher. Tommy (fictive name) asked where to put his pencil case, and I replied: *In your backpack I think*, he got a bit annoyed: *You think?* And then he asked Elizabeth to be sure. My unclear answers annoyed him. After a while I saw the children helping each other with schoolwork and I got less strict about the rule.

On Day 13 during 'outdoor school', I observed a group of children on the outskirts of the

park. Tommy suggested that they played the popular game: 'The girls chasing the boys'. One boy argued: *Eve (teacher) said we couldn't play that game.* (There had been conflict and tears earlier that day). Tommy said: *But Eve is not here!* Simon agreed: *There are no teachers here we can play that game!* One boy pointed at me: *But there is a teacher right there!* Simon smiled at me and said: *Nah, she is not a teacher!* It happened a few times that my group explained to other children who I was and what I was doing at the school.

3.7.4 The helper

I had my jacket and shoes in the children's dressing room; this was a way to distinguish myself from the teachers who had their dressing room upstairs. The time before and after the breaks was a crucial: the children were together as a whole group, they made plans and boys and girls interacted and so on. I helped the children with zippers and tying their shoelaces, I felt better doing this than just watching them passively as the dressing procedure often took a long time.

As the weeks passed I often found myself in situation where I was the only adult around, especially in the beginning of the breaks. The children saw me as an adult and came to me for help. On Day 16, a boy from year 2 fell flat on his face on the dirty asphalt. In this situation I choose the role of an adult, I lifted him up and tried to wipe the dirt of his clothes. I decided that I would rather be perceived as a helper than a cold and distant adult. I distinguished between helping when children had accidents and helping in conflicts, I avoided conflict situations.

3.7.5 The participant

On Day 6, I walked past a group of girls chopping rocks. They were making stone dust by chopping stones with bigger stones. The girls told me that I could buy stuff from their kiosk and pay with a stone. I asked if I could join them and a girls responded: *Okay, for a little while, if you find a stone you can chop with,* I joined them and they taught me how to do it. A girl asked me: *Why did you become a stone chopper?* I said: *I though it looked fun,* she replied: *Yeah, you can join, first graders and adults can join, only girls. Are you a girl?* I replied: *Yes,* she modifies her answer: *Okay, maybe one boy can join, we are doing this tomorrow as well, do you want to join tomorrow as well?* I replied: *Yeah if I can I would like to join.*

David Goode (1991:156) writes about the concept of 'passive obedience' in his research with a deaf- blind girl, he explains: "I physically allowed her to take the lead in structuring our interaction. This proved a most beneficial (although difficult to arrive at) stance. Once Chris knew that I was cooperative to this degree, she initiated a huge variety of activities and exchanges *in her terms*" (original emphasis) (In: Hutchby & Moran- Ellis, 1998:11).

I tried to follow this strategy even though it was hard, when being passive you fear that the children will think that you are boring because there are less initiative and resistance. On Day 8 I asked Anna and Cecilia if it was okay that I sat down by where they were playing and they said it was fine. Cecilia asked if I wanted to join the play and I said yes. They decided that I should be the mum. Cecilia told me: *As we sleep you can sit over there and you can wake us up tomorrow morning*. We played 'mother and children' almost every day after that, in my overview I have listed 17 observation days where I participated and observed the children playing. Cecilia was in many ways a key informant, she often asked me to join in on various play and activities. On Day 20, the girls decided to spy on the boys, Cecilia asked if I wanted to join, I said yes, she added: *Because then you can look after us*. She asked me to join and stated the role that she wanted me to play.

3.7.6 The adult

My participation did effect the social interaction between the children. On Day 18 while playing 'mother and children' Elizabeth walked past us and said something to Anna. I asked Anna what she said and she explained that Elizabeth told her that we should not pick the leaves of the trees on other side of the fence, as it was someone's garden. I felt embarrassed for not thinking about that myself. I said that it would be best to only pick leaves and plants on our side, and so we did. During the next break I came out late and saw that Anna and other girls had broken all the twigs on the tree (from the neighbor garden). They had built a doghouse by attaching the twigs to the spaces between the planks in the terrace. On the floor they made a blanket out of all the leaves. I could see how excited they were about this. I felt responsible but I didn't want to interfere so I stayed away from that area the whole break, hoping that Elizabeth wouldn't notice the damage. I know that if I had been there I would have stopped it. The hardest situations

were when the children and adults perspectives collided and I was caught in between having to choose the adult or the child side.

3.7.7 *But you are an adult!*

Although the children did not regard me as a teacher I certainly was an adult. Sebastian made this clear to me on Day 24, in the park. He came running over to me saying: *You have to come Henry just kicked Simon, he is crying!* I told him: *It is better that you find Elizabeth,* Sebastian answered: *But you are an adult! Come on!*” (We started to walk over to the other boys) he continued to instruct me: *You have to walk faster! And be strict now, you have to yell at Henry!* It is not the first time Sebastian heard me saying: *Sorry I cannot do that I am just visiting here.* In his opinion the fact that I was an adult made me responsible for sorting out the conflict. I do not think the children had experienced many adults with this kind of role, at least not in an institution like day care or school. The children tested me, asking me to do things, swearing and going against the teacher’s rules find out what kind of adult I was.

Three weeks after I finished my fieldwork I got an email from Elizabeth and she told me about a conversation that happened in the classroom. They were discussing something and one of the children said: *Do you think Kristina would have liked it?* Elizabeth replied: *Kristina?* the child answered: *Yeah, Kristina who is a part of our group!* Elizabeth wrote me: *I had to laugh; to the children you are a part of our group!*

As Christensen (2004:174) points out, the goal is not to pass as a child but to: “Find the delicate balance between acting as a ‘responsible adult’ and maintaining the special position built up over a period of time”. As I did my fieldwork I realized that my research role were constantly negotiated and the process of gaining the children's trust was ongoing throughout the period

3.8 Methods

I was interested to find out more about: *How does children experience starting school? How do the children construct social rules and friendships? What are the shared and separate features of boys and girls interaction and play?*

To learn about the children's experiences I decided to use participant observation as my main method. I also choose group interviews to learn about children's constructions of social rules and friendships. I choose to only involve children as my main informants because I view children as experts in their own lives (Langsted, 1994, In: Clark & Moss, 2005). To hear the children reflect and discuss their daily lives and observe and participate in the daily activities taught me much about how they experienced starting school.

3.8.1 Doing research *with* children and not *on* them

UNCRC states that children have the right to participation, to have an opinion about matters that concerned them (UNCRC: Article 13). This is true for research as well; children should have a clear voice in research. 'Research on children' refers to studies that involve children but they have no control: it can look like 'testing' children in sterile laboratories to confirm or discard hypothesis about them. When one is doing research *with* children they are participants in the process, the methods, the topics and the representation. (Woodhead & Faulkner, 2000). My study is inspired by ethnography as I have focused on participatory observation as one of my methods of data production. According to Randi D. Nilsen: "Ethnography gives us the advantages for children to participate directly in the research process as we meet them face- to- face in their daily surroundings and learn about everyday life experiences from their point of view" (Nilsen, 2004:119).

3.9 Participant observation

The reason why it is helpful to observe and not only talk with informants is that not all knowledge is easily expressed verbally. Knowledge can also be embodied, and this is true for children's knowledge as well (Atkinson & Hammersley, 1994). When studying social interaction one has to observe children, they might not be consciously aware of why they are behaving in a certain way, and if they are conscious about their behavior they might not be willing to share it with a researcher in an interview setting. Judith Ennew emphasize the importance of building rapport between the research and her informants: "Children are unlikely to tell much about their lives, especially about sensitive issues, to a stranger in answer to direct questions" (Ennew, 2009, 2.10) Sigrun Gudmundsdottir (1992:2) argues that: "It is crucial to have a long observation

period, to see many days, good and bad, to know what is 'normal' and what is not". The fieldwork period and doing participant observation allowed me to see many days to get familiar with the children and their interaction.

Atkinson and Hammersley (1994:248) define participant observation as: "The researcher playing an established participant role in the scene studied". Further the authors argue that to what degree the researcher is participating or observing varies. One can either be: "Complete observer, observer as participant, and participant as observer or complete participant". I found myself in all of these categories throughout my fieldwork. It depended on the situation, mostly on how much the children choose to involve me in their activities.

3.9.1 Practicalities (how)

Field notes

I took notes as I observed the children; I quoted what the children were saying and doing. I described play and games. I tried to flesh out the context in which the situations occurred. I noted children attempting to join in play and games. I looked for rules and norms that the children played by. I noted body language and gestures.

Daily summary

I finished the day by writing a summary with all the observations on my computer. The summaries were organized chronologically after the timetable so I knew if an event happened in the first or the second break, indoors or outdoors. When I carried the small notebook I could only write short words and sentences because I had to get everything down on paper fast, but in the summary I could elaborate. To get good data I had to work on observing and writing down 'thick descriptions: to carefully observe and write observations with much detail so that it would make sense to me when reading it months later. It was not enough to use bullet points, I had to provide the context. I also reflected on my research role, the part I played in the situations. I tried to put the observations into categories and find overall themes.

3.9.2 Advantages of using participant observation

Studying the children in their natural environment was crucial for the reliability of the data produced. It felt right to stay so close to the children and get to know them and

giving some of the control to them. Participant observation allowed flexibility: I could focus on the individual children, small groups of children or the whole group as a unit. I could follow the social interaction in certain activities, play situations and special or daily events. I could observe what the children were talking about and it helped me to learn about their perspectives. Participant observation does not demand much resources or active participation from the school; I was just a part of the everyday life. The role of being participant observer attracted me, I love to play with, and be around children and I have always been interested in understanding them better.

3.9.3 The challenges of using participant observation

My role as a researcher was both a strength and weakness in the project.

Conducting the study by my self was a limitation because I could only be one place at a time, and when there are 15 participants it is challenging to build a relationship with everyone. If I observed a situation from a distance, I would only hear fragments of what the children were saying but if I choose to move closer I could interrupt the situation.

Silverman (1993) reflect about the researcher's role in the data production:

“All that ethnography, and social research is general, can accomplish is to explicate what people appear to be doing and how they appear to be doing it, while bearing in mind that the researcher is an active participant in the production of research itself, and that the research process is reflexively related to its own subject matter: the social process” (In: Hutchby & Moran- Ellis, 1998:11).

The fieldwork period required that I looked at the children with new eyes every day. It is easy to be blinded, thinking that you have seen it all when you visit the school day by day. Also one can get a lot of data but not the data that one is looking for. This can be a good thing because one is forced to abandon own preconceptions, created from one's own preconceptions from previous experiences. When I carried my book around observing the children and taking notes it attracted attention, which was good as it gave me an opportunity to talk with them. The book helped me to explain to the children why I was there and it distinguished me from the other adults. However, it started to hinder me, as I gradually played more with the children. When I left the book inside, the challenge was to remember all the details and quickly write them down after the break.

Also my presence at the school and the children's knowledge that I observed them must have affected their behavior to some extent.

Participant observation proved to be a suitable method for doing research with children. To interact with the children for such a long time gave me valuable insights that I don't think I could get in any other way. It is not an easy method as human interaction is not easy and accessing the participant's world is not easy. However it is necessary for getting the children's perspectives on their daily lives.

3.10 Group interviews

It was important that I could be with the children by myself and that it would not interfere too much with the teachers scheduled activities. The time had to be short enough to keep the children focused. As I did my observation I noticed that the children loved to tell stories in the 'Listening Corner', they loved to talk! I could have used drawing and coloring but I noticed that they were doing that all the time. Giving them another drawing task might be seen as more school work. I choose to use group interviews thinking it would be less scary than talking to me one- on- one. I hoped this would stimulate discussion amongst the group.

Steinar Kvale and Svend Brinkman have written a book called *InterViews* about the qualitative interview. They argue for the interdependence of human interaction and knowledge production. Kvale & Brinkman state that the knowledge is constructed in inter-action between the interviewer and the interviewee (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009, 2). I wanted to create an arena where I could talk to the children about things that I was curious about. I was interested in their reflections, views, stories and also facts about their background, their life as a school- child, their peers and activities. According to Gudmundsdottir (1992) there are six groups of questions asked in a qualitative interview: Questions that ask the participants to:

- 1) Analyze/ reflect about own or others behavior,
- 2) Explain their own opinions and attitudes,
- 3) Express their feelings or react emotionally,
- 4) Explain their own sensory experiences: what they see, hear, feel, taste or smell,
- 5) Share facts/ knowledge about the world and own reality,
- 6) General background information about demography (Gudmundsdottir, 1995:).

Throughout the series of group interviews I asked all these groups of questions depending on the 'holes' of missing information I found as I observed the children. Major themes of the interviews were friendships, social rules, and day care and play activities.

3.10.1 Practicalities

The group interviews were conducted in the kitchen. It was relatively quiet and had a table and benches we could sit on. The groups consisted of three to five children divided by seating groups or the children's preferences. The interview session lasted for 15 min per group. I did altogether 10 interviews divided into two series conducted on Day 18,19 and 20 and last series on Day 25.

I prepared a few topics that I wanted us to talk about so it was semi- structured interviews. I used a puppet called "Fredrick the Fox" (Ragnar Rev) I told them that he was starting school and asked what he needed to do in order to find friends. By using an external object I hoped that the children would think of it as a hypothetical question. It gave me insight into how the children reflect around the subject and gives the choice of how personal they want to be. I decided to use a tape recorder to get all the details of what the children were saying. When listening to the tape I could analyze my own role in the conversations in order to improve for the next group. I tried to make the children feel comfortable by allowing them to eat their lunch, look at the props I had brought and to draw in my book.

3.10.2 Advantages of using group interviews

I had the opportunity to ask for information that I was missing as I observed. Their insights contributed to my observation, as I understood them better. Talking to the children I learned about how they construct social rules and friendships. I got the chance to tell the children more about my project, why I was there. Many of the children did reflected on aspects of starting school and they expressed their feelings. The children were more than willing to share their experiences; many were excited to join the activity. The tape recorder worked well as I started by telling the children that they could not touch it. I also let them listen to it afterwards. I think being in a different room; the puppet and the tape recorder made the children feel special, that what they were saying was important and that they could help me. The tape recorder helped me to transcribe the

conversations in detail and some information I only got from listening to the recording many times. I see the interviews huge steps forward in the research process and valuable learning for me.

3.10.3 Challenges of using group interviews

The group setting and asking open questions favored the most talkative and articulate and outgoing children. As I listened to the recordings and transcribed the conversations, it was easy to see that some were given much more talking time than others. I tried to prevent this by asking a question and asking everyone to answer one by one, but this interfered with the discussion. I learned that the formulation of the questions was crucial to data production. If the children did not understand the question they did let me know and I asked the question in a different way. I experienced, as I suspected, that some children found it hard to reflect about what they were presently experiencing and also to relate to abstract concepts. In order to compensate for the 'seriousness' of the interview setting I let the children tell me things that I didn't ask about. If they became restless I let them wander around in the room for a short time. They were also allowed to play with the props I brought. Many were curious about my big red book and wanted to know what I've been writing.

3.10.4 Conclusion

I think that the combination of participant observation and group interviews were successful because they produced different types of data. The organization of the methods was helpful as I did 17 days of observation alone before I did the first series of interviews on Day 18,19 and 20. I performed two more weeks of observation before I did the second series of interviews on Day 27. After that, I still had three more days of observation. I found out much about the children's interactions through my observation and more about children's understanding of their interaction in the interviews. For example, I observed the nature of the conflicts that occurred as the children played soccer and from the interviews I learned that two of the boys involved were cousins. The boys told me the reason for the conflict and their perspective on the event, as I talked to them in separate groups.

3.11 Ethics

In this section will present the ethical considerations that guided my fieldwork and data production process. Ethics are is an important part of doing research with children because they are in need of special protection as they are not always able to understand the consequences of their actions.

3.11.1 Informed consent from parents

During the first week of school, when an information packet was sent home with the children to be given to the parents I had the teacher include a letter with information about the project. In the letter I presented the study and gave the parents an opportunity to exclude their children from taking part in the project by returning a slip with their signature. If a child were not participating she/he would have the same status as all the other students at the school.

One note was returned stating that one girl was not to take part in the project. It was still important to treat her like all the other children in the group. Since the participants were surrounded by non- participants for a large part of the day it was very difficult to keep this girl out of my notes. As she was the only one who didn't partake I was left with a dilemma as I planned the group interviews. I didn't want to exclude the child from the interviews since she was the only one but I also didn't want to overrule her parents' decision. To show respect for their decision I got the teacher to call them again and explain the situation. The teacher called because she was the one who had previously spoken to them and had their contact information. The teacher explained the situation, asked whether we could ask the child if she wanted to join, and assured them that I would not record data from what the child said in the interviews. Her parents agreed to let me ask her and the girl wanted to participate. As I transcribed the interviews I only wrote: 'girl is talking' so that I could get the flow of the conversation in the transcription.

3.11.2 Informed consent from children

Informed consent means that the participant has agreed to take part in the research activity understanding the aims, methods, and topic of the research and what the data will be used for. They should also know that they could withdraw from the research at any time (Ennew, 2009:2.14-2.15) In the 1st series of interview, in Group 3 with Jamie, Lovina and Johanna we talked about informed consent. I started by thanking them for

partaking in the interview and Johanna asked: *But what if you don't want to join?* I said: *Than you don't have to, it is completely voluntary.* Jamie added: *Yeah, we can decide ourselves!*

In the last series of the group interviews I asked Tommy if he wanted to participate with his group, he replied with a sigh: *Do I have to?* To help me Elizabeth said: *Yes you have to.* I quickly assured him that he did not have to join and that I could ask someone else. I also asked him whether it was okay if I asked later and he said yes. Next time I asked two other boys and him and this time he was excited to join. Two children said no to participating in the interviews I was okay with because than I knew that the participating children most likely agreed to join because they wanted to and not out of obligation.

3.11.3 Protection from harm: The responsible adult

“Researchers are responsible for protecting all research participants from any emotional and physical harm that might result from the research, and to protect their rights and interests” (Ennew, 2009:2.13-2.14). I want to give you an example of an ethical dilemma that I encountered during my fieldwork. On Day 22 I was observing the children in a corner of the playground. Cecilia and Rebecca were planning to climb under the fence and climb the stairs: 'to see what is up there'. As I saw that there were no adults around and the girls were serious about the plan. They had their feet half way under the fence and I choose to intrude, as I felt responsible for their safety. I said that I didn't think we were allowed to climb under the fence, the girls were bummed that I stopped them. I thought it was better to stop it on an early stage than wait and risk having to be even firmer in my language.

3.11.4 Sensitivity

Knowing that starting school can be turbulent time sensitivity is important. To ask questions like: *Are you sitting here all by yourself?* can fuel negative emotions. To interfere in conflict and take sides was also something I avoided as much as I could. I learnt an important lesson about sensitivity as I talked to Camilla in an interview. I was so excited because saw that she seemed much happier as time went by, she took a leader's role in play and were more active. I wanted to her to reflect on this process and therefore I asked her if she felt different about school now compared to the beginning. I

said that I sometimes saw her by herself the first weeks but now she has many friends. She could not relate to what I was saying, to her it was hard to remember things that happened a month earlier. And the concept of a personal process was foreign to her. She asked me if my observations were true or made up. I learned a lot from this experience; to dig into so abstract but yet so personal issues is adult-centric and not sensitive. It is okay if the child brings up the topic themselves but not for a researcher to ask about in a group setting.

3.11.5 Respect cultural traditions, knowledge and customs

As I was a guest at the school I was important for me to show respect to the institution and the teachers, I therefore introduced my study to the teachers I met. Being an adult I did interfere in children's play at times as I felt the responsibility to protect the children from harm, this can also be seen as a way of respecting the institution. I did follow the rules that the teachers set for the children, and did not partake in rule-breaking activities, like moving out side of school grounds or not coming back into class when the bell rang.

3.11.6 Reciprocity

As I finished my fieldwork I baked cinnamon buns for the participants, I also gave them a personal bookmark as a memory. I see my role as a helper as a form of reciprocity that the children benefited from me being there as I helped them with practical things. I also visited the children a few times throughout the school year to play with the children and hear how they were doing. I also plan to present the results to the children in a short and fun Power Point slide show.

3.11.7 Respect privacy

An important principle is to always ask the children for permission for using their stories and pictures (Ennew, 2009:2.16). I wanted to make this clear to the children, I got the children to sign their name on a list whenever they participated group interviews I also asked all participants personally whether I could take photos of their drawings. And I asked a girl if I could have a note that she sent to a boy and use it in my book and she approved.

3.11.8 Ensure confidentiality

To ensure confidentiality I have changed the names of all of the participants and teachers in the representation of my data. I have also chosen not to reveal the name or location of the school to ensure anonymity in the representation and also when talking about my fieldwork (Ennew, 2009:2.17). The children's fictive names are: Sebastian, Jonathan, Simon, Tommy, Jamie, Cecilia, Elise, Anna, Isabel, Camilla, Rebecca, Julia, Johanna, Alice and Lovina.

3.12 The analysis process

3.12.1 Transcribing

In the children's autumn break (between Day 26 and Day 27) I transcribed the two series of interviews word- by- word. I tried to write down what the children were saying in their dialect and included all the thinking pauses. I listed all the questions that I asked and noted how many of the participants who answered the various questions. I marked all the participants' words in different colors so that it was easy to find.

3.12.2 Finding and organizing themes

I printed out all the field notes and read them carefully; I looked at every section and tried to label the observation with themes that I could dig deeper into. Examples were child-child and older child- child interaction, negative attention, ethics. I also made an overview of all the days of observation and all the themes and marked the occurrences. This gave me an overview of the overall themes. At this point I still did not know how to organize the analysis I had to go to the literature to look for ideas.

3.12.3 Reading literature seeing my data in new light

As I read literature it helped me to see the data from different perspectives. For example as I read Barrie Thorne's (1993) *Gender Play* I was reminded to look for girls and boys interaction. With 'new glasses' I saw similarities between boys and girls play and I also situations were they were interacting. The common features of boys and girls play were: small and large groups, negotiations, conflict and progressive play. I read relevant literature to look for concepts that I could use. I considered a variety of concepts and choose the ones I thought were best fitted for my study. I will describe them in the

theory section.

3.12.4 Organizing the data into analysis chapters

I choose to divide the analysis in three chapters to capture as much as possible of the children's experiences of the transition, their understanding of social rules and friendship and observations of play. When finding these three main themes I looked through my field notes and I translated all the observations that I wanted to use from Norwegian to English. I also found major themes of the interviews and copy/pasted all the relevant quotes from the children organized in sections.

3.13 Conclusion

In this chapter I have explained the research process. I have described the access process into the school, the group and the peer-culture. I have written about how I constructed and negotiated my research role. I have presented the methods that I used for data production and the advantages and challenges I met using the methods. I have also discussed the ethical considerations that guided my fieldwork. The analysis process was presented at the end. In the next chapter I will present the theoretical perspectives and analytical concepts that I have chosen to build my research on.

4 Theory chapter

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter I will establish a theoretical basis for my analysis and discussion. My study is a part of the sociology of children and childhood research tradition. The aim of my study is to learn about children's own experiences of starting school taking their perspective. I will focus on school as a forum for social interaction and play. I have chosen to let gender be a factor when analyzing the children's interaction. The children's culture: interactions, play and relationships are the topics I have chosen to elaborate on in the analysis. Children's play culture (Mouritsen, 2002), social competence (Hutchby & Moran- Ellis, 1998) and 'We-ness' (Nilsen, 2004) are theoretical concepts that will be explained in this chapter and used in the analysis and discussion.

The sociology of children and childhood research tradition emerged within social science field about 30 years ago. This interdisciplinary approach to childhood studies was in many ways a reaction to the existing child research within disciplines such as psychology and sociology. At the time children were not absent in research but they were a muted group, comparable to women. Children were studied from an adult perspective and lacked a voice in research (Prout & James, 1990).

4.2 The sociology of children and childhood research tradition

4.2.1 Childhood is constructed

Developmental psychology defined childhood as various stages that a child goes through from birth through childhood. There is a focus on the individual child's development, assuming universality; that all children develop through the same biologically determined stages. The theory was based on western research experiments but many assumed universal applicability. We also find the view that childhood is universal in The United Nations' Convention of the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). In the articles of the convention we read children's rights to basic needs (food, protection, shelter) and to schooling and participation. The global ratification of the Convention has fueled the strong emphasis on universal schooling for children. School is viewed as a proper place for children whereas work, that is harmful or a hinder for the children's schooling, is discouraged (James, Jenks & Prout, 1998). The school vs. work dichotomy is much debated among researchers, politicians, children's rights activists and humanitarian

organizations. The universal schooling process is an example of how research contributes to the construction of childhood and influences politics and most of all children's everyday lives.

The social studies of childhood tradition views childhood as socially constructed. Childhood is created in a social, political, historical and normative space and therefore there is no universal childhood (James, Jenks & Prout, 1998). It might be closer to reality to speak of childhood(s). Childhood as a social institution is constructed within a historical space and it is reconstructed *for* and *by* children themselves (Prout & James, 1990:8).

4.2.2 The active child

Social studies of childhood criticize the view of children that was presented in the classical socialization theory. It is criticized because it portrays children as passive and conforming. Children's activities were perceived as rehearsing for adulthood, and as the children grew their activities and interaction became more sophisticated:

“Child culture is seen as a rehearsal for adult life and socialization consists of the process through which, by one method or another, children are made to conform, in cases of ‘successful’ socialization or become deviants in cases of ‘failed socialization’ (Shildkrout (1978:109-110), In: Prout & James, 1990:14).

In sociology, children were portrayed as immature, irrational, incompetent, asocial and acultural in comparison to the mature, rational, competent, social and cultural adult (Mackay, 1973, In: Prout & James, 1990). If a person does not attain these characteristics of adulthood and does not function according to cultural expectations, socialization has failed and failing at socialization is in a way failing to be human (Prout & James, 1990:13).

Applying this socialization theory to my topic would imply that the teachers and adults in the children's lives would teach and be models for the children and if the (passive) children were taught the 'right things' (following the recipe step-by-step) one would have the desired outcome: competent social adults. But it is not that simple. Wartofsky says it well: “If children learned only what they were taught...the species would have ended

long ago- perhaps after a single generation” (Wartofsky 1981, In: Qvortrup, 2002:57). We see this view of children in the Norwegian governments White Paper, *Culture for Learning*, describing the purpose of schooling:

“The school's role is for prepare children and young people to function in a future society. The school should also develop students so that they can critically evaluate the about the society. The school should develop students that are critical but also optimistic about the future. The school should facilitate the development of skills that are necessary to manage the adult life. To participate in the labor force is only one of the functions of adult life” (St.meld. 30, 2003-4, 4.2)

As mentioned in the introduction chapter, the Norwegian school is known for its emphasis on the intrinsic value of childhood. However the language here indicates that the purpose of schooling is future oriented. Here the children are presented as 'human becomings' rather than 'human beings', childhood is viewed as a preparation for adulthood (James, 2009). The classical socialization theory does not give the children their deserved credit. Children should be seen as active participants in their own lives, Prout & James states:

“Children are and must be seen as active in the construction and determination of their own social lives, the lives of those around them and of the societies in which they live. Children are not just passive subjects of social structures and processes” (Prout & James, 1990:8).

Qvortrup argues that the relationship between children and adults is regulated through power and interest. Children are treated differently than adults, but it is not because they are passive (and adults are active), but rather because they are not active in the same way as adults are active (Qvortrup, 2002:55). Children are active in the way that they are constructive, value producing actors. They do have their own agenda and are actively participating and therefore their activities deserve credit in their own right (Qvortrup, 2002:73). Only when one view children interaction and activities as important enough to study will one discover how complex their world is.

4.2.3 Children's similar and different experiences

Childhood is constructed in the same way as other social institutions such as gender, class and ethnicity and I have chosen to pay attention to this in my study. I choose a school and a group of year 1 students with 5 boys and 10 girls, and the aim is to learn about their experiences. At the same time I am aware of the variety of experiences that the children have within my group. If I would have done the fieldwork three km away in a different school I might have learned about totally different experiences. Various cultural backgrounds, economic class, rural or urban school, group size composition of boys and girls are factors that can shape the shared and personal experiences of starting school.

When one focus so much on the difference one can forget to look for similarities and collective experiences. Starting school is a shared childhood phenomenon in Norway. An aim of this study is to present both the similarities and the differences of the children's experiences. Jens Qvortrup states that it is important to look for the similarities:

“I believe it is important to avoid the temptation to sacrifice the shared aspects of childhood or the ordinary experiences of children in a context or a given society in favor of certain perspectives which make differences in the childhood population the most important aspect (Qvortrup, 2002:69).

Throughout the fieldwork period I learned that boys and girls played separately for the most of their free playtime I decided that this phenomenon was worthy of further analysis. As I organized my data that boys and girls had separate and shared experiences of starting school, I will describe this in the section about children's play. They were not two separate groups, there might be more commonalities than I first assumed. The children as a group had much in common: They live in the same area, they started school at the same time, they have similar backgrounds and all have attended day care. They share historical space, they receive the same teaching, they are the same age, they watch the same television channels and they grow up in the same culture. And they have more in common as boys and girls than children and adults. Most likely there are some aspects of the children's experiences that most Norwegian children starting school can relate to but there are also some aspects that might be unique to this school or to similar urban schools.

4.2.4 Understanding gender

When observing the children playing it occurred to me that the children played separately for the majority of their free playtime. Barrie Thorne concludes in her book *Gender Play* from 1993 a majority of research on this topic show that when children get the opportunity to choose companions same aged, children choose same-gender companions (Thorne, 1993). Research also showed that the context influence the cross-gender interaction. Indoors, in classrooms and hallways where children do the same activities boys and girls are more likely to interact. Outside on the other hand boys and girls play more separately. Studies of playgrounds confirm that boys occupy the large fixed spaces designated for team sports while the girls would play on bars and jungle gyms and painted cement areas for jump rope and hopscotch or they talk in circles (Thorne, 1993). Thorne concludes that when children have constructed sharp gender boundaries, only a few attempt to cross this boundary. In my study that the soccer field was occupied by the boys but other than that boys and girls shared the rest of the schoolyard. Thorne did her research almost 20 years ago in USA and she refers to research from this time period so not all of their findings are similar to mine. However, Thorne's theory of gender play is classic as it focus on both the shared and separate features of girls and boys interaction. Thorne argues that research often presents the genders as opposed to each other, that one looks for differences and blows them up out of proportions. This dichotomous picture of gender does not capture the complexity of gender relations:

“The complexity of gender relations, the multiple and contradictory meanings, the crosscutting lines of difference and inequality, the fluctuating significance of gender (girls and boys are sometimes with as well as apart from one another) gender is not always at the forefront of their interactions” (Thorne, 1993:5).

Being reminded of this, I looked over my field-notes and found many situations were boys and girls interacted, where the gender mattered to a varying degree. Thorne argues that: “The occasions when girls and boys play together are as theoretically important and socially significant as when they are apart.” In short, Thorne argues that we should move the focus from dualism to gender as fluid and situated (Thorne, 1990:105).

4.2.5 Children's social relationships: Worthy of being studied

As I did my fieldwork a teacher asked me if was *just* observing the children. When I said I would be there for 10 weeks, he commented: *Oh, that long, I remember observation was the most boring part of my teachers' practice.* I agreed with him that observing a teacher teach might be boring but observing children were anything but boring. From an adult centric viewpoint it might look like just 'play' Barrie Thorne opposes the notion that children play is: "Everything that involves little trouble, little importance and a very easy or trifling matter" (Thorne, 1993:5). To put all of children's actions and feelings into the 'play category' is to not take children seriously.

Thorne argues that social relations entail consequential structures of power. Her own observations from school ground play were more than trivial activities. She argues: "I witnessed not only play but serious fateful encounters; I witnessed anger, sorrow and boredom, as well as sport and jest" (Thorne, 1993:6). Thorne argues that children's experiences should be taken as seriously or lightly as those of others (Thorne, 1993).

I want to take children's interaction seriously in my analysis, not to portray it as a 'walk in the park', but to include the power struggles, conflicts, negotiations and exclusions as well as the high-spirited friendship scenes that confirms a carefree childhood ideal. Only by doing this we can learn more about children's competence, how they are able to navigate through these processes.

Flemming Mouritsen also touches on this issue when he argue that we see children and their activities through a lens (preconceptions) whether we are aware of it or not: "We see what we can see, what we want to see, what we fear, what we wish to see (Mouritsen, 2002:32). The other pitfall is to put our own adult experiences into the meaning of children's interaction. When what we see is far from how the children experience it. Gregory Bateson argue that 'play' does not name the action but frame the action (Bateson, 1972, In: Thorne, 1993) Bateson gives an example of 'playing war', an activity that adults dislike, the reason being that the adult looks at it through a 'learning- frame' while the child has another frame and sees it as play, therefore they can't see why it is such a 'big deal' it is just a play (Bateson 1972, In: Mouritsen, 2002).

4.2.6 Understanding children's interaction

From what perspective do we perceive children's interaction? Does children's culture reflect the wider culture? Or is it an autonomous self-regulated world? How does child culture develop and how is it transmitted? Is children's play an imitation of adult life? Or is it 'just play' with little roots in adult world? What is the purpose of studying play? When analyzing the children's interaction there are many perspectives one could take and many things one could focus on.

Sigurd Berentzen was the first one to do ethnographical research in a Norwegian day care center, in 1989 he edited the report: *Ethnographic Approaches to Children's Worlds and Peer Cultures*. In his introduction chapter he presents interaction theory as a micro-ethnographic approach that is useful for understanding children's communication: their forms of talk, ways of developing play and their concept of friendship. To study children's interaction will provide us with knowledge of the complexity of their social world. By studying the micro level, we can come closer to understand the wider international context, and its relevance for culture and organization and features of peer-groups. For example by studying interaction of boys and girls we can learn how they construct gender relations and it also might reflect the gender perceptions in the larger culture. Berentzen asks: "What are the social understandings shared by the children which effect how they develop peer-interaction, evaluate others behavior, and relate to persons outside their peer-group? What are the sources of these social understandings?" (Berentzen, 1989:9). In the 1st interview session, I asked the children to reflect about their friendships and relationships. We also talked about the social rules constructed by the adults and reconstructed by the children in their interaction. In the analysis I will present these social understandings and show how they are integrated in the children's interaction. Based on his own research Berentzen concludes that:

"Children are not only engaged in 'constructing' conversations or play sequences. They are also engaged by the following questions: Who are steering the development of the play-activities and how are they doing this? Children interpret and evaluate their ongoing interaction" (Berentzen, 1989:21).

When describing the children's play culture, (Mouritsen, 2002) I will focus on how children develop and negotiate play and games. How the children use their social competence to influence the play to fit their personal interests and how they negotiate

the progression of the play in interaction.

4.2.7 Child culture

Randi D. Nilsen has written on child culture and who is managing this culture. Are there groups of child culture or is there only one? Is it isolated from the adult culture or is it a micro culture, a part of the larger culture. Nilsen argues that age in itself cannot be a definition for membership in child culture. Both school- and preschool-aged children have competence for managing what we call child culture. She suggests that we question the characteristics of child culture as a homogenous culture, a shared form with shared knowledge and attitudes. Then we can be open to children in different age groups creating variations within a child culture, in the same way that variations are found locally or among boys and girls groups (Nilsen, 1990:38).

When describing boys and girls play we can say that they are apart of the same culture but we can see variations within the groups. The Year 1 students share culture with the rest of the school as well, and with school children in the rest of Norway. There are local variations but there are still so many similarities that we can speak about a child culture.

4.3 Theoretical concepts

In this section I will explain the theoretical concepts that I make use of in my analysis.

Ethnographic researchers have been criticized for being too close to the data and make little effort to connect the empirical data to established theory and to develop new theory (Woods, 1986, In: Nilsen, 2004:119). I will now introduce the concepts that I have made use of in my analysis.

4.3.1 Play culture

Flemming Mouritsen (2002) defines three different types of child culture. First there is the culture produced for children by adults (literature, drama, music, film, TV, computer games, toys, sweets and advertisements). Some products have a formative oriented production with educational persuasion. And a market- oriented production where children are consumers. This can be called a macro culture because it is shared across nations or even globally, for example through worldwide children's TV programs.

Secondly there is a child culture where adults and children together make use of various

cultural techniques and media. Thirdly there is children's culture: the expression of culture that children produce in their own networks. The children can use media and literature and technology as tool for own expression relating to play activities. The children produce or transform such situations into special arenas (Mouritsen, 2002:17).

Media is important raw material for the children, the children implement media in games and stories and they form a common frame of reference. For example in my study when the girls engaged in role-play they would speak a certain dialect from children's television. This phenomenon is familiar from my own childhood. The 'play language' (the Eastern Norway dialect) can be used to develop a play identity that exists only in the play. When talking to people from other places in Norway I learned that they shared this 'play language' as well. My own experience and the girls in my study can indicate that the 'play language' phenomenon is generational and a shared feature in Norwegian child culture. Further research needs to be done to study the find out how widespread this phenomenon is. It seems children are used to this dialect from television and associate it with play. Childhood can be seen as a: "Self- regulating, autonomous world which does not necessarily reflect early development of adult culture (Hardman, 1973, In: Prout & James, 1990:46). From this perspective we see that there are features of child culture that are unique for children.

Mouritsen argues that play can be understood as an expression of the life that the children live (Mouritsen, 1998). For example the children in my study are not unaffected by their surrounding circumstances: that they are transitioning between day care and school and that they are learning new things. The context, the teachers, the older children and the activities that happen there influence play. I would like to have this perspective when I analyze the children's play.

The organization of play share organizational features with the surrounding adult culture but it is also different. Mouritsen argues that play is not hierarchical and functionalistic; it is not bound by schedules and mechanical time. It is not result-oriented. The purpose is to produce social interaction. There are leaders but they do not have formal or material power. The leadership is built ideally on social and interactional competence but in reality it can look different. The interaction is focused on the process and the context, not on the result (Mouritsen, 1998:71). In my analysis I will focus on the leadership and process in play. How a play progress as children's introduce new ideas to keep the play interesting.

The cultural space of play is not idyllic all the time. It is also filled with conflict; charged with tension that is negotiated in the interaction. According to Mouritsen, play can lead to bullying, battle of prestige; hierarchy or it can brake down because it gets boring. The leaders in the play lead poorly; they and the participants can lack the necessary interactional and social competencies so that the play is not successful. I would like to analyze the not-so- idyllic situations of play to see how the children display social competence also in these situations (Hutchby & Moran-Ellis, 1998).

4.3.2 Children's agency

Social studies of childhood views children as an active in the construction of their own lives, the lives around them and of the society in which they live (James & Prout, 1990). What does it mean to be an actor? According to Mayall it is:

“Someone who is doing something: the agent is someone who does something with other people, and, in so doing, makes things happen, thereby contributing to wider process of social and cultural reproduction (Mayall, 2002: In James, 2009:41).

Children relationship with adults provides both opportunities and limitations for children's agency. James states that to study children's agency is not necessarily to study the child as an individual agent, but the child as a member of the generational category of children (James, 2009). In a school setting children can display agency in many ways. Corsaro states that a dynamic of initial peer cultures is that children make persistent attempts to gain control of their lives and also share the control with each other (Corsaro, 1997:118).

Children attempt to gain control over their own lives by collectively using their agency to resist adult control, to not do what they *ought* to be doing at the time. In a quiet work sessions in a classroom the children might display agency by working around the rules (Corsaro, 2009); they talk instead of working, take a long trip to the bathroom or better: meeting someone in the bathroom. They might leave their chair, to fill their water bottle or sharpen their pencils to interact with their friends. They communicate with each other

in sign language or passing notes. This resistance is almost a play in itself; the project is to avoid doing what you are supposed to do without getting caught by the teacher. The children's social interaction and play will be the focus of my study I will present the school the forum for where the interaction and play takes place.

4.3.3 Social competence

I would like to refer to two different theoretical perspectives of social competence and explain my own view. Terje Ogden is a professor of psychology and the Director of research at the Norwegian center for child behavioral research. He has done extensive research on social competence, and child behavior within the context of school. Ogden views social competence as a personal competence:

“Relatively stable characteristics, related to knowledge, skills and attitudes that makes it possible to establish and maintain social relationships. It leads to a realistic view of own competence, and is essential for social skills (social mestring) and for achieving social acceptance or for establishing close and personal friendships (Ogden, 2001:196. Authors translation)

Ogden refers to Gresham & Elliott (1990) as he presents some of the personal characteristics of a social competent child in a school context:

“Empathy as in relating to, and caring for other people’s feelings or views. Cooperation, as sharing and helping others, and following rules and instruction. Self- expression- to ask for information, present one self and respond to others' behavior. Self-control: to regulate feelings, wait for your turn, and respond appropriately to teasing/bullying. Self-expression; to present oneself and state own opinion. Accountability, referring to the ability to communicate with adults and show respect for others’ property and work” (Ogden, 2001: 208-209, Authors translation).

Ogden argues that social competence is an important aspect of school readiness (NOU nr.8, 2010). There are a few reasons for why I don't share this view of social competence: I do not necessarily believe that these characteristics are age specific as there are many adults who does not exhibit these characteristics. 2) Social competence is not a skill you

master like riding a bike or tying you shoelaces. 3) A child who is often emphatic, has self- control, makes compromises and follows common rules probably has an advantage when starting school, and might be a good friend, but social competence is more than that. Ogden focuses on the individual characteristics and does not give the social context enough weight.

Ian Hutchby and Jo Moran-Ellis has written the book: *Children and Social Competence*, which addressed the relationship between childhood, competence and the social arenas of actions in which children live their lives. Moran-Ellis developed one of the first courses in the sociology of childhood. The authors claim that when viewing children as competent social agents, we have to view their competence in relation to “children’s real-world activities with the structural and interactional frameworks of everyday life” (Hutchby & Moran- Ellis, 1998:15). Social competence is defined as:

“A constantly negotiated dynamic, a phenomenon which is stabilized, to greater or lesser degrees, in and through the interactions between human actors and the material and cultural resources which are available, and which can be recruited to play a part in the constitution of specific, situated activities (Hutchby & Moran-Ellis, 1998:15).

In children's real-world activities social competence can be many things. According to this view social competence is situational dependent, and not an individual skill. If a child receives negative attention one can discuss what a socially competent respond would be. The children often try out a number of different strategies, using the available material and cultural resources, the success or failure of the strategies depends on the other children and their response. My argument is that we should not be so quick to determine what is socially competent and incompetent without studying the context, the actors, the children's strategies and the effect of the strategies. I have chosen to use Hutchby & Moran-Ellis view of social competence in my analysis and discussion.

Researchers and adults in general like to put people in categories. After a few hours of my fieldwork I started to put labels on the children: ‘popular/unpopular’, ‘included/excluded’, ‘leader/ followers’, ‘bully/ bullied’. But the longer I spent with the children the more nuanced the categories became. A child could move between *all* of these roles in one play session. And the roles are not: either or, it might as well be both.

My data confirms that roles are not set; a child might play a certain role in one setting but not in all settings and not all the time. The static 'social role' view of children's relationships is close to the in-group concept that is applied in Adler & Adler's research on social life among preadolescents in USA. They view 'in-group' as an: "Unquestionable loyalty to the group and automatic hostility toward outsiders, additionally a strict hierarchical structure of status and power rules" (Nilsen, 2005:125). Randi D. Nilsen criticizes this theoretical model of inclusionary and exclusionary dynamics of cliques.

To put the children in such stable social categories is an adult centric, stereotypical and too simplistic approach. The in-group concept emphasizes the dominance of individualism while social studies of childhood focus on the social child. Nilsen (2005) underscores the necessity of a relational perspective when studying social relations. The children in my study were in a new environment and their social network was fluid in nature as the children negotiated their social roles and tried to find their place.

Children's competence can look different from adult competence. Hutchby & Moran-Ellis write that there is a need for empirical research to explore the concept of children's competence and the factors that enable and constrain children's agency (Hutchby & Moran-Ellis, 1998). The question is not whether children are competent social actors but what are the ways in which children display competence. The authors argue that: "Competence has more to do with children's ability to manage their social surroundings, to engage in meaningful social action within given interactional contexts" (Hutchby & Moran-Ellis, 1998:16). An aim of my study is to show how the children competently engaged with their social surroundings in various ways.

4.3.4 Friendship

The concept of 'friendship' has been criticized for being adult centric and individualized because of its notion as a strong emotional bond and its long lasting nature (Corsaro, 1985, 1994, 1997, James, 1993, In: Nilsen, 2004:123). In the second chapter of my analysis, I have included a part called 'Constructing friendship'. The children shared an understanding of the concept of a friend that it was *a person that you play with*. Corsaro's definition of friend groups can fit to the children's definition: "A cohort or group of children who spend time together on an everyday basis" (Corsaro, 1997:95). He

states that friendships are: “Producing shared activity together in a specific area, and protecting that play from intrusions of others” (Corsaro, 1997:127). Additionally the children would list their friends from day care first. According to the children, friends were both children they played with and had closer and longer relationships with.

4.3.5 We-ness

The children in my study had just started school and I assume that many friendships were yet to be established. Throughout the school year they might make new friends and the networks will continually change. From observing the children I learned that there was much interaction and play that happened among children who did not define themselves as 'friends', 'best friends' or 'buddies'. Randi D. Nilsen has developed the we-ness concept that captures the fluidity of children's social relationships. She defines we-ness as: “An intimate relationship, with meanings such as ‘we are together’ and ‘we are friends’ but its not a fixed relationship, it can shift to ‘we are not friends’ in the next moment” (Nilsen, 2004). In my study this concept fits well as I observed the shared and separate features of boys’ and girls’ play groups. We-ness is to engage in joint play-activities and share interests, objects and secrets. It can also be to break adult rules and regulations (Nilsen, 2004). This fluidity of the relationships is different from the adult normative concept of friendship:

“There is a movement between being together and not, being friends and not, a fluidity between inclusion and exclusion in groups of we-ness (..) Managing this kind of social movement and dynamics points to constructions of social competence that one can say is different in an adult normative concept of friendship” (Nilsen, 2004:123).

If one view the children from an adult centric viewpoint of stable friendship child interaction can seem ‘harsh’ as the space between ‘we are friends’ and ‘we are not friends’ are so small. One can be normative about this instability. But as Nilsen point out, the children use their social competence to navigate through these processes in a way that us adults might struggle to do. It correlates well with the view of Hutchby & Moran-Ellis that social competence is a constantly negotiated dynamic.

I have now presented some of the theory that has guided the research process and

analysis. I have placed my project in the landscape of childhood research by focusing on children's social world and presenting theory on the topic. I have explained concepts that I will make use of in my analysis.

5 Analysis: The transition from day care to school

5.1 Introduction

In chapter 5 of analysis I will focus on children's interaction in relation to starting school. Firstly, I will focus on the structure of the school as the forum of where the interaction takes place. Schools are mostly spoken of as a 'mediator of pedagogy' but I have chosen to see school from the perspective of child culture. (Mouritsen, 2002:20). The children's school days will be presented in short. I have also included the children's experience of day care and the transition to school. In chapter 6, I will look at the social understandings shared by the children which effect how they construct their social lives and evaluate others' behavior. The children's experiences have been analyzed and presented under the topics: Constructing social rules and constructing friendships. In chapter 7 I will present the children's culture in play. I will describe the interaction and play that were characteristic for the children. I have organized the chapter in three parts; first I analyze the interaction between boys and girls than I look at boys and girls separate play looking at shared and separate features. With this I hope to capture the children's multifaceted social experience of starting school.

5.2 The school

The school was located in an urban area in Norway. The children attending the school live in close proximity to the school and they go there from Year 1 to 7. A majority of the children are ethnical Norwegians from middle to upper class backgrounds. The school also has a SFO (after school program) in the school facilities. This program is for children from Year 1 to 4 and is mostly used by the younger children. My participant group is a class of 15 children who were all ethnically Norwegian. There were five boys and ten girls around six years old. They come from over ten different day care centers in the area, and a few of them knew each other before starting school.

5.3 Timetable

The school day is generally from 08.30 to 13.30, every weekday. Within the first weeks the teachers focused much on play and outdoor activities to help the children settle in the new environment. As the weeks went by, the teachers introduced new subjects to the children. I will show you the timetable the way that Elizabeth (teacher) would present in

on the blackboard every morning.

A normal school day:

Time	Activity	Place
08:30 – 09:00	Language training (songs, going through plan of the day, instructions)	Listening corner
09:00 – 09:30	Individual work (Norwegian, Math, and English)	Classroom
09:30 – 09:45	Break: Free play (Only year 1 and 2 out)	School yard
10:00 – 10:15	Language training (instructions)	Listening corner
10:15 – 11:00	Individual work (Norwegian, Math, and English)	Classroom
11:00 – 11:30	Lunch (Picking up milk from fridge, singing, eating, reading from a book, hangman)	Classroom
11:30 – 11:45	Cleaning up, getting dressed	Classroom/ Wardrobe
11:45 – 12:30	Lunch break: Free play (Everyone out)	School yard
12:30 – 13:30	RLE: Religion, philosophy and ethics/ PE: Physical Education (Year 1 divided into groups and swapping between the two subjects) Activities in groups: (All year 1 Year) Puzzling, painting, drawing, outdoor games)	The year 1 classrooms

5.4 Homework

The children shared the common understanding that all the work they did, both at school and at home was 'homework' (lekser). They received exercise books in Math and Norwegian, and handouts in English and RLE. They also had a notebook called 'my book' that they glued handouts into. The children also did homework after school and everything was written in the 'week plan' that they got to bring home every week. The children were given feedback on all their work and sometimes they got stamps.

5.5 Schoolyard

The schoolyard is surrounding the whole school. On the backside there is a space for ballgames, a steep slope and monkey bars with a slide. On the short side of the school there is also a steep slope and a rock that one can climb and hide under. In the front there is a large swing with room for two to six children, a large sandpit and a slide. There are also monkey bars combined with a climbing tower. The soccer field with large goals takes u half of the front side of the schoolyard. Two areas are covered with a roof, which are great places to be when it is raining. The school is surrounded with fences, with two gates to enter and exit by, on each side of the school building.

5.6 Outdoor school

One day a week the children would spend half a day, from 11.00 to 13.30 outside in a park within walking distance from the school. The purpose of this activity was free play in a natural environment. There was no traffic nearby so the children could make use of the whole area. There they had the opportunity to get to know each other across the Year 1 groups. First, the children ate their lunch and then they played for one hour or more. Sometimes the teachers did activities with a learning aspect such as language training, math or cooperation exercises. This was a great time to observe the children playing: they had a lot of space and their play was not interfered with much by adults or older children. The children enjoyed the variety of activities that this environment offered.

5.7 Friends group

These groups were organized by the parents' representatives and were introduced after three weeks into the school year. I first heard them talk about the groups on Day 20. The purpose for the friends group was that they would get to know each other across the three groups with boys and girls together. On Day 29 Lovina and Jonathan told me about a meeting they had with their friends group. They went to visit a boy from another group after school, and they played together and ate pancakes. They also showed me a necklace they made: a key made of beads with a lace. They were talking with another boy from the group, he also had the same key, and it was for unlocking a special door.

5.8 Older children

The Year 1 children entered an already existing child culture when they started school. The older children were not direct participants in the study but I have chosen to include the interaction between the participants and the older children at school. As the children started school they had to figure out the social rules and activities of the school. Their position was changed, from being the oldest children in day care to the youngest at school. Based on memories from my own childhood I expected that the Year 1 students would not engage much with the older students, especially the oldest children from Year 5 to Year 7. I expected the Year 1 students to be intimidated and the older children to be dominant. Seeing the older children welcoming the new children impressed me. On the

first day the older children seemed to be excited about the new students; I saw one boy sitting on the shoulder of an older boy. Two older girls making a seat by holding each other's arms carried Jonathan on a 'kings chair' and many were talking to the fresh students.

The older children often arranged games for the younger like on Day 5 when they arranged a game called 'Bro bro brille' similar to 'London bridge is falling down' with Alice and some other girls. It seemed like these initiatives helped some of the new children feel safe in the breaks. Tommy and Simon interacted much with the Year 7 girls, they were often seen standing in a circle, talking. The girls and some boys were often borrowing Simon and Tommy's caps. Simon had an older sister at school therefore he was familiar with some of the older girls already. Here is an example from Day 27:

Simon was approaching a group of Year 7s. He placed his hands around the waist of a girl who wore a 'student-guard' vest.

She put her hand on his shoulder and brought him into the circle, it was easier for him to see what was going on from the inside of the circle.

Simon and Tommy received a lot of attention for their caps. They often lend them to the older girls. (FN 2011, Schoolyard, Day 27)

On Day 20 Jamie, Tommy and Simon watch the older boys juggle their Diablo:

They are cheering for the boys saying: *You guys are great!*

Simon is quick to ask if he can have a go, after a while he gets to try. He says: *I really suck at this.* The older boys explain to him how it works. Tommy also asks if he can try. One of the boys answer: *Yes you can try after me.*

Jamie is watching another juggler and applauds him. The boy puts his arm around Jamie and together they walk away, joking, and return back. Another boy tries to lift Jamie, he says: *I'm gonna lift you up so you can see better.* He sits down and says: *Climb up on my back.*

Jamie climbs up on his back.

(FN 2011, Day 20)

The older children had more experience with the rules of the schoolyard. The soccer field plan is an example of that. On Day 4 the older boys entered the soccer field while the Year 1 boys were playing. The young boys argued: *We had the field first!* But the older boys did not give in. Tommy shouted: *Than we should be aloud to join! Remember the YES rule!* An older boy replied: *But when we have the field we are the ones playing.* The older boys had been through this before they knew their rights. The younger children were not automatically included in the older children's play who preferred playing with boys their own size most of the time.

5.9 The sponsor program

Elise told me the best thing about school:

Elise: *That we have sponsors...It was like..one day I was bored at school and then my sponsor came..and it is like.. they play with us..and stuff*

[What do you like about your sponsor?]

Elise: *She is kind..and then it is fun to braid her hair..even though she might have lice..and one time I saw a lice in her hair..and I took it out*

(Interview 2011, 1st session, Group 5)

It has become normal practice in many Norwegian schools, for older children to be allocated a Year 1 student in the beginning of the school year. At this school it was the Year 5 students that were the sponsors. The children were introduced to their sponsors during the third week of school. The sponsors got the name of their child and had to find them during the lunch break. The sponsors would often organize activities and games for the younger children and many would join. On Day 26 the Year 1 students and their sponsors went on an excursion to the park together. The sponsors all walked hand-in-hand with their children all the way to the park. The girls would often walk around with their sponsors and at the end of the break, they would come with the children to the door and give them hugs and say good-bye. The children sometimes sat on their sponsors lap and the sponsors also carried them or let them sit on their backs.

The closeness of the relationship between child and sponsor depended much on the interest of both the sponsor and the sponsor child. Tommy had a girl sponsor and there was not much interaction between them. Lovina talked about her sponsor a lot but often but said a few times that she could not find her. She told me: *I wonder if my sponsor is hiding?* Rebecca had a closer relationship with her sponsor in the beginning, but as she got to know the girls in her group she preferred playing with them. On day 23 while playing 'mum and children' Rebecca's sponsor came and said hi but Rebecca did not show any interest. The sponsor stood there a while and then she walked away. Rebecca gave Cecilia a hug and said: *I only want to play with you!* To some of the children, especially the girls, the sponsors were important. To have someone to go to in the breaks, to play with and talk to were valuable in the midst of the newness of everything.

5.10 The transition

The children started SFO two weeks before school commenced. Since the SFO makes use of the same facilities the children had time to get familiar with the school building

and outdoor area before school commenced. Jonathan shared with me what it was like to attend SFO in the beginning: *It is just like..It is more like day care! Only that you are at school, but then you get to play.. even inside.*

On the first day of school all the Year 1 students came with their parents. There was a speech from the principal welcoming them to the school. All the children were called by name and had to greet their teacher, and then they walked to their classroom. Jamie remembered the first day: *At school they came and watched us..it makes my shy. Like at the beginning of a birthday party..then I am shy..not on my birthday party..but when I go to others then I become shy.* Isabel found it hard to separate from her dad: *I think it was OK to start school but in the beginning my dad had to..I only wanted to be with my dad.*

I asked Camilla about her initial thoughts about starting school, and her answer was: *I was dreading it..because I didn't know that many people.* I asked her how it was now, after nearly two months and she had a more positive view: *I have been here a while now and I have gotten more friends!* The children were able to express that there had been a social process from the beginning of the school year; the major different was that they knew the place and knew people better.

5.11 Looking back at day care life

I asked the children to compare life in day care with life at school. The themes that often came up were the structure of the day, food and free playtime. Johanna explains her day care days:

We got lunch in the day care, breakfast, lunch and snack, she continues: When we came to the day care (in the morning) we got porridge..then we should play..then we had a circle time..then we washed our hands..then eat..then rest.. then we should go outside for one hour..then it was afternoon snack..sandwich sometimes..or crisp bread, or hot food.. and then we played till they picked us up. (Interview 2011, 1st Session, Group 3)

Other children talked about this structure emphasizing meals and resting time. Lovina said it simple: *At school its homework..but in day care we played.* It is an illustration that there were more free play in day care but not that school is absent of free play On Day 7 Elizabeth wrote 'school' on the chalkboard and asked the children to name things the associated with school, they said: To make bead-art, do homework, to join in on play, to eat SFO food, play with skipping rope, to climb on the monkey bars. Elizabeth had to give them hints in order to get 'learning activities'. Many of the children said 'homework' as the major difference between the institutions. When asked about the difference the

children often said *I think it was better...* so comparison meant rating to them. Jamie gives a more nuanced answer: *Day care was better..because at school you have to do homework..but it is good to be at school cause we learn more than we did in day care.* Jamie associates 'homework' with 'learning' and does not associate day care with learning, at least not in the same way as in school. Some of the children expressed that they enjoyed homework and found it easy, like Rebecca: *I like homework..I just do like this dadadadadei* (pretending to write).

Isabel expressed having more freedom in day care: *Day care was better cause there you could decide more yourself...at school you need to listen all the time..* [So in day care you got to decide more your self?] *Yeah..there I could decide myself when I wanted to go inside.* Anna has a similar experience: *That we could be outside for as long as we wanted, and sometimes someone didn't want to be outside.* At school the classroom was associated with learning and the schoolyard with play, but in day care play happened inside and outside. From what the children express it seems like they had more agency in day care, that they could decide where to play and had longer free play sessions. The children often expressed disappointment when they had to go inside after the break, the procedure of getting dressed often took a long time there was barely enough time to start a game before it was time to go back in.

As the children move to school there is less adult contact, in day care there is one adult per 6 children and at school there was one adult for 16 children. Anna mentioned this: *In the day care the adults decide more... Maria (teacher) got angry with them when they did something they were not aloud to do..That is why you always tell her..cause she is the strictest..and the most kind when she is not strict.* Anna expressed both advantages and disadvantages with the stronger adult control in day care; the teachers controlled them more but it also provided safety.

Day care was also talked about as an immature stage. On Day 6 Sebastian kept coming over to get Elizabeth's attention as she was helping Simon. In frustration, Simon uttered: *Why are you looking in my exercise book all the time?* He added: *Has he not learnt to sit on his seat in day care?* The sense that 'we are bigger now' was strong. The teacher also sometimes said: *We stopped doing that in day care.* They also mentioned resting time as something that happened in the past, a stage they have now grown out of.

The children spoke of memories connected to friends and play, Tommy shared: *Day care was better, because there we had a skating hall and we were aloud to bring our*

skateboard and I have a skateboard.. and I had lots of buddies that were skating. Elise missed the monkey bars she had in day care and Isabel missed her friends: It was fun in day care..just that my two best friends..they attend a different school..but we are in a ballet dance group together. When asked about what they like about school they mentioned play related things: I like to play with my sponsors, jump rope, play soccer, hang up-side-down from the monkey bars and play. Their memories from both day care and school reflects children's agency, that they value freedom of choice. The children indicate that play and friends are important factors in their everyday lives.

5.12 Looking back: Evaluating the process

I asked Jamie and Johanna about their two and a half month long journey as school children, and if anything had changed from the beginning. Johanna shared: *In the beginning I was shy..but now I know people more and stuff. 'To know people' seemed to be an important factor for feeling comfortable at school. Jamie added that it took time to get used to a new place: When you have been going to school for a while..first time I came here I was shy.. but now we have been her for a while and than it can be.. pretty nice..when you have been there for a while. Anna put the process of 'finding your place' into words: (In the beginning) For example I didn't know where my seat were..and I didn't know what group I was in.. and than you get new friends..I got new friends [How did that happened?] I played with them a lot and than we became great friends. Lovina also though school was pretty nice at that point: Its good..when I am inside..or in the break..and I like to do homework..I like to eat there. Julia also 'got to know more people': I have more friends now than I used to have..the first day I only knew the people I knew, and Isabel.*

5.13 Conclusion

To conclude we can say that children were able to reflect around how they experienced starting school. The children reflected around the structure of both the day care and school institutions. When first asked they explained the difference between day care and school as 'play' and 'homework'. However the children did associate school with play also. Valuable relationships and play experiences were important for their school life, and dear memories of day care life. Some aspects, such as areas to play and amount of free play, the children expressed having more agency in day care. But when it came to

adult control in day care, an advantage with this was that the adult could intervene faster in conflict situations.

6 Constructing social rules and friendships

6.1 Introduction

What are the social understandings shared by the children that effect how they develop social interaction and play? How do they evaluate others behavior? This chapter will be about the children and the adults' co-construction of the social rules at school; how the children interpret and implement the social rules in their interaction. I will also look at how the children construct friendships; discussing topics like what is a friend, what are friendly and unfriendly behavior and the purpose and features of friendships.

6.2 Constructing social rules

In this section I would like to describe the social rules that Elizabeth taught the children and also how the children worked with and around these rules in their social interaction. The social rules were often taught and repeated in the listening corner.

The way I see it the rules functioned as tools for the children in their interaction. The rules were used as advocacy when children felt they were treated unfairly, since they could defend themselves by reminding their peers about the rules. The rules were influential because the children were mutually dependent on them.

6.3 The YES rule

A main rule was the YES-rule: Everyone should be able to join in play, when someone asks to join, one should always say yes. Elizabeth also added another aspect to the rule: If you said yes to let someone play you cannot simply run away, a yes is a yes. This rule does challenge Corsaro's definition of friendship: "Producing shared activity together in a specific area, and protecting that play from intrusions of others" (Corsaro, 1997:127). Children tend to define who is in and who is out as a way of protecting the shared activity. However the children in this study were all in a new environment and they valued the social procedure of 'asking if you can join' and that 'everyone should be allowed to join'. The children were also older and therefore they might have been more attentive to the social rules than in day care. Jonathan and Rebecca talk about how they implement this rule in their everyday lives:

Jonathan: And if someone says no (when you ask if you can join) we simply say: Have you forgotten the YES- rule?

Rebecca: They have to say yes if you want to join the play.. If someone are best friends and they play together all the time they don't want to play with anyone else

Jonathan: *That is mean! Everyone should be allowed to join* (Interview, 1st session, Group 4)

Rebecca and Jonathan expressed that they value this rule and that it serves their personal interests. They also show that the rule is not followed all the time. Rebecca reflected about the issue of best friend relationships that they often violated the rule. The children were drawn between the dilemmas of at times, conflicting personal and communal interest. On one side they valued the rule because it served their personal rights and they wanted to be perceived as including. If they excluded people repeatedly they might lose goodwill and be excluded themselves on another occasion. Camilla viewed breaking the YES-rule as 'unfriendly behavior': *If someone is asking nicely: Can I join? and they say: NO strictly*. Other examples of unfriendly behavior were hitting, biting and kicking, so excluding someone from play in an explicit way was serious unfriendly behavior according to Camilla.

On the other hand, they also found themselves in situations where they wanted to protect their play against intruders. The wish to have stability, to have a best friend, was strong, especially among the girls. This dilemma caused the children to violate the rule implicitly rather than explicitly, by 'working around the rules'. Corsaro calls this process of reconstructing the social norms an 'under life', defined as: "A set of behaviors or activities that contradict, challenge, or violate the official norms or rules of a specific social organization" (Corsaro, 1997:134).

On Day 2 Rebecca, Anna, and another girl were playing in the sand, and Johanna came over, asking: *Can I join?* The girls looked down and did not answer her question, and after a few seconds Johanna walked away. The girls were engaged in sharing the sand activity and saw Johanna as the intruder so the shared activity (communal interest) was valued more highly than the social rule (Johanna's individual interest). Corsaro gives an explanation for why children do this:

"By protecting their initial space, children come to realize that they can manage their own activities. In negotiating who is in and who is out, who is one of them and who is not, children begin to grasp their developing social identities" (Corsaro, 1997:127).

On Day 3 I observed a situation with three different strategies for working around the YES rule: Johanna, Anna and Elise were on the large swing. Alice asked if she could join, no one stopped the swing to let her on, eventually she walked away. Another girl asked to join and Elise jumped of, saying: *I want to play kitten*. The two other girls also jumped of the swing. Two girls and Rebecca stayed on the swing. They discussed the rules and one girl stated: *There is a yes rule*. Rebecca argued: *But not if there are already four on the swing*. In this short sequence there were three strategies: 1) Ignoring the request 2) Leaving the play and 3) Modify the rule using a logic argument.

The third strategy was also used when Jamie asked a boy if he wanted to play soccer with him on Day 2. The boys answered: *I don't know*. Jamie replied: *You have to say yes it is the YES rule*. The boy argued: *No, you have to say yes if someone asks if they can join the play, but I don't have to play soccer if I don't want to*. Another thing we see here is Jamie trying to use the rule for own personal interest, which was typical, that the children used the rule to control the play. We can say that the children use their agency when they actively participate in play, applying or violating the rules. There is a personal gain that can seem more important than following the rule because 'the teacher said so' (Qvortrup, 2002:73).

Another strategy is to claim that the play is for boys or girls only. On Day 9 in the park many of the boys gathered in the play house and a girl tried but she was denied entrance. The boys proclaimed: *Get out, this is a boys party..only boys are allowed!* The girls also used this strategy on day 20 during the 'spy play'. The girls were balancing on a concrete cylinder and a boy came and joined them but the girls protested: *You can't join us! It's only for girls! You have to go*, and the boy eventually left.

6.4 The STOP Rule

The STOP Rule states that if someone is doing something to you that you don't like you should say STOP and everyone should respect this and stop. The rule was effective because it remained the children of their agency: that you have control over your own body and you do not have to accept all the things that people do to you. You have the right to withdraw from play if it crosses your personal boundaries.

I will show later that the play often progressed in a direction the children did not like. For

example wrestling, a child might be OK at the start of the play, but as it progresses to be rougher in nature, he or she may be uncomfortable. My observations show that this rule was harder to implement because the children pushed each other's boundaries in up-heated situations. Simon mentioned this rule and added that one needs adult support in these situations. He stated: *One should not be mean, first you say STOP and then you should tell an adult.* The child often says STOP after their personal boundaries are crossed after they are already hurt and therefore they would seek the help of an adult. However, the also children learn each other's boundaries so that next time they know how far they can go, and how much the person can take.

6.5 The flexibility rule

Elizabeth explained:

You cannot play only what you want all the time: one has to try new things. Best friends cannot decide what the other one should do. If one wants to do different things, one should either: Agree to do one thing first and then the other or simply do different things.

On Day 14 when Isabel and Julia are going through this issue, Elizabeth explains to everyone: *Two people might be friends and play together a lot. And then one gets to know someone else, and then maybe the other one gets to know someone else. It can be a good idea to know more people. Your heart has room for many friends at the same time. Imagine if one gets tonsillitis (halsbetennelse) and has to stay home for a while, it might be very sad for the other.*

If one plays with another friend that does not mean that she/he is not friends with the other.
(FN 2012, Day 14)

Here, we see the peer dynamic of sharing the control in a relationship. It is a constantly negotiated dynamic to protect own personal interest in a relationship (Corsaro, 1997). It can be hard to experience your stable play partner suddenly leaving you for someone else or ignoring. Elizabeth encouraged the children, saying that they are better off to have a number of peers to choose from, compared to 'laying all the eggs in one basket'. This rule is in line with Mouritsen's theory that play is something that you practice to become good at, that you have to be so good that you can improvise (Mouritsen, 2002). A child that is good at playing might find it easier to switch between play partners.

Elizabeth usually introduced social rules when situations needing to be addressed occurred. She would often tell stories from her own childhood to illustrate her point. The children paid great attention to her stories and it was a way of sharing experience rather than giving the children 'black and white' rules.

Elizabeth also had rules for the learning aspect of school, such as: *Everyone has to try, you can't say: 'I don't want to', or 'that's boring', everyone has to practice and than you will make it.* When asked how you make friends Jamie and Lovina used this same strategy for friends making as for schoolwork. Lovina explained: *One should play with them and never give up..and do you homework.* Jamie agrees: *One should never give up finding a friend.. one should say: Can I join? To someone you don't know.. and then you get to know one another...after playing for a while.*

The children did valued the social rules that they were given and they understood the importance of these rules for making school a pleasant place to be. The children actively used the rules in their daily lives. At times, the children had to chose between conflicting values: The wish to protect their play from intruders and the wish to be follow the social rules of including people. The children who had established closer connections would exclude other children from their play. In the next section I will present what the children told me about friends in the interviews.

6.6 Constructing friendship

I spent some time talking with the children about friendship, an overall agreement was: 'Friends are people who play together a lot'. This perception of friendship reflects well William Corsaro's definition of friends as: "A cohort or group of children who spend time together on an everyday basis" (Corsaro, 1997:95). Corsaro continues by saying that through experience in initial peer cultures his perception of friendship has changed from seeing friendship as a label that is applied to a specific child to something involving shared activity (Corsaro, 1997:127). From what the children explain it can seem as if friends are people who experience what Randi D. Nilsen defines as 'we-ness': the notion that 'we are together' in sharing play and activities, not predicting that it has to be a long lasting friendship but that the 'we-ness' is situational and momentary. This concept reflects well the developing play culture that I observed among the children the first period of their school experience, especially how the children expressed their wish to 'be together' in contrast to the less preferred state: 'being alone'.

6.6.1 Naming their friends

One of the first things that happened in the 1st session of the group interviews was that

the children wanted to list their friends. Many listed many friends and it seemed like it was highly valued to have many. The participants would list children from their day care most of the time, explaining that their friends were attending different schools. This indicates that the children also had a stable concept of friendship, as close and longer lasting relationships. It would have been interesting to ask the children the same question at the end of the school year and see if they still recalled the friends from day care or if they mostly named friends from school.

The children also named friends they had at school either in the small group or other Year 1 students. The boys often named friends from other groups. Since there were only five boys in the group, and they often played soccer and other activities outside and they established networks early. Some also mentioned siblings, imaginary friends and adults. Johanna and Elise shared that they went to the same day care but in different departments, so they only became friends after starting school. The children shared that they see their old day care friends less but many of them stayed in contact with their old friends by visiting them, going for cabin trips, writing letters, having reunions in day care or going to the same after school activities.

6.7 Making friends

6.7.1 Sharing space

We discussed how you make friends, in response to which Jonathan stated: *In the first place..is that you first meet each other.* The first step of becoming friends is being at the same place at the same time for a certain amount of time. Elise illustrates this: *Once I had a best friend..it was at acrobatics (turn) we were playing together in the..climbing room. And we got to know each other for two days..her name was Olivia..we are not best friends anymore..because we forgot each other and stuff.* Because they didn't meet they 'forgot' each other and the relationship ceased to exist. It is therefore fair to say that friendship involves sharing space. In situations where the children do not meet daily or weekly. The parents can either limit or promote the children's agency in establishing friendships. Since the children are dependent on the parents to arrange meetings for them. William Corsaro writes about the network of peer cultures in organized settings:

“In Western societies children are moving into organized child-care and educational settings at earlier ages. Given the amount of time that young children normally spend in these settings and the intensity of interaction, they often serve as a hub in an interlocking network of peer settings or localities. It is through intensive, everyday interaction in this hub that the first local peer culture develops and flourishes” (Corsaro, 1997:117-118).

6.7.2 Sharing interests

But shared space is not the factor necessary for peer relations to be established. Camilla and Anna lived in the same house, and children lived in close to each other but that did not necessarily mean that they played together very much at school. Camilla and Alice shared day care experience but they did not play together as much as I thought initially. An important dynamic of friendship was to share interests; Tommy and Simon brought this up in an interview:

Tommy: *We are both cool..he is kind..he is though..both are missing a tooth..we are cousins.*

Simon: *I think Tommy is a real good friend..he is cool..and we both sag..and we go to the same soccer..and we went to the same day care..and we are both missing a tooth.*

Tommy: *We go to the same soccer practice..and the same hip hop.*

Simon: *And we go to the same club..hockey* (Interview 2011, 2nd Session, Group 3)

Tommy and Simon share a family bond and they have a common history of attending the same day care. They share interests: soccer, hip-hop and hockey. They also share the same perception about what is cool, as they prefer the same clothing style. Having shared their childhood to this degree is facilitating a close relationship but it can also cause the boys to seek their own individuality. As Corsaro explains there are an important aspect of friendship is to share control (Corsaro, 1997:118). The control issue was constantly negotiated between Tommy and Simon, especially when Tommy objected Simon's suggestions or withdrew support. Rebecca gives expression to this phenomenon when asked what she thought about school. She answered: *I think it is good.. it is most fun when Cecilia and I play together and then..when I get to decide then I think its good!* She enjoys playing with Cecilia and to share and activity or a play is even better when she gets to decide what they should do, demonstrating the control aspect.

According to the children the process of becoming friends involved asking if you could play with someone or a group. Camilla explains how she does this: *I just look around and I see if there is anyone playing something fun, and then I asked them.* The children expressed that, after playing together for a certain amount of time, they would eventually develop friendships.

6.8 The purpose of friendships

I asked the children why it was important to make friends. Jamie explained: *You can't only know the people you have known all the time..one should also make new friends,* and Anna continued: *If everyone was friends.. and some were sick, we could have played with someone else.* The children preferred 'being together' compared to 'being alone'. Jamie shared:

It is lonely if one never finds friends..to only have your younger brother, dad and mum..that can be lonesome.. the brother will be in day care and the others working..then it is lonesome for him..And when (brothers name) comes it is still lonesome to only have one friend.
(Interview 2011, 1st session, group 3)

This gives some insight to the transition it must be to go from being oldest in the day care and 'know everyone' to starting at school and not have the same network anymore.

I asked the children if it was hard to make friends, Johanna talks about her experience: *I think it was easy..but not so easy. I had some friends from day care and those were Jason and Elise, they started at my school but they were the only ones at this school, the rest started at a different school.* I talked with Cecilia during the 2nd interview session about what it was like to start school and who she had more friends now than in the beginning and how that happened. She spoke very positive about her experience:

I played with them and suddenly they come more and more (to play with her)
(Interview 2011, 1st session, group 1)

Cecilia spoke of making friends almost like as a play in itself. She illustrates well Mouritsen's theory that play is something you practice by playing, by taking part, he writes: "You have to be so good that you can improvise (...) the ability to improvise, capturing the moment, takes practice. It is not just divine inspiration but practiced spontaneity" (Mouritsen, 2002:23-24).

The children had many ideas about the purpose of friendship, Simon shared: *A friend is a buddy you can bring wherever you go. [Why do you need a friend?] Because he can be with you when you need him, if you are injured.* Jonathan agrees: *A friend is one you can play with.. and when one is sad he comforts you.* Anna said: *Because it makes us happy..if we do not have anyone to play with..for example if I go home and she has no friends left she had to meet new friends that she could play with..so that she did not have to be sad.* A friend can substitute for siblings, according to Camilla: *A friend, if you are going somewhere, and you do not have siblings, than it is nice to have someone to play with.* The children valued being together and conclude that most activities are more meaningful (and fun) when they are shared.

6.9 Friendly and unfriendly behavior

The children had a perception of friendly behavior that encouraged friendship. Julia explains: *One should be happy and kind so that people want to be friends with you,* Elise adds: *To be funny.. and ask them if they want to be best friends.* Friends were people that treated each other in a certain way: *Someone who is kind to each other and never mean,* and: *You love one another.* When asked about unfriendly behavior, the children had a long list: *To pinch, bite and other nasty things or to kick.* Jamie stated: *If one is rude, if he wants to be in the group but he pushes people, hitting or kicking then they don't want him in the group.* Anna describes unfriendly behavior in this section:

Anna: But I am not best friends with one called Henry..because.. one time he kicked me..then we did not want him to go there anymore.. and sometimes he could not sit and eat there..because we did not like to sit with him..because when I sat with him, he kicked..and then he did something rude: he screamed in my ear” (Interview 2011, 1st session, Group 2)

She effectively illustrates the effect unfriendly behavior can have in peer interaction. Henry's behavior caused Anna to avoid him or exclude him from play. The behavior the children mention is physically harmful, behavior that does not occur on a daily basis, Camilla also mentioned socially bad behavior: *If someone is asking nicely: Can I join? and they go: NO! Strictly,* Elise adds: *To run away from someone.* To say yes to someone to let them join the play and then run away afterwards are considered unfriendly behavior according to the children. Elise concludes: *If they are mean to others then they will not*

make friends, Johanna argues: *Then they don't want friends*. To lose 'goodwill' from their peers in this way can lead to exclusion like it did for Henry. The wish to not be perceived as unfriendly might motivate the children to be at their best behavior as long as they were able to.

6.10 Conflict

I was interested in their thoughts about the role of conflict in friendships. I asked if they remembered having any arguments. Cecilia said: *Yeah with Lilly (from daycare) she was bossing me around all the time.. but she stopped*” Camilla shared a similar thing: *Louise is always so strict with me*. Julia remembered: *I used to argue with Liz*. Rebecca shows that the need for control can cause conflict in relationships:

I had arguments with someone in day care, her name is Jill and we argued.. I wanted a sledge and she wanted the same sledge.. And then Jill wanted to go somewhere else and I just (demonstrating, folding her arms on her chest and proudly lifting her head, eyes closed) she continues: *But then I walked over to her said: OK.. You can have the sledge! And then we shared*.

(Interview 2011, 1st session, group 4)

The conflict ended by the girls making a compromise. It seems like Rebecca valued 'playing with' Jill more than having the sledge 'all by her self', so she made the effort to continue the play. This is more clear when there are only two playing, if it was a group playing then Rebecca could have continued the play with the rest of the group. Simon and Tommy told me about an argument they had the day before:

Simon: *I had an argument with Tommy, we are playing soccer, and he is not passing the ball, I tell him to pass the ball, he tells me to shut up, and then he starts clawing my neck (demonstrating) it felt uncomfortable, like I need to tell an adult.. or maybe a buddy comes over and say: Should I tell an adult, than I say: yes*.

(Interview 2011, 1st session, group 1)

Tommy tells his version: *Yesterday it was like..an accident, I had some sharp claws, my mum.. Would you like to feel (clawing me) my mum never cuts my fingernails..almost never.. and then I did like this you know (demonstrating that he clawed) and Simon got a small scar.. I did that yesterday*.

He continues to reflect on this when he talked about unfriendly behavior

Tommy: *The most mean you can do here at school is to bite, pinch, and kick, kick someone's ass, kick someone's dick, and pull someone's hair out..and what I did to Simon..claw*

(Interview 2011, 1st session, group 2)

These two versions of the episode give us a picture of what happened. Tommy was open about the accident he caused but he also explained what happened, he did not intend to cause harm, but his nails were sharp, because his mum didn't cut them. Accidents do

happen in play, disagreements and negotiations are features of child culture.

Jonathan reflected on what one can do to solve conflicts: *If you do something good to them you might become friends again..one way we can be friends again is..that when we are unfriends we meet each other and than you say.. It's OK.* A conflict can be resolved and the play can continue if both meet and say OK. The children often turned to an adult to sort things out, which was helpful for them because both could share their version, say sorry and agree to end the conflict.

Thomas Rizzo argues that conflict has an important function in peer cultures:

“Such disputes not only helped the children obtain a better understanding of what they could expect from each other as friends, but also brought about intra- personal reflection, resulting in the children’s development of unique insight into their own actions and roles as friends (Rizzo, In: Corsaro, 1997:149).

Conflicts appeared to be common in the school, mostly as discussions and negotiations, and especially connected to the boys playing soccer. The children recalled conflicts but most of them were from day care. When speaking about arguments Tommy stated that it was OK to argue, and to discuss. It seemed like a close relationship could handle more arguments than a distant relationship, this is most likely because stable friends had experienced more arguments. In newer relationships children might be more conforming in order to keep the 'we-ness' and avoid conflict. I will elaborate more on conflict when I describe the girls' and boys' play culture in the next chapter.

6.11 Conclusion

The social rules taught by the teachers were interpreted and applied in the children's interaction. Sometimes the children were drawn between the wish to protect the play from intruders and wanting to follow the rule of letting people join the play. It seemed like best friends were more likely to break the YES rule than more casual peer relationships. The STOP rule reminded the children of their agency, the effect of withdrawing from a play might have long-term effects as the children learn each other’s boundaries. The children would often involve the adults in these situations for extra

support.

The children had a clear view of behavior that they appreciated in their peer-group: kindness, solidarity, cheerfulness and shared interests. Explicit unfriendly behavior were not wanted in the group, and unfriendly people were perceived as 'not wanting friends' and could lead to exclusion.

7 Play culture

7.1 Introduction

The focus of this chapter is the culture that the children produced within their own networks (Mouritsen, 2002). I have decided to call it 'play culture' because much of the data are collected from in play situations and the children called their activities 'play'. Like Mouritsen, I view play as an expression of the life the children live, influenced by the social context, it is organized and can be lead by leaders, it can be successful or not. The purpose is social interaction: to be together. Play is not idyllic all the time; it can involve conflicts and tension. It can lead to bullying, battle of prestige and hierarchy. (Mouritsen, 1998) The aim is to present play as a multi faceted social interaction between children.

The children share child culture, with their group, their school and their generation but there are group variations (Nilsen, 1990) The variations are visible in their play-activities I will first focus on boys' and girls' interaction; the situations described will both be from free play and adult controlled activities. Barrie Thorne argues that the occasions were boys and girls play together are as theoretically important and socially significant as when they are apart” (Thorne, 1990). The second and third part of chapter 7 will be about the boys and girls separate play culture.

7.2 Anna's birthday party

We can question the constructed 'gap' between boys and girls world, the differences should not be exaggerated nor ignored, neither should their shared culture. To give an example of the gender aspect of the children's interaction there is an example from Anna's birthday:

Anna tells me: *In one week it is my birthday.*

[That is wonderful]

Anna: *I will celebrate it at the climbing place. They have a guestroom, and they will put up a picture of me in the ball-room.*

[Will anyone from our group come?]

Anna: *The whole group, both boys and girls!*

Tommy is listening to the conversation, he is a bit worried when he hears his name.

He asks Anna: *Is Simon going? Is it not an all girls birthday party?*

Anna assures him that the whole group is invited.

(FN 2011, Day 28)

Anna is crossing the constructed border when she includes the boys. Tommy is insecure because he is not sure if he wants to cross the border and go to a girl's birthday party. The previous birthday parties were either girls or boys. He depends on Simon's approval before he can accept the invitation. Anna illustrates the shared culture: it is a birthday party, something that boys and girls celebrate, the people invited are all in one group, and it is at a climbing place so she assumes that it is an activity that both boys and girls will like. Anna was best friends with a boy in day care so crossing this line was easier for her even if it deviated from the norm. I asked Anna who she preferred playing with boys or girls and she answered:

Anna: It is better to play with boys and girls..cause sometimes one play with boys and sometimes girls..but I play mostly with girls. [Why?]

Anna: Cause those boys are so cool..one time I was here and there were sitting some boys here and they looked cool..and what they did looked fun.

(Interview 2011, 1st session, Group 2)

Anna express that she likes to play with both girls and boys but she play mostly with girls. When she described her relationship to 'unfriendly' Henry in chapter 6 we see that it is not gender that is the determining factor, but rather if she perceives them as friendly or not, and if what they are doing looks fun. Most of the children would probably relate more to Jonathan's reflection on why he plays mostly with boys: *Boys.. because they are girls and I am a boy..girls play mostly with girls..I do not see the girls that often.* During the breaks boys and girls often played separately most of the time: the boys occupied the soccer field, this phenomenon confirmed in many studies (Thorne, 1993). The girls played everywhere else. In the beginning I found it hard to follow the girls as they constantly moved all over the school yard. I could sit and observe the boys for a whole break playing soccer but the girls would not stick to one location. Most areas girls and boys occupied together: in the sandpit, the swing, the monkey bars, the slide, and the grass and asphalt areas.

7.3 Boys and girls interaction

I have divided the interaction into two overlapping spheres to illustrate that the interaction between boys and girls were different outside and inside. Only a part of the boys and girls interaction can be seen as play I have therefore categorized their

interaction in the activities that situated the interaction. My observations confirm Thorne's theory that the context determines the cross-gender interaction. Indoors, in classrooms and hallways, where children do the same activities, boys and girls were more likely to interact because there is more adult control in these spheres (Thorne, 1993).

7.4 Inside the classroom

In the classroom, the seating groups were organized with one boy on each group, in this way the boys had to interact with the girls. Elizabeth explained that she did this because if she placed the boys 2+2+1 it would not be fair to the single boy.

The group changed the seating groups one time during the fieldwork period and the second time it was the same system with one boy and three to four girls. Thorne explains why children interact more across gender when under adult authority: "In addition to reducing the treat of teasing, the presence of adults alter the dynamics of power. Girls and boys, who share the subordinate position of being children, sometimes draw together to resist or maneuver around adult authority" (Thorne, 1993:56)

On Day 5 Simon teased Tommy: *You are surrounded with girls*, Tommy pointed at Jamie: *Him too!* The seating arrangement facilitated interaction between boys and girls because they had to cooperate and ask each other for help. I should also say that I never heard anyone tease someone about being a 'girly boy' or a 'boyish girl'. Thorne's study showed this attitude; I think different time and different culture might be an explanation for why it did not occur in my study. However, not many children did play in groups of the opposite gender. I don't know whether it will occur more in the future. The social understandings might change and the children that cross the boundaries, playing mostly in opposite gender groups might be teased for it, or it is more accepted to play in cross-gender groups among these children, only further studied could tell us more about this.

7.4.1 Homework

The children would help each other; the greatest example of this is Camilla helping Alice during the first weeks of school. Even though they did not play together that often, Alice found support in Camilla from the start. In the beginning Alice could not write her name, so Camilla helped her with that as well as drawing and coloring. Camilla was OK with

being a substitute teacher most of the time. I think Alice found it easier to ask Camilla for help than Elizabeth because she was more accessible, since Elizabeth had to help all the children, and Alice knew Camilla from day care. I constantly heard Alice and Sebastian asking Camilla: *What are we doing?* And Camilla instructed them again and again. The children often encouraged each other: here is an example from Day 22:

Camilla and Simon are drawing from the outdoor school. The teacher encourages Simon saying that he is a good drawer. He is very happy to hear that. Simon brags about Camilla's drawing: *Your squirrel is very nice.*

Simon is drawing in his 'nature diary'; he draws a tree with the trunk, the branches and the leaves (doodles) Camilla asks him: *Why are you doing like that* (doodles) Simon answer: *Because I like to draw like this*, Camilla responds: *I don't like to draw like that but I like when others do it.* (FN 2011, Day 22)

In these situation gender is not a factor, they are both drawing and interacting around this activity. Here is another example where the children help each other while solving crosswords:

Tommy and Isabel are solving a crossword. Isabel is a head of Tommy and she shows him her sheet.

Jamie, Johanna and Lovina are also working on crosswords, they are blocking the view by putting up their pencil case. Lovina shows her crossword sheet to Elizabeth saying: *Johanna is helping me!*

Camilla shows Simon how to write an 'e'.

Sebastian and Jamie meet on the floor; they have their sheets on the same chair. Jamie shows Sebastian every word he should write and spells the words for him. Tommy comes over too. Sebastian finishes the crossword, Jamie cheers: *Well done, Sebastian!*

Tommy says: *Come over and help me now* (Jamie goes over to his desk and finds his sheet). Tommy shows the words that he needs help with. Sebastian finds a new sheet.

Jamie goes over to Sebastian and asks: *Is it 'i'?*

(Jamie shows his sheet).

(FN 2011, Day 29)

Tommy first cooperates with Isabel but when he gets the choice as Jamie offers to help he prefers him. This confirms the overall findings from school research that when children are given the opportunity to choose companions same age girls choose girls and boys choose boys (Thorne, 1993:46). On Day 17 in the listening corner Jamie admitted that he also appreciated help sometimes:

Rachel (substitute teacher) gives the task to find a word that starts with the same sound as

in their name. Many answer: *I don't know*, when it is their turn. Cecilia answers: *Cell phone*, Alice answer: *I don't know*, Simon helps her by suggesting: *angel*.
Jamie answer: *I don't know*,
Tommy is surprised: *But you are so good!*
Jamie explains with a quiet voice: *I am good at adding and subtracting, but I wished you all would help me with this.* (FN 2011, Day 17)

I think that having a substitute teacher made the children feel less secure. Normally, almost all would suggest something but this time many said they did not know. This was also not a task they were given previously. It seemed like the children knew who normally would need extra help and were quick to suggest words. Tommy was surprised when Jamie did not know the answer.

Jamie's reflection at the end sums up an aspect of the children's experience well. The notion that it is 'better together' is true for the children's experience of the transition to school. To play with someone is better than playing alone, to solve a task or experiencing something together is better than doing it alone.

In the interviews Simon said that a friend supports and comforts you when you're injured. Anna said it's good to have a friend because it makes us happy and you don't have to be alone. It is good to be supported by the teacher but it might be even better to be supported by a friend.

An example of that is when Jamie spoke up for Sebastian on the soccer field in the park. Some of the boys teased him for kicking poorly and being an 'easy match.' When Sebastian scored a goal Jamie said loudly: *Who said anything about kicking poorly?* Imagine the satisfaction Sebastian felt when he managed to prove them wrong, by scoring and then, when a buddy sees it and affirms him in front of everyone. Later Sebastian said to everyone: *I know where Jamie lives*, with a proud voice. It seems like the affirmation from peers ranged higher than affirmation from teachers.

7.4.2 Jigsaw puzzle

Puzzle play was another situation where boys and girls were interacting. Sometimes, if there were many children they would split up and work on different puzzles. On Day 8 Simon asked Anna to work on a different puzzle because: *this puzzle is a guy thing* (guttegreier). The activity was easy to join like on Day 9 Simon came over to a group

saying: *I'm in, I'm in! I'm in on puzzling!* (Puts his arms around the neighbors shoulder)
Can I have a piece?

It seemed that the group united when they had to solve a challenging task. There was a 100-piece dog puzzle that the children used days to finish, since they could only puzzle when they had finished their work. Jamie took a leader's role in this situation and was very intent on collaboration. The children were very inspired, and whenever someone could place a new piece they all, cheered. On Day 29 about 10 children were standing around the teacher's desk to place the last pieces and they all cheered, loudly when it was completed. The groups would often display we-ness in these situations as they celebrated progress, they would say things like: *Yes! Look I found this one..Yes! **We** made it!*

7.4.3 Hangman

Hangman was another activity where the whole group worked together as a team to make sure that they guessed all the letters in the word before the man was hanged. Elizabeth introduced this game early in the period and the children wanted to play during every lunch break. The children who could read were very important for the team: everyone would guess letters but when there were just a few letters left the readers could figure out the word and suggest the last letters. Jamie and Camilla were the best readers in the class. Jamie was often praised for his important role.

Once, he guessed the last letter two times and Tommy saluted him: *You saved us!* On Day 8 there was one letter left in 'school break' (Skolefri). Simon said: *Jamie, you have to read it!* Camilla read it and guessed the last letter. After that Jamie guessed the 2nd last letter in 'national soccer game' (fotball landskamp). To celebrate Simon and Tommy ran over to Jamie and hugged him. Camilla guessed the last letter. On Day 29 Jamie suggested the last letter correctly and got so excited. He left his seat, ran and landed on his knees, sliding on the floor and lifted his hands (ritual from soccer) while Tommy ran after him. Neither the girls nor the boys celebrated Camilla's achievements in the same way. It was mostly Tommy and Simon who did the praising, and imitating the soccer praising routines. Neither Camilla nor the girls were apart of the soccer culture; it might be the reason for why she was not praised in this way. Simon did acknowledge Camilla's skills on other occasions though, saying things like: *Camilla you are so much smarter than me!* Maybe that was easier to say to a girl, because girls are often spoken of as 'clever'.

When Jamie was away on holiday, Tommy mentioned asked a few times: *When does Jamie come back? When he comes back we will solve hangman in a 'blink of an eye'* (på et blunk). When Jamie returned on Day 17, Tommy told Jamie: *When we are eating we will play hangman and you will solve it in a second!* The children did really well at Hangman and Elizabeth had to come up with harder words. On Day 16, she said: *You solved that one too easy; I'm going to find a word so difficult that you will never guess it!* Tommy responded: *We can do anything!* (Vi kan klare alt vi). In this activity the group had to work together as a team, they loved it, every day they asked if they could play hangman.

7.5 Outside in the schoolyard

Outside where children have more autonomy deciding their own activities and play groups the children played more in separate girls and boys group, but they also interacted a cross the genders sometimes. Thorne argues that when the children have constructed sharp gender boundaries only a few attempt to cross (Thorne, 1993). An example of this is the soccer field: it was only the boys who played soccer and the girls could watch. Among the older children I occasionally saw a few girls playing but the majority was boys.

7.5.1 Kiss- chasing

From the beginning 'boys against girls' or 'girls chasing the boys' appeared to be an established concept. Randi D. Nilsen has done research on this phenomenon in day care settings, she calls it: 'kiss-chasing'. The play follows the structure of 'catch and run' but has boys and girls on separate teams. The play is categorized by excitement and it might be this element of 'danger', that one might be kissed, and the high speed, that attracts the boys to join. Nilsen describes that the chasing interests comes and goes in waves (Nilsen, unpublished).

Some girls told me that the chasing started in SFO before school commenced. While watching soccer on Day 4, two girls explained: *We cheer for Simon* [Do you like him?] *No we just cheer for him..on an outing we chased him and caught him and sat on top of*

him, first me and than all the girls. On Day 5 Simon were chased by six girls, the whole break.

He takes control over the play as he runs over to the Amfi (stairs made of wood, facing a platform with a roof in the corner of the school yard).

Simon instructs all the girls to stand in a line, he says that he will choose one girl who will kiss him. He chooses some girls but they do not want to.

Then he chooses Lovina but she refuses, and he chases after her. There is a lot of screaming, Simon tries to maintain the control, shouting: *Sit down!* A girl shouts: *Sit down and he will choose a girl, the one he likes the most.* Suddenly he runs and the girls chase after him. (FN 2011, The Amfi, Day 5)

It was the girls from the other groups that were the most active in chasing Simon in the beginning. But the girls in the group joined the play on Day 5, in the dressing room: Cecilia got her lip balm from the classroom, and asked Lovina: *Can we kiss the boys with lip balm?* I saw them chasing Simon that break. On Day 13, in the park it had turned into 'the girls against the boys' as they were chasing each other as groups of boys and girls. It might be Simon that first started this play and the other boys joined in after a while. The play progressed into a rough play and at some point someone got offended, the teachers got involved, and the children were not allowed to play chasing more that day.

7.5.2 The 'daddy' play

The girls initiated this version of chasing. On Day 20 I observed the 'daddy' play for the first time. The girls would call the boys 'daddy' or say: *You are my daddy*, as they either hugged the boy, or clung to the boy's arm or leg. They would mostly do it to Simon but I saw them do it to Tommy, Jonathan and Jamie, but never Sebastian. Cecilia was one of the most active girls in this play. It varied depending on, how much the boys tolerated it. In the interview on Day 19, a girl said to Jonathan: *You are my daddy...It is nice to have a daddy at school.* Jonathan reacted, by saying: *I am not your daddy* (in a friendly tone). This play has an aspect of we-ness to it because of the fluid nature of the play: whom the girls choose, and how the boys responded varied from time to time. It was not a 'sweetheart-relationship' that I assume would last longer than one break or one day, the daddy we-ness could last for only short moments. Here are some examples:

Once, Cecilia clang to Jamie's foot in the wardrobe before the break, saying: *Daddy.* Jamie smiled a little embarrassed but he didn't try to stop her. On Day 22 Cecilia gave

Tommy many hugs and he did not resist. The next day however, a girl gave him a hug and said *Daddy* but he objected, saying: *No mummy!* And then she let him go. Cecilia also played this with older boys, on Day 21, she shouted: *Daddy! Daddy!* To a Year 3 boy, who joined the 'mum and children' play the previous week. Since she called him 'daddy' on Day 21 it must mean that he agreed to be the 'daddy' on an earlier occasion, but the second time he refused to join. He was busy in the sand pit and ignored her request. When Simon saw Cecilia shouting 'daddy' to the older, he came over and told me: *I am the daddy!* This indicates that he did want to be the 'daddy', at least some times. On Day 24, he was not interested, while puzzling, he pushed Cecilia away a number of times, Anna said: *Can't you see she needs her daddy?* Simon kept rejecting her, and she acted like a baby who wanted comfort, but he responded by pushing her away, and she 'cried' even more. On Day 29, he told the girls in the dressing room that they could play 'daddy' in the break. The girls cheered. I saw Rebecca, Cecilia, Isabel and Johanna close to the soccer field watching the soccer. At one point, they were out on the field and close to Simon, he turned quickly and the girls squealed and ran away. I talked to Simon, Tommy and Sebastian about the 'daddy' play in an interview and they surprised me:

[What do you think about girls..I've noticed that you tease the girls]

Sebastian: *Simon is Molly's boyfriend*

Simon: *Normally I am together with Molly*

Tommy: *They do like this: daddy..daddy!*

[What does that mean?]

Simon: *It is a bit like this (clinging to Tommy's foot) Daddy..daddy..I am putting my shoes on..and they come and cling to my leg*

[And they say daddy..do you think its fun?]

Simon: *No! They bother us sometimes*

[Sometimes?]

Simon: *We are used to the Year 7 girls..and they are used to us..but we are not so used to the Year 1 girls*

[The Year 7 girls?]

Both: *Yeah*

Simon: *They are cute*

[Do you sometimes play with girls?]

Simon: *We mostly play soccer..and Year 7 girls* (Interview 2011, 2nd Session, Group 3)

They explain the play, concluding that they think it is bothersome at times. It might explain Nilsen's observation that the 'kiss-chase' comes in waves, the play might have been interesting at first but after a couple of weeks it becomes less interesting for the boys and they reject the girls more. In the same period Simon and Tommy were seen together

with the Year 7 girls in almost every break. They were included into the older girls circle, they lend their caps to the girls and sit on their laps. In comparison, the Year 1 girls have a childish way of approaching them. And Simon says he prefers the Year 7 girls. He confirms that he is Molly's sweetheart; they were sweethearts for the last month of the fieldwork period.

The success of the 'daddy' play varied from break to break, the girls got the boys attention but they boys did not join in the play every time.

I see this play as a way for the girls to approach the boys. It was smart to start with Simon, and when he was OK with it the other boys gave in too. In this way they could move closer to the boys, and if they did not object they could move even closer. Another example comes from the listening corner around the same time. Cecilia and Anna were sitting with Simon in between them and they held hands behind his back. He was smiling and they continued then Anna let go and Cecilia had her arm around Simon, he took her hand away and she tried another time. Simon got so frustrated that he told Elizabeth, who told Cecilia to stop. Coming up with this play, the girls managed to get the boys attention and distract them from their usual activities, playing soccer and doing 'boy activities'.

7.5.3 Sweethearts

This topic also came up throughout the period. On Day 3, Simon told Rebecca: *I had lots of girlfriends in day care*. Rebecca answered: *I will never get a boyfriend at school*. Later Simon explained to everyone: *When I was in day care we had a huge table where all the girls sat and on the corner, I sat*. Elizabeth asked: *Oh, so you are used to handling the ladies?* He answered: *No*, but later he told his group: *I am used to handling the ladies!* Simon was the boy who crossed the gender boundary the most, he managed to switch from soccer, to chasing, to talking to the Year 7 girls, all in one break. Playing soccer was only interesting for a while, than he needed to switch activities.

On Day 15, in the listening corner, Camilla told Simon that there are many girls who 'fancy' him, and that she knows about a least one. Simon was embarrassed; he hid his face in his hands. A girl was smiling. Every time Simon looked at her she hid her face. After a while she started licking her lips (like a hungry dog), Elise started to do the same

and now it was Simon who was embarrassed. It was only a few of the children who openly showed interest and spoke of 'sweethearts', most of them were too shy to share it with the group or they were simply not interested.

Tommy wrote a 'love letter' to a girl from another group while he was at the SFO. On Day 13 a girl shouted to Tommy: *Tommy, Tommy, I remember that time when you sent a love letter to Louise!* Louise explained that she got a letter from him and that she sent one back and wondered if he could bring the letter home. Tommy was embarrassed because he was with the 'boys club'.

Cecilia sent this note to Simon. (I got her permission to include it in the 'book').



The note says: *From Cecilia, I wonder if you want to be sweethearts.* As you can see Simon answered *NO* to her question. I saw Cecilia writing the note earlier together, with some girls. It is impressive that she wrote it by her self, with help from the girls. Cecilia was many times a determined girl, and also brave to plan and complete the note. I don't know if Simon read it by himself or if she read it for him. Cecilia made many attempt to interact with Simon and sometimes it was successful and sometimes it failed. To me it seemed like she was not too offended by his rejection.

As with friends making it seems like Cecilia saw this as a play in it self, she laughed and suddenly she moved on to another activity. On Day 23, Tommy that is unsuccessful in his attempt to interact with Isabel in the listening corner:

I don't know when it started, but I think Tommy and Isabel started to poke one another in a friendly way. Tommy poked Isabel saying: *I hit you here, here, here, here, here, here* (poking a bit hard on her back, arms, thighs, head and softer on her cheeks, forehead and nose). She asks him to stop but he keeps poking her.

When Elizabeth enters the room Isabel says loud with a broken voice: *Tommy is hitting me, Tommy is hitting me!*

Tommy explains: *She started to cry after I poked her.* (Isabel cries heavily)

(Elizabeth sits Isabel on her lap) she comforts her first with a rhythm and than she tells the group a story:

Now I'm gonna tell you about the first job that I had. There was a man there who always

threw his lunch wrapping on me. One day my boss said: 'Love always starts with a throw', he meant that the guy throwing the paper was flirting, that he actually wanted to be my sweetheart. After that he never threw his paper at me again. Elizabeth continues to say that boys sometimes do silly things to get a girl's attention and it is not to by mean, it is because they like the girl.

Camilla reflects: *Maybe they are mad at you, or they like you.*

After Isabel stops crying she goes to sit down and Tommy says: *I'm sorry.* Elizabeth comments: *Good that you apologize Tommy.* The children are handed their math exercise books, Isabel show something to Tommy, he is paying attention to what she says. (FN 2011, Day 23)

This phenomenon can be labeled as 'romantic teasing' defined as:

1) A technique for maintaining gender boundaries (Schofield, 1983, In: Berentzen 1989)
2) An important means for initiating cross-sex interaction. 3) A safe way to communicate liking without being held accountable for one's feelings (Schofield, 1982, In: Berentzen, 1989:276). If Tommy would have teased a boy in the same way it would probably be interpreted differently as boys might be more used physical play. Tommy's intention was probably not to harm her but she experienced it as harmful. We do not know Tommy's intension, if he meant it as romantic teasing, or normal teasing. Isabel did not interpret is as funny, she experienced it as harmful. It is an example of a situation that two people experience in two different ways. It is a challenge when children have different understanding of what 'too rough play' is. Camilla indicates that she struggles to understand the boys in these situations: *Maybe they are mad at you, or they like you.*

This might be familiar thoughts for many girls and also boys. The play turns rough and crosses one's personal boundary. If one chooses to interpret the play, as 'he is mad at me' it can end this way, that one gets offended. Playful teasing is defined a humorous remark aimed at another person, but the response of the receiver determines if it was humorous or not (Berentzen, 1989: 275). Isabel response indicates that she did not perceive it as humorous so it was not successful.

7.6 Play

Camilla was the girl that crossed the gender barrier most; I saw her playing with boys on a number of occasions. On Day 10, I observed Camilla playing with some Year 3 boys for the first time. She played in the sand pit building sandcastles. The play progressed as they started to throw sand at each other, Camilla was very engaged and it looked like she

had great fun. Then the group moved to the monkey bars where she fell and started to cry. A teacher came to comfort her, and her hurting foot. It was good to see Camilla so active in play: in the days before, she struggled a lot with finding playmates and often went to Elizabeth to get support. In this example you see the progression of a play where Jamie and Camilla are the main characters:

Jamie and Camilla are teasing each other in the dressing room. They talk to each other in funny voices, catch one another and laugh a lot. Outside Jamie and Camilla continue their play, Jamie runs after Camilla to catch her, but she is too fast for him. Camilla hides behind me. Afterwards, Camilla runs after Jamie.

When I come back they have the same game but more children are involved; Camilla, Johanna and a girl run towards Simon, Tommy, Jamie, Sebastian and another boy. The boys are in majority, a few of them try to catch Camilla but she is tough and manages to escape. Jamie catches Johanna but she protests: *I don't want to join*. Jamie brags about how Camilla is so strong.

Two Year 5 children, a girl and a boy, are close by. Camilla takes the boy's hat, and she gives it to the older girl. They continue the 'the girls against the boys' play. Jamie manages to get the hat and he gives it to the boy, Camilla tries to get it back.

A Year 1 boy is clinging to Camilla, he is bigger than Jamie and his movements are rougher. Camilla gets his arm in her nose/fore head and stops the play as she starts crying (the girls go inside).

The boy defends himself: *She was in on the play* (hun var med på leken).

Later in the break Jamie is on his way to the front side of the school, he is playing by himself with a ball. Camilla walks passed him, Jamie says: *Hey Camilla* she replies: *Hey Jamie* (They stop, look at each other and smile). (FN 2011, School yard, Day 20)

The reason for why I do not include this in the kiss-chase section is that it is not about kiss- chasing or 'sweethearted-ness'. It has elements of boys against the girls, but it is more Camilla against Jamie, they are more equal. Jamie brags about Camilla being strong and fast. Johanna is not very comfortable with the play and she withdraws when she is caught.

In the fourth segment the Year 1 boy joins but he has not figured out the play style, he is too rough for Camilla, she ends up getting hurt. Again we see a boy had a different view of rough play than the girl, he states half of the Norwegian saying "Den som er med på leken må tåle steken" which is equivalent to the English saying: "If you can't stand the heat then get out of the kitchen". Jamie managed to keep the play going because he was not that rough, I saw that a number of times.

Here is an example from Day 23 in the dressing room:

Someone starts to talk about trapping someone in the boys' toilet.
Camilla gets excited: *Lets trap you Jamie in the boys' toilet.*
A group of girls attacks Jamie, trying to push him into the toilet.
Camilla: (walking toward Jamie): *You are three and a half*
Jamie: *No, you are a baby*
Camilla: *You are a mini- baby in you mums belly*
(They are kicking each other) (Jamie shrinks together)
Camilla defends herself: *You kicked my leg!*
Jamie: *Damn it!*
Camilla: *Jamie, are you OK?*
[More people attack Jamie]
Jamie: *I hope they stop now (smiling) I will run out fast* (FN 2011, Day 23)

Jamie is the one being 'attacked' in this situation: even with a group of girls trying to push him, he does not stop smiling, and does not use dirty tricks. When he was hurt he expressed frustration he did not try to hurt Camilla. This ability made the girls trust Jamie, he was more predictable than some of the other boys.

7.7 The diplomat role

On Day 22 Jonathan, Tommy and Cecilia were standing in a line, waiting to go to the park. Jonathan stood between Tommy and Cecilia. He disappeared for a while and when he came back he wanted his spot back. Tommy argued that he should go to the back of the line and refused to give him his old spot. Cecilia observed the situation and gently pulled Jonathan back into the line. Cecilia's discrete move and the fact that she was there stopped the potential conflict between the two boys. While standing there, Cecilia wanted me to join a 'counting rhythm'. We chose a finger each, and than she or we, would find out who wins. One time the third finger won, but we didn't choose anyone for this finger. I asked who it was and Cecilia answered: *That is Jonathan*. Later, Cecilia tapped his shoulder, he turned around and as he does this, his backpack touched Tommy, who said (annoyed): *Can you stand still?* Cecilia kept poking Jonathan on his shoulder, and they both laughed. Here Cecilia is compensating for Tommy's bad mood by being cheerful and including Jonathan back into the line and also into the play.

We can conclude that the boys and girls did interact in play in the schoolyard. Their interaction sometimes revolved around opposing groups such as kiss- chasing and the

'daddy play'. The children also talked about sweethearts but there were only a few of the children who openly showed interests, in having a sweetheart. There was romantic teasing as the children wanted to interact with the other gender, sometimes it was successful and sometimes not. When the children played or interact it often involved excitement and heightened spirits and it did sometimes lead to girls being offended and stopping the play. As the children play together they might develop a shared understanding of play that both boys and girls enjoys, were the play does not end in tears or arguments.

7.8 Girls play culture

This section will explore some girl playgroups. I have organized their play into large and small playgroups. I will also look at how the girls initiate and negotiate play. When appropriate I will also compare the girls' play to the boys' play finding similarities and differences.

7.8.1 Initiating play

As the children told earlier initiating play often means that one would have to approach someone who was playing and ask: 'Can I join?' On Day 2, when Rebecca, Anna and a girl were playing in the sand pit and Johanna came over. This time she was not lucky as the girls looked away and did not give her an answer. How easy or hard it was to join a play depended on many factors; if it was a large or a small group playing, if the play had already started or not, the person asking and group playing, and also what they were playing. Here is an example from Day 8, and the 'stone-chopping group':

The girls are discussing various rules of who were allowed to join the play. When I ask if I can join, a girls responds: *It's okay, for a little while, if you find a stone to chop with..* After playing for a while, a girl asks me why I became a stone chopper and I said it looked fun.

The girl explained: *Yeah, you can join, but only year 1 students and adults can join..or only girls can join, are you a girl? [Yes] And maybe one boy..we are doing this tomorrow as well, would you like to join then?* (FN 2011, Day 8)

First, I got conditions for my involvement: 'It was for a little while' and I had to find my own stone. As we played the conditions changed and the girl decided that adults could join too. I think the conditions are situation dependent: if the group does not want to

include the child who asks they can come up with all kinds of conditions for excluding the person. An example is claiming that the play is only for girls. The boys did the same thing in the 'boys club': sagging, certain clothes and being a boy were a few of the conditions they purposed.

A strategic moment to initiate play was in the dressing room before the break: at this moment most of the girls were free and one could ask before the play had started. For example on Day 8 when Johanna asked Julia: *Do you want to play together in the break?* Julia said yes and Isabel and Cecilia also asked if they could join them. The girls established 'we-ness', but it did not mean that they would play together the whole break. But it was an oral commitment that might be binding and more stable than if one was to just walk around and find a group playing. To be asked if you want to join a play is a privileged position. If play was successful it was common that they wanted to continue the play the next break. Like on Day 3, Isabel said to Cecilia, in the dressing room: *We have to continue the play.. We have to get everyone with us.*

Initiating play is an important skill to develop, to be persistent in trying will often lead to success, like Jamie and Johanna expressed in the interview: *That one should never give up finding a friend.* On Day 9 Lovina wanted to 'go together ' with Camilla to the park, Camilla walked away without giving her an answer. Lovina asked two more times and they ended up going together. I also saw them eating lunch and climbing trees later that day.

To initiate and develop fun plays can be what Mouritsen calls 'practiced spontaneity' it takes practice, it is a carefully navigated process, to get you ideas through and keep the groups interested is all but coincidence (Mouritsen, 2002:24).

7.8.2 Play in small groups – easier to influence

I have chosen to divide between play in large and small groups because there are some features that varies from the size of the playgroups. Because of this children might prefer either small or large groups. Rebecca clearly preferred small groups, she stated: *Its most fun when Cecilia and I play together and then..when I get to decide then I think its good!*

Small group are easier to influence, there are only a few children to negotiate with, and it is safer to come up with new ideas and progression in the play. Rebecca would often be

passive in larger groups, only observing and not making any suggestions. In smaller groups she was more active and engaged with words and actions.

And example of a small group is from Day 6: Julia, Camilla and Isabel were playing in the sandpit. Julia took the leader role in the play, and she made clear that she wanted water in the sand hole. The two others walked around looking for water but they could not find any: Julia sent them of three times to look new places but they found nothing. When the girls suggested using coal she refused until they took the coal back where they found it. Julia could only lead the play as long as Camilla and Isabel kept following her suggestions. In a larger group it might have been harder to keep the leader role that long.

7.8.3 Always progressing play

I observed the many segments of a play, as it developed to looked very different to the initial idea, here is an example from Day 23 when I participated in the 'shark play':

I was balancing on the planks that frame the sandpit. Cecilia and Rebecca came over and started to balance behind me. Cecilia established the rule: A shark will eat the person that falls. After a while both Rebecca and Cecilia fell and were 'eaten by the shark'.

Cecilia came up with a new idea: *Now we are transformed into sharks and we will eat you if you fall into the water.* After a while I also fell into the water. The girls ran after me around the table again and again, and then they split up and came from opposite sides and caught me and brought me to the table.

Rebecca decided: *This is your aquarium, and you are stuck in here, we have to go and find some more.* They 'cut' the glass, jumped out and 'glued the glass' back on.

The play ended there: I sat on the table waiting for them but they must have been distracted somewhere else. (FN 2011, Day 23)

7.8.4 Sharing crayons

Sharing rituals are also an important part of play (Corsaro, 1997). I observed some of the girls Cecilia, Julia and Camilla in the classroom, sharing crayons. The girls were placed in the same seating group and their individual work sessions became increasingly social as they shared crayons and copied each other's drawings while talking:

Cecilia: *Can I borrow crayons from you?* (to Julia)

Julia: *Yeah, which colors do you want?*

Cecilia: *I want this one, I've never seen one like this before, and I also want to borrow from you Camilla.*

Camilla: *Yeah..*

(Julia is copying Cecilia's drawing)

Cecilia: *I want to borrow this from you Camilla.. to borrow from both of you is so much fun*

Cecilia: *Camilla, your teeth are really nice* (Camilla smiles) (Rebecca comes over)

Rebecca: *Cecilia, your crayons are so nice*

Cecilia: *It's not my crayons, it's Camilla's.. I need white*

Camilla: *I have white* (Runs over to Cecilia)

(FN 2011, Day 22)

From the outside, sharing crayons can seem mundane, but I view the activity as a way of establishing relationships. As the children shared their crayons Julia wrote her name with special letters. When I looked at the others' drawings, they all wrote their names in this style. When the children are copying each other's drawings and writing, it seems like a way of affirming each other. On Day 28 the girls took it further. They told me: *We are sharing all the crayons! In the middle of the table all our crayons are mixed in one pile.* Julia confirms the idea by mixing the crayons even more. The play continued for a few days every time they would draw or color in. On Day 29, Cecilia put her crayons back in her pencil case because it was 'too messy' but she made sure everyone knew that they could still borrow from her. This was also that day she brought colored 'top-model' drawings for Julia, Isabel and Camilla. She must have made them at home: she picked them out from her backpack and gave the girls their personal drawing with their name and 'from Cecilia' written on it.

7.9 The mum and children play

This play was the longest in duration of all the play situations I observed with the girls. I got good insight into the game because I participated in this play for a short or long time almost every day after Day 8. The play was different each day but there were similarities: The location, by the terrace or in the playhouse in the park, the roles: I was the mum and they were often the children. And the girls had a common understanding of the play; they always referred to it as 'that play' or 'the play we always play'. The group who were playing were relatively stable, some only joined occasionally but the core group was Cecilia, Rebecca, Anna, Lovina and some girls from other Year 1 groups.

The first time I joined the play I was sitting by Cecilia and Anna, who were playing in the wooden terrace on a small grass coated hill in the schoolyard. Cecilia invited me to join their play and suggested that I should be the mum. When we started the play the project was to make food out of leaves, wooden sticks, dirt, seeds, grass, straw and

flowers that we found nearby. From the start, the girls lead the play, deciding the progression of the play: when to sleep, drive the car, eat breakfast and go to work, school and day care. Another project was to escape danger; we had to make sure the wolf did not eat us. When it was bedtime, I did not get a bed, Cecilia told me: *You can sit over there and then you can wake us up the next morning.* Sometimes we spoke in the 'play language' that I wrote about in the theory chapter, that children are used to hearing on TV. This was a sign that you were 'in the play', when discussing the terms of the play, we would speak our own dialect and the play was 'paused'. It is an example of children using media as raw material in their play (Mouritsen, 2002). The play has strong elements of adult culture, the family setting and adult activities such as cooking, driving, work and day care. But it was just as much inspired by fairytales and movies: the wolf, war, princesses and tooth fairies.

7.9.1 A play in progress

This play was always progressing as the children kept introducing new segments to keep it interesting. On Day 9 during outdoor school, Cecilia and I played 'shop' in the playhouse. The boys were playing loudly outside and climbing on the roof. Cecilia adapted the play to the noise, suggesting that there was a war outside, and we had to be careful when we were walking outside. If other children came into the house Cecilia treated them like costumers or guests. We kept 'harvesting' food outside to sell it in the store. This play was easy to join and no one got a 'no' when they asked; my presence there was most likely a contributing factor.

On Day 11, Cecilia decided that the wolf ate me while I was going to the shop. I walked away and they came after me saying that: *Now you can come back and be a new mum.* I told them to look out for the hungry wolf and Cecilia continued: *Yes we have to remember what happened to dad, and big brother, and mum.* We made plans to catch the wolf by setting up traps for him. Lovina made progression in the play when she announced that she caught the wolf and killed it. Cecilia complained about blood all over the vegetables. Lovina came up with a solution: *That's okay, we just push the 'rain-button' and then everything will go away.* Cecilia agreed: *Yeah, that's great.* In play nothing is impossible. From this time, Lovina got more and more involved with the 'mum

and children' play, she played an increasingly more active role and Cecilia included her by supporting her suggestions.

7.9.2 Deciding your own role in the play

On Day 13 Cecilia asked me if it was okay that I gave birth to a child and that this child was named Catherine. This girl joined the play on a number of occasions and she always wanted to be the baby. On Day 16 we clearly see the trend of deciding your own role and function in the play. Lovina stated that she wanted to be the crown princess and that I should be the queen. Cecilia and Anna also wanted to be princesses. Lovina wanted them to be crown princesses together. A girl played the naughty dog and another girl was the tooth fairy. After a while Cecilia announced that she was the aunt and that she lived further away, and that she planned to come visit sometimes. She went to another grass-coated hill where there were flowers.

To conclude I think this play was successful because of many things; we played it almost everyday so it was predictable but than again we never played the same 'story' twice, there was always progression. There was unlimited space, it was easy to come and join and decide your own role and projects. One could play for a while and then you could 'go to work' or fade out without interrupting the play. The fact that I was there also provided some stability for the children, maybe they felt that having me there made it easier for them to succeed in the play.

7.10 Play in large groups

I also want to include some observations of play in larger groups to see if there are different play features. The first example is from the park with a larger group of girls eating together on Day 13:

Johanna: *I have eaten bird poop* (has dirt on her hands) (Johanna throws a stick)
Johanna: *Who can be a good boy* (flink bisk) *and get that?* (Elise runs to get the stick)
Elise sits down and Johanna wipes her hand on Elise's dress
Elise: *I am going to a birthday party look how dirty I am*
Johanna: *It is not birdpoop its soil... I am going to a birthday party too*
Elise: *Who wants to see a waterfall?* (Pours out some milk)
Johanna: *Who wants to see milk? Those who won't see will get milk in their hair.. line up!*
(All the girls, except Isabel, line up)
Johanna: *Isabel, if you won't see, you'll get milk in you hair and it'll stink.*

(Isabel gets up, walks over and watches)

Johanna: *Oh my god!*

A girl modifies her statement saying *Oh my goodness!* This happens twice.

The girl makes a last attempt: *Can you stop!* (FN 2011, Park, Day 13)

Johanna takes the leader role in this situation. She is doing funny things that make the others laugh. One can only have this influence if it is given to you. When Elise ran to get the stick, and did not protest. Or when Johanna wiped her hands on her dress, it reinforced her influence and she could go on leading the play. When Elise initiated a new sequence, pouring out the milk, Johanna picked up her idea but developed it, making everyone stand and line up to watch the milk. When Isabel did not follow, Johanna threatened her with pouring milk in her hair, and Isabel gave in.

In the last sequence Johanna was swearing, a girl modified the language by saying 'oh my goodness' but Johanna said 'oh my god' one more time, not giving in to her suggestion. Then the girl actually asks her to stop: she is the first to object Johanna's initiatives. A leader can only lead as long as the group follows; there is a balance because if the leader is too bossy someone might resist and the play will end, or someone else would take the leader role.

This kind of play with a clear leader was also common among the boys I will give you examples of that in the following. There is also an example of this on Day 20, when a group of girls played 'spying on the boys':

Cecilia, Rebecca, Camilla, Elise, Johanna, and Anna are playing over by the soccer field. They sneak up behind Simon who is playing soccer. They stay on the field for a couple of seconds before they move behind the goal. A few of them shout to Simon: *Daddy!*

Tommy is annoyed: *We are in the middle of a match, go away!*

(Anna takes the leader role)

Anna: *Girls, come over here, we have to make up a plan.* They stand in a circle whispering, the plan is to spy on Simon and then they will catch him and kiss him. One girl is chosen to be the kisser. The plan is to be as invisible as possible so that he does not notice them. The children hide behind a shed.

Cecilia looked at me: *Do you want to join us?* [Yes, I want to] *Then you can look after us.*

We slip around the corner, two of the sides of the shed is visible from the soccer field. After a while we run quickly to the pillars on the other side of the field. Hiding behind the pillar there is a lot of movement. Some of the girls are whispering: *He saw me...He saw me!* They are all very excited. Anna decides: *Lets split up!* We split up some at each the pillar. Someone says: *We are spies!* Everyone is hiding the best they can. After a while we run to the monkey bars, Anna states: *This is a watchtower,* Cecilia says: *They can see us!*

We run to the concrete stair case.

Lovina suggests that we play that we lived there and make food (similar to the 'mum and children' play). No one responds to her idea.

The girls run to the fireplace (encircled with a ring of concrete.) The girls start to balance on the ring. It is decided that if one falls down she has to count to ten before she can balance on the ring again. One girl suggests that you have to count to as many as there are girls in the ring.

A boy comes and starts to balance. The girls' protest: *you can't join us! It is only for girls! You have to go!* The boy eventually walks away. (FN 2011, Day 20)

The play progressed from being about kissing Simon to being spies to balancing on the concrete cylinder. But it was the same group who played the entire time. Lovina struggled to get her ideas through; it might be because her suggestions were so different from the nature of the play. The 'spy play' was intense, it involved running and hiding and not being caught. It might be harder to control the progress of a play in a large group like this, there are many ideas and the speed is higher switching from one segment to the other. There are also more girls competing for the leader role.

7.10.1 Playing games

The girls also played games in larger groups. The games were organized by the children themselves or by older children, sponsors, welfare leaders and adults. During the first weeks the teachers organized activities at the end of the day. The children repeated these games during the play outside in the breaks. One example is the 'miming game' from Day 12. The girls would split into two teams; one group would start and decide what they would like to mime. The other team would guess. When they guessed the correct answer, the miming team had to run back to their base. The guessing team had to catch as many as they could from the miming team. All those who were caught had to join the other team. In this way the size of the teams would shift, and one team had the possibility to win, when they were able to catch all the members of the other team.

These games were easy to join: it was more fun with larger groups than smaller. The games required leaders who took the initiative and made sure that everyone followed the rules. These plays lasted longer and were more successful when older children would organize them. When everyone is new, it takes a while before anyone feels safe enough to take the leader role in a large group.

Camilla was one of the girls who I saw in this role towards the end of the fieldwork period. On Day 23, she took initiative leading a game called 'red light', she was standing

in the window frame, a meter from the ground facing the wall. A large group of girls stood on a line. The game was to move towards Camilla, but when she turned they all had to freeze in their positions, Camilla's job was to look for children that moved. She would say their name and they had to go back to the starting line. She jumped down from the window frame and studied everyone carefully. She said someone's name, they would protest, but she did not give up until they went back to the start line. She ran the game with an authoritative voice.

I saw her do the same thing on Day 22 in the park, with the game called 'Slå på Ringen' it is a circle game like 'Ring a Ring o' Roses' where everyone holds their hands on their backs and one puts a ring in one of the hands. A rhythm is sung and it ends with everyone having their hands in the front and 'shaking' their fists. The person in the middle of the ring has a number of chances to guess which hand that hides the ring. She will poke a hand and the person opens it. The children take turns being the person that guess and the person that place the ring. They started with a small group and than many people joined after a while.

It looked like Camilla enjoyed to having a leader role. It did take a while for Camilla to find her place, like I mentioned earlier she often contacted Elizabeth in the breaks because she did not have anyone to play with. Alice and another girl were from her day care but they did not play together that much. It seemed like Alice and this girl were very close, they even wore the same jacket and I saw them together almost every day. Camilla expressed that that she liked to play with the older boys from Year 2 and 3, who she knew from day care. Throughout the fieldwork period, I saw her engaged in many physical plays with boys, or circle games. It looked like she found it less interesting to play with the girls. Camilla was one of the girls that crossed the gender barrier because she enjoyed playing with the boys so much. It might be more accepted for girls to play with boys than boys to play with girls, especially if the activities were feminine.

7.11 Negotiation and conflict in girls play

Sometimes the children did not agree on the progression of the play and they would negotiate until they came up with a solution that both could agree upon, or they would

end the play. The girls negotiations were more implicit than the boys, here is an example from 'the mother and children' play on Day 11:

Cecilia bought me a gift, I unwrapped it and it was gravel, Cecilia told me it was candy. We were making a soup in a bucket with rainwater and a girl was putting gravel in the soup.

Cecilia reacts: *Are you putting candy in the soup?*

The girl continued to put more gravel in the soup saying: *This gravel can be so many things, it is magic!*

Cecilia accepts this idea and come up with things that the gravel can 'turn into'.

(FN 2011, Day 11)

The girl and Cecilia had two different ideas about the gravel, instead of staying with her idea Cecilia goes along with the girl's suggestion. It might have been more important to Cecilia that the play progresses than having the leader role and risking the play stopped. The girls avoided conflicts more than the boys. On Day 21 there was a more explicit example:

Cecilia and Rebecca rehearse a clap- rhythm and they want Anna and I to watch.

The stage is the terrace, on the stairs. Lovina sits in the stairs and refuses to move when they ask her to. Lovina argues that they can move to the side, but the girls do not go along with this. The girls chose to ignore Lovina and start the show.

Lovina marches away with an angry face. She comes back and observes the show, hiding behind a tree.

(FN, 2011, Day 21)

This was one of the few open conflicts that I observed among the girls. I think Lovina had a strong wish to be included by Rebecca and Cecilia; on a number of occasions she would come over to me and ask: *What are they doing?* When she was ignored, and to some extent excluded like this she reacted with frustration. Maybe she hoped that her demonstration would make them follow her and ask her to come back, but the girls just continued their show. In this situation Cecilia does not take the diplomat role that she sometimes does, the play she had going on with Rebecca was valued higher than the shared social rules of inclusion. Maybe Cecilia and Rebecca perceived their play as inclusive since they invited us to watch. As I will show later the boys had more conflicts in their play and their conflicts were more dramatic emotionally and physically. Here is an example of a similar situation but with a different strategy and outcome:

Rebecca, Cecilia and I were playing at the terrace. Rebecca found a rope that was tied to a pole and she wanted to skip. Cecilia skipped one time but then went back to her 'job' making food. Then it was only Rebecca and I: she suggested that we practiced swinging the

rope: *Lets count to 100!* We started to count. Cecilia tried to get us back into her game by saying: *I was the one cooking the food.* After a while Elise noticed us and came over wanting to skip, and more children lined up. Cecilia kept 'making food' and made a last attempt: *Don't forget that we are in the middle of a play here.* (FN 2011, Day 22)

Cecilia tried to get us involved in her play but Rebecca was too occupied with the rope, and I simply went along with her plan. Cecilia tried to take a leader role but we did not follow. There can be many reasons for why Cecilia reacted differently to Lovina. She was not pushed and excluded like Lovina; she had established a stable relation to Rebecca and me. I also think that she was a more skilled player than Lovina, Cecilia was more flexible and could improvise to a large degree than Lovina. Her play-skills helped her to build her network of peers faster than Lovina, who was more restless and passive in her interaction at this stage. I see Cecilia as having more agency than Cecilia at this point.

7.11.1 Conclusion

The girls did organize their play in smaller and larger groups. The girls also had the best friend issue that many wished to have a stable play partner. A successful play for the girls was a play constantly progressing as new ideas were introduced. It was easier to influence a small group than a large group. Normally, someone took a leader role in the play: it was a constantly negotiated role because she had to come up with new ideas and keep the group engaged. If she became too bossy the group could resist the leadership or leave the play. The leader only had as much power as the group gave her. The girls negotiations and conflicts were often more implicit than the boys, the girls appeared to be more scared of arguments.

7.12 Boys play groups

I will organize this section differently from the previous one on girls' culture; the reason for this is that I want to describe the main activities first. Soccer and 'the boys club' will be most elaborated on, but I will also give examples of small playgroup settings. I will focus more on conflict in boys' playgroups because it occurred more frequently among the boys.

7.12.1 Playing soccer

Soccer was a popular activity for the Year 1 boys. It would be the first time that they had daily access to a soccer field because day care centers normally do not have that. The local sport club only offered a program from year 2 in school. Some parents took the initiative to arrange weekly soccer practice for the Year 1 students using the school facilities. Some of the boys had older siblings and therefore they might have joined them at their soccer practice and matches to watch and cheer. Many told me that they watched soccer on TV and supported local or international soccer teams.

I found the soccer activity interesting for a number of reasons. Firstly, it was a 'children-controlled' activity. Elizabeth told me that they did not interfere in this activity unless the children asked them to, since the adults controlled most of their day, the soccer field was a free space. To observe how the children organized the play, choose the teams, negotiated the rules and solved conflicts taught me much about their play culture. Secondly, it was interesting to see the children's reconstruction of soccer: they have obviously been introduced to the sport through siblings and parents, watching soccer on TV, playing soccer, cheering for the local and international soccer team and so on. Thirdly, it was an activity that involved boys only, I never saw any Year 1 girl playing soccer. Fourthly, I observed how social competence was negotiated in the interaction among the players.

Jamie was one of the most eager soccer players in the group. Here is a conversation we had where he talks about playing soccer at school:

Jamie: I think it is most fun to play with the Year 1 boys.. but the Year 5 and 4 they come and take over the field.. [Why?] because it is their turn to have the field it says in the..

Johanna: There is a note about it.. so they come and take the field

Jamie: They take it all the time..It is so boring cause we never have the field.. Year 1 is not in the plan..but we will..I have to remember to tell Elizabeth..that Year 1 should have..we have to make a Year 1 ball..we have two fields..we can have two goals..we can have the stairs..we can make two goals..on the backside!

Jamie: But it is boring to be on the backside..because with the real goals we can see it better when we score.. I dribbled a Year 2 boy and than I scored! On an open goal!

(Jamie demonstrates)

Jamie: It is hard to dribble.

Elise: What is dribble?

Jamie: You don't even know what dribbling is?

[It is that you are running past someone with the ball]

Jamie: I have practiced taking my foot over the ball.. Will is good at that.

(Interview 2011, 2nd session, Group 1)

Jamie was very excited about soccer and he spent much of his breaks playing soccer. It took a while before the Year 1 boys understood the system with the schedule, and the fact that they did not have right to the field. On Day 3 there was a confrontation between the Year 1 and 3 boys. The Year 1 boys were playing but the Year 3 entered the field and claim that it was theirs. Jamie and Tommy shouted: *But we have never had the soccer field yet!* At this point Jamie was annoyed, he grabbed the ball and shouted: *We are taking the ball and we are playing somewhere else!* Jamie and the other boys following him marched off the field and up to the backside of the school. The backside was used as the second option. Jamie and the boys show agency as they go into discussion with the older boys. And they also have a plan B, when the initial plan failed. Jamie wants to involve Elizabeth as well to insure that they get their own ball and right to the field.

Johanna had some knowledge about soccer since she knew about the schedule. Elise revealed her lack of knowledge about soccer when she asked about what 'dribble' means. On Day 3 Jamie asked Lovina in the dressing room: *If play soccer, would you watch me?* To have girls watching and cheering was something Jamie wanted, Simon who often had girls cheering for him might have inspired him.

7.12.2 Choosing teams, again and again

Jamie also revealed that skills were important; scoring goals, dribbling the other players and running fast gave them status. There are studies on boys engaged in sports that confirm the strong notion of competition, and rankings of players. And also the hierarchical social structures in sports teams (Berentzen 1984, 1983, In: Corsaro: 1997:154). The hierarchical structure became visible when the boys were picking teams. Before every game the boys had to line up, there was appointed a 1st and a 2nd chooser and they got to pick players by turn. This is a well-known procedure in school soccer in Norway. I remembered it vividly from my own childhood. The procedure has been criticized, and P.E teachers have been discouraged from practicing it, because it is viewed as pedagogically incorrect. This must be a phenomenon that is generational and a part of the Norwegian child culture transmitted from child group to child group. Jamie explained the choosing process:

Jamie: *We take choosers so that it is fair..just..you can choose whomever you want..it is not fair when a 1st chooser..then he has the ball..the 2nd chooser is supposed to have the ball because the 2nd chooser should start with the ball*

[Who is chosen first?]

Jamie: *Everyone is so caught up in.. everyone thinks its so important who is the 1st chooser.. everyone is going on and on about wanting to be the 1st chooser..but is not a big deal.*

[OK, so the first thing you do is to choose teams?]

Jamie: *We choose so that we have people on teams that pass the ball..we have to have teams. But everyone is so focused on having the ball..they don't pass the ball..they just want to have it..they don't pass it.. I position myself all the time..but they don't pass it..they only want to dribble.*

[What does a good soccer player do?]

Jamie: *One should try to pass..and that you also have to dribble.. but it is smart to pass the ball..because the more you pass the more goals you score.*

(Interview 2011, Session 2, Group 1)

The idea of the choosers was to have fair teams. If one team scored many goals it was often protested and someone would suggest that they choose new teams, this could happen two or three times in one break. The boys often appointed themselves to be the choosers and the leaders often negotiated it. The idea was that if two even players would be 1st and 2nd choosers, they would pick even teams. When doing this procedure so many times all the players knew their rank. Simon and Tommy demonstrated a choosing process for me during an interview:

Tommy: *It is like, imagine I am the 1st chooser and Simon is the 2nd chooser.*

Simon: *No..I am the 1st and Tommy is the 2nd*

Tommy: *We are standing her choosing and they are standing on a line*

Simon: *Then I am choosing Nick*

Tommy: *I am choosing Jess*

Simon: *I am choosing Will*

Tommy: *Then I am choosing Jamie*

Simon: *Then I am suddenly choosing Michael*

Tommy: *Then I choose Jonathan*

Simon: *Then I choose Sebastian*

[Why are you choosing someone before someone else? Is there a system that someone is always picked first?]

Tommy: *I don't know [Why are someone pick 1st , someone 2nd and 3rd ?]*

Tommy: *Because [Just because? Are they good or?]*

Tommy: *It is about the 1st and 2nd chooser.* (Interview 2011, 2nd session, Group 3)

We see here that the boys were concerned about the 1st and 2nd chooser like Jamie explained. The four first boys called (plus Tommy and Simon) were considered the best players in Year 1. They were also the boys that were appointed 1st and 2nd choosers most of the time. The last three boys were considered as the worse players. The rank was often

done in this order. Even though Sebastian is sitting in front of them they still pick him last.

There were a few times where one of the less skilled players got to be one of the choosers but then the dominating players would dictate him, telling him whom to choose. This could result in one good and one not-so-good team. If the less good chooser picked one that wanted to be on the good team he would protest. On Day 7 this happened on the backside field. Jamie was the 1st chooser and Sebastian was the 2nd. It was evident that Jamie and two other boys really wanted to be on the same team. To make this happen Jamie told Sebastian whom to choose. But the chosen boy would not accept this and he refused to go to Sebastian's team. Jamie tried to convince the boy that Sebastian picked him and therefore he should go. The boy reacted by refusing to play. Another boy said: *We'll just start, and then he will join.* Knowing that the teams are uneven Jamie encouraged Sebastian's team: *We are not gonna do our best, OK?* Jamie takes the leader role and not the diplomat role in this situation.

On another occasion Jamie is the one who does not want to be on his allocated team, he tries to get the chooser to change his mind: *Why me? He is way better!* Some of the other boys said: *Yeah, don't choose Jamie, he sucks.* Another strategy is to refuse to play and see if the boys care enough about you playing with them to let you have it your way.

The boys explicitly showed either positive or negative emotions about the team they were allocated to. On Day 27 Simon and Tommy had to go to the 'less good' team, they showed great frustration by sighing loudly, marching in an angry way and raising their arms in anger. If a boy were chosen among the first he would celebrate it as a victory: cheering, falling down on the knees and hugging the chooser.

How come the less- good boys kept playing? They must have had a good experience of it even though they were picked last. The good players had keep everyone motivated, so that they still wanted to play. Soccer was an easy play to join since you needed a large group. Soccer was an important part of the boys play culture, even though some were picked last they still got to play, and be a part of a group.

7.12.3 Negotiating the rules

The boys were very occupied with the rules and used the known soccer terms: 'corner',

'throw', and 'kicking with the right foot', 'hands', 'foul', 'penalty kick' and so on. To be the one to do the 'throw' was sought after and the boys would often negotiate, like on Day 3 when one boy got ready to do a 'throw' from the corner and another boy interrupted him saying: *No, I want to do it now*. They discussed back and forth till the first boy gave in, on one condition: *You have to pass the ball to me then*. Here they met in the middle and found a solution that gave them both an advantage. Similar to the girls play the boys wanted to influence the play and would take the leader role but they were dependent on the support from the other players.

In the park on Day 17 Jamie fell and cried and the boys gathered around him saying: *It is a 'foul'; it is a 'foul'!* But later when two boys fell from opposite teams they agreed that it was not a 'free kick' because both teams were affected. At one point Simon was the keeper and his finger got hit by the ball, he ordered a 'foul' but Tommy ran over and encouraged him: *The keeper can handle it, the keeper can handle it!* Simon was OK with this.

When the boys were playing with older boys from Year 2, the not-so-good players were placed further down on the hierarchy. The Year 2 players were the ones picked first, and they had the last say in discussions. Some of them were good players and it seemed like the Year 1 boys liked playing with them. This might be the reason why they let them 'run the show' whenever they were playing together.

7.12.4 Conflict

On Day 7 Tommy and Simon were arguing if there was a goal or not. Simon grabbed Tommy by his shoulders, he pulled off his cap and threw it on the ground shouting: *Asshole!* Tommy lost his motivation after this, Jamie came over to encourage him and patted his shoulder: *You hit the ball with your head, that's really good! You are awesome too!*

On Day 15 there were two choosing sessions and a group of four boys were left at the end both times, and during the last session they were not picked at all. One of the boys asked a boy if he can join but got a 'no'. The boy started to cry and walked over to where I sat. I asked him: *Do you want to play soccer?* He said: *Yeah*, I suggested: *Just go out on the field and start playing*. The boy responded: *They don't want me to join*, I answered:

But it is not their soccer field... Which team do you want to be on? He asked if I could talk to Simon. I answered that I could not do that because I am not a teacher. At the same time Simon ordered that the goalkeeper should be replaced, the boy walked off the field and he came up to me: *Simon is telling me off, he doesn't want me there*, he were almost crying. This is one of the most explicit exclusions I observed at the school. The boys' conflicts reveal deeper aspects of boys' play; it is raw, there are a lot of emotions: anger, grief, frustration but also excitement and a strong 'we-ness' feeling.

7.12.5 The diplomatic role

Jamie was very occupied with the rules and that play should be fair, he often had a diplomatic role in the play. On Day 17 he took the leader role during a choosing process. One boy was the 1st chooser and Sebastian was the 2nd chooser. Two boys whispered to the 1st choose maybe about whom he should choose. Jamie shouted: *No whispering! Line up!* After a while the 1st chooser marched of the field in frustration, he wanted to do a 'throw in' but he was denied. Jamie ran after him and brought him back instructing everyone: *Let him do the 'throw in'!* The boy who was supposed to do the 'throw in' gave in on one condition: *Throw the ball to me, OK?* Jamie instructed: *Throw it to him.* The ball did not go all the way over to the boy and Jamie commented: *He tried! He tried!*

Why did Jamie have this influence why did they follow his instructions? I think there are many explanations for this; he was very passionate about soccer, and an active player, and he had knowledge about the rules. He had a strong sense of fairness, and he dared to speak mind. His sense of fairness also benefited the less- good players like on Day 17 in the park when the boys repeatedly made fun of Sebastian's kicking and throwing abilities. When Sebastian scored a goal Jamie said loudly: *Who said anything about kicking poorly?* I saw that the children liked when someone took leadership, it ensured progression in the game and made it entertaining.

The boy's affiliation for Jamie had its limits, such as on Day 20 when he stated: *I think I am the best soccer player in all year I!* No one responded and than Tommy commented: *Yeah right!* But Jamie was still excited: *At least I am the best one in my group.. I almost scored from the middle of the field...I think I am the best of the Year 1 students!* A boy asked: *What about Tommy and Peter?* As I have shown earlier Jamie did not act like a diplomat constantly, and there were times were he added to the hierarchy organization of the teams.

Jamie showed that he sometimes had struggles about doing what he believed was right or doing what he felt like. He said that he did not get why being 1st and 2nd chooser was a big deal, and that everyone should pass the ball. But he also admitted that he liked to dribble and score goals, that he liked to win and hated to lose. He was drawn between what he knew about soccer, social rules, and the wish to 'fit in' and have a leader role.

7.12.6 Where did the children get the inspiration?

Many of the children told that they liked to watch soccer on TV with their dads or grandfathers; they also played soccer with dads and siblings. Jamie shared that soccer was his favorite thing to do. Tommy told on Day 10 that his mum woke him up early and that he was outside kicking the ball against the wall to practice. Jamie said he enjoyed playing FIFA on the TV with his dad. Three of the boys had pencil cases from their favorite soccer team. They also talked a lot about the local soccer team. When they played they sometimes picked famous soccer teams like Barcelona or Manchester United, and choose players like Rooney and Messi. When they would score goals they would imitate the soccer players on TV. They stretched out their arms and 'flew' running in large circles. The other boys on the team would run after him and pat his shoulder. Sometimes the whole team would join in a large circle holding their arms around each other's shoulders and jump around. On Day 27 Tommy scored a goal and the team members were shouting: *You rule Tommy!* Jamie ran over to him: *You are on our team! Well done!*

We see a good example of 'we-ness' in these short celebration moments, the children might not play together on other occasions but at that particular moment they were a team. And they show this with making a circle and holding their arms around each other's shoulders and cheering loudly. In the next moment the teams might be mixed up so the groups are not stable and it can last for long or short periods.

Soccer was an important part of the boys' play culture at school. Media and family members influenced the play, but the boys constructed their own features, such as the choosing and the ranking. All the boys in the study played soccer but some were more involved than others. It was a way of building networks, a place where the Year 1 boys could meet and interact.

7.12.7 The boys club

The boys club was a term that developed early in the fieldwork period. Simon first introduced it and then the boys and girls soon became familiar with it. On Day 9 I observed the boys playing in the park; it was the first time I saw the boys club in action, playing inside/outside/on top of the playhouse.

When girls came they were denied access to the house because it was a boys party. They go outside and find sticks and climb up on the roof, shouting: *It is war Simon you are the boss!*

Simon: *The king is coming down!* (Climbing down from the roof)

Simon: *You two, make sure no girls come up on the roof!*

Simon: *Everyone, up on the roof*

A boy: Why?

Simon: *I am the boss, I decide, someone grab my water bottle!*

(A girl is coming)

Simon: *ALARM!*

(The boys are armed with sticks) (Simon is squirting water on the children on the ground)

A boy: *Simon, I challenge you it is a duel* (fencing back and forth)

Boy: *Peace!* (surrender)

Simon: *All servants, come over to the stairs! All servants you will get a prize! You will get the sword*

(Gives a stick to a boy)

Simon: *All guards, come over here!*

(A touches Simon with his sword)

Simon: *Take him!*

(Everyone point their sword toward the boy)

(The boy starts crying, a teacher comes over. Simon walks away, the boys follow him. After a while they come back to him.)

The boy: *If only one gets to be the boss it is unfair!*

(FN 2011, The Park, Day 9)

Simon was the leader in this play. He was the one responsible for the progression in the play; he decided what and when things should happen. It was not a title he made up himself but it was given to him. It was a play all the boys could join even though it developed into a direction not all of the boys were comfortable with. The group seemed happy to be servants and guards and it was not until the boy started to cry and told the adult that the play stopped. The boy was the first to question Simon's role. A leader in this position needs social competence to navigate the controlling and the sharing aspect of the play. If he becomes too bossy the group might lose interest or rebel against him.

Simon continued to be the leader and initiator in the boys club. There was a certain notion of being 'in' or 'out' of the boys club, the girls were definitely 'out' and Simon kept

coming up with conditions for membership. On Day 13 a boy had cut his hair and wore a big hip-hop style white jacket with black horizontal stripes. Simon told him: *You are really cool* (drit kul); *you are in the boys club!* Jonathan confirmed Simon's position by saying: *Simon is the boss of all the boys in Year 1.* The thing with clothes came up a few times, also on Day 5, Simon asked: *Who is sagging?* Tommy replied: *I am!* (Shows how far down his pants are) Simon asked Sebastian: *Why do you wear your pants all the way up to your bellybutton?* On Day 13 Simon pulled Jonathan pants further down saying: *Now you are sagging, just like Tommy and me.*

On Day 18 the Year 1 students were lining up to go to the gym. The boys gathered in the back of the line in something they called the 'boys line'. They made a rhythm going like this: *We are the boys line; we are the boys' line*, repeated over and over again. The next segment of the play was to add various dance moves. Simon was leading and more boys followed him. They tried to come up with a cooler dance move than the pervious, or they said something funny, or sang the rhythm in a special way. When a girl lined up she was quickly told to go to the other line.

Simon had a 'golden star' from many of the boys, his ability to come up with new ideas, his authoritative style and bold behavior attracted many, and many wished to be recognized by him. His influence had its highs and lows, he could go from being declared boss in one moment to playing alone in the next, some of it depended on Tommy's support. He was emotionally engaged for better and for worse; in conflict and on a 'bad day' he would show some of the unfriendly behavior that the children listed in the interviews. But then he was quick to work at winning back the favor from the boys, being friendly in the next moment.

7.12.8 Play in smaller groups

Soccer and the boys club were only parts of the boys play culture. Jonathan and Sebastian sometimes preferred other types of play. Jonathan enjoyed the skipping with a rope activity that the teachers organized in the breaks. He was good at skipping, often managed to do 20 in a row witch was the maximum. That both boys and girls engaged in this activity is different from Thorne's observation where the jump rope was perceived as a girl activity and boys were denied access from both the teachers and girls (Throne, 1993). In my school the teachers introduced the activity the first week and all had to learn

it, this probably constructed the view that it was a gender-neutral activity.

Jonathan also played something they called 'Boksen går' a game where some were hiding and one would try to find them. There was a box that functioned as a jail, where all the caught children needed to stand. The free children could set the captives free by running to the box and say 'Boksen går' before the catcher sees him. Jonathan played this game with girls and boys from Year 1.

Sebastian could often be found doing rough physical play like wrestling in the steep grass slopes. He would play with two boys from his day care. Most of the time he would play with Michael, one of them, and the other looked like he wanted to join but was ignored. Sometimes all three of them would wrestle together.

Jonathan and Sebastian would also play 'war' with some small characters called 'Gormitis', in the sand. The boys that played this game were the ones that did not like to play soccer that much.

As the boys expressed in the interviews, they valued friends and buddies, especially in hard times. Tommy and Simon were often in conflict but they also showed appreciation like on Day 14 in the listening corner when Tommy suggested 'Simon' as something that starts with 's'. Simon gave Tommy a hug, he held his head close to Tommy's head and said repeatedly: *You are a great buddy* (kompis). He also said the same thing to Sebastian that day putting a hand on his shoulder: *You're my buddy, Sebastian you are my buddy!* On Day 17 when Jamie returned from a two weeklong holiday he told Tommy: *So nice to see you again!* Tommy responded: *So nice to see you too, I've missed you a lot.* Simon was also happy to see Jamie; he put his arms around Jamie and said: *We are best friends.*

7.12.9 Conflict in play

Like I said earlier, conflict was a part of the boys' play culture and in comparison with the girls, the conflicts were more physical emotional explicit. When the boys had a conflict you could hear it and see it from a distance, there was shouting, name-calling, swearing, hitting and kicking and crying. The most documented conflict relationship I have is between Simon and Sebastian. As I just said there were times of peace and joy between them but there were conflicts daily. I noticed it on Day 1 when Simon and a few older boys were standing on top of the steep grass slope and he pointed at and talked about Sebastian who was standing close. That same day, Simon kicked Sebastian and

when he kicked back Simon told him that his kicks were weak. Sebastian was shorter and smaller than Simon, Simon would remind him of that and Sebastian would try to prove him wrong.

In the beginning I saw it as Simon bullying Sebastian but as time went by I had almost just as many observations of Sebastian teasing Simon. I went from seeing it as 'bullying' to 'negative attention' and landed on 'conflict'. The factor that fueled the conflict was that they kept getting back at each other. Tommy would often team up with Simon and then Sebastian would be the weaker part. But then Simon and Tommy would have conflicts too. On Day 13 we see both:

In the line on the way to a concert, Tommy and Simon are standing behind Sebastian in the line, they punch his butt. Sebastian turns around and Tommy says: *It was him* (points to Simon) and Simon says: *No it was Tommy!* Tommy punches Simon in the stomach, Simon punch back (you can hear it is a hard punch) Elizabeth breaks in: *It is enough, you are not allowed to punch one another.* Simon argues: *But he hit me first,* and Tommy objects: *No he hit me.* Elizabeth takes Simon and pulls him to the front of the line. (FN 2011, Day 13)

This can be seen as a type of play; Simon and Tommy trying to get Sebastian's attention by teasing him, and then they punch each other. Other examples of Simon mocking Sebastian would be on Day 16 when he laughs when Sebastian makes mistakes, writing on the chalkboard. During Hangman that day Sebastian put up his hand saying: *Simon says 'yes' every time I guess a wrong letter.* When things went too far, one of them, mostly Sebastian would seek support from Elizabeth.

On Day 21 there was peace as Simon walked over to Sebastian to show him that he had colored the girl in the book grey and made a large cross over her. Sitting by his desk I heard Simon say: *I hate writing* and shortly after I heard Sebastian say the exact same thing.

Sometimes the play started up in a friendly tone but turned into a conflict like on Day 25 on the way back from the park. Simon and Sebastian were at the end of the line. They played a 'Rock, paper, scissors' tournament while walking. They were joking a lot and both of them were laughing. They started to argue about who should walk first. Simon then walked in the front holding a girl's hand. Sebastian asked if Simon should kiss her and he kisses her hair. Towards the end of the trip Simon teases Sebastian: *You have a fat dick Sebastian.* He said it over and over again and Sebastian asked him to stop. On Day 26 Sebastian were mocking Simon in the listening corner. Elizabeth said: *Simon has*

got a new jacket, that is a sentence, Sebastian said: *Simon has got a new suckle* (Patte). ('Jakke' and 'patte' rhymes in Norwegian) Simon said: *What did you say?* Sebastian laughed. Simon was annoyed: *He is teasing me!* Elizabeth responded: *Stop that nonsense.*

The most explicit conflict was observed during a Lego play with a group of boys on Day 27:

Simon takes one of Sebastian's blocks and Sebastian protests: *Give it back!* (He goes over to Simon and tries to take it back).

Lukas looks at me for support. I interfere and ask Simon to give it back and he does.

Simon threatens to hit Sebastian, who responds by saying that Simon can't come to his birthday party. Another boy confirms that he is invited to the party. Simon argues: *Everybody can come, I don't have to be invited.* Sebastian: *No, you can't come if you are not invited, I don't want you there!*

Simon threatens: *I'm gonna hit you, I'm gonna hit you hard! My dad is stronger than the strongest man in the world!* Tommy supports him: *He is!* Sebastian answer: *You are not aloud to do that!* (FN 2011, Day 27)

Here we see that the two boys are using whatever means they have to defeat one another. Simon is playing on his physical strength, and Sebastian's fear. Sebastian is using his birthday party for all its worth. To be excluded from a birthday party is a serious threat for a Year 1 boy. You can see that Simon is desperate when he again threatens to hit Sebastian and that he has a strong dad.

When viewing social competence as: "A constantly negotiated dynamic, a phenomenon which is stabilized (..) in and trough the interactions between human actors and the material and cultural resources which they are available" (Hutchby & Moran- Ellis, 1998:15).

When analyzing the Lego play we can see how Sebastian is using the *available resources*: 1) Trying to get the Lego piece back, first by asking and then by physical strength 2) Looking to me for help 3) Excluding Simon from the birthday party, something that is very important for them 4) Referring to social rules, that Simon is not allowed to do that. To call Sebastian the bullied would not be fair or correct in my opinion; it is a too simplistic interpretation of Sebastian and Simon's relationship. Sebastian's determination to always defend himself might settle their dispute or at least calm it down. Sebastian not only defend himself he attacks back in other situations, and that fuels the conflict. Simon had the advantage of support from Tommy, but Sebastian often got more support than Simon from Elizabeth.

7.13 Conclusion

From this chapter we can conclude that the boys and girls both took initiatives to cross-gender interaction. In the classroom the gender barrier were quite small; boys and girls often cooperated in schoolwork. In team activities such as Hangman and puzzle play the group functioned more as one team. In the school yard there were many activities that both genders would engage in such as jump rope, sand pit and monkey bars, were as the soccer field were occupied with boys and girls would occasionally watch. Teasing was a strategy that the children used to interact across gender. Kiss- chasing and sweetheartedness were apart of the child culture, many were involved but only a few dared/or desired to actually kiss or openly have a sweetheart. There were also times were boys and girls played, it might be organized in gender groups but it was not romantic in nature like the kiss- chase. In cross- gender play and interaction came with challenges: the boys struggled to understand the girls' boundaries for rough play. The boy might think that if the girl was in on the play she should handle that it is rough. But the girls seemed to have the perspective that the play ceased to be a play if it got too rough and when the boundary was crossed they stopped the play by starting to cry or telling an adult. These situations could potentially help the boys and girls establish these boundaries to avoid the play to stop that quickly next time.

Boys and girls spent most of their free play time apart but there were similar features between the two groups: 1) Both groups used media as raw material in their play, girls in the 'mother and children play' with 'play language' and characters from literature or media (princesses, wolves and tooth fairy). The boys were inspired by the soccer culture. 2) Both of the groups often had leader roles that would initiate and/or insure progress in the play. A diplomatic role was also helpful to insure fair play and keep the group together. 3) Both boys and girls wished to have influence in the direction of the play. 4) There were negotiations in both girls and boys play groups: the children discussed the terms and conditions, the directions and the rules of the play. 5) Both groups played in both smaller and larger groups.

Boys were more explicit (emotionally and physically) in their conflict than girls, especially on the soccer field. To navigate through these processes took social competence, it was not a skill that the children possessed or not but it was something that were constantly navigated in interaction. Social competence looked different from situation to situation, and it was constantly developed through experience.

8 Discussion

8.1 Introduction

This chapter I will summarize the findings from the three analysis chapters, and the research questions. In the second part I will discuss the concept of social competence with particular focus on conflict and negotiations. I will compare social competence to using one's 'sense of direction' illustrated with a map metaphor. Further I will refer to Corsaro's (1997) research on peer cultures to discuss the role of conflict and negotiations in peer interactions.

8.2 *How does children experience starting school?*

To learn about the children's experiences of starting school I used group interviews. The children were interviewed in groups of two to four and the interviews lasted for about 15 min. We spoke about their day care experience, their friends, the structure of the day, their activities, the adults and conflict. The children spoke of their day care experience using positive terms, they shared memories of meaningful relationships and play activities. They also expressed that they had agency, with longer free play sessions available to play both inside and outside. Some spoke of stronger adult control and that it had both advantages and disadvantages. Day care was also an immature stage and there was a sense that 'we are bigger now', and that there were things that one should have learnt in day care such as remaining seated on your chair.

The children remembered their first days; a few children shared that they were shy the first days, and that it was a bit scary to not know many people. After a period of two months the children expressed that it was better, because they knew more people, and the facilities. When comparing day care and school, the children expressed that they associated day care with play and school with homework. However they also associated school with play. Meaningful relationships and play activities were important components in their daily lives. From observation I learned that the older children welcomed the children, and they frequently interacted with them, especially the sponsors. Many children appreciated having a sponsor to play with in the breaks.

8.3 How do they construct social rules and friendships?

Most of what I learned about the children's understanding of social rules I learned through observing the children but we also talked about it in the interviews.

The teacher introduced social rules to the children as situations occurred, that needed to be addresses. The children valued the YES and STOP rule and the flexibility rule. They applied the rules in their interactions. The children worked with, and around, the rules as it suited their personal interests. Sometimes the children had to chose between conflicting values: the wish to protect the play from intruders (Corsaro, 1997) and the wish to have an including culture in school. It was especially best friends that excluded others from their play, but also in soccer play.

I talked to the children about friendship, how to make friends, friendly and unfriendly behavior and conflict. The children explained in order to become friends it is necessary to share space (to meet), interests and understanding of social rules. In response to the question of why it was important to make friends children answers can be summarized in the notion that they preferred 'being together' more than 'being alone', and most activities were more meaningful when shared. This value was also strong when the children made compromises and solved conflicts: one valued the play or the 'we-ness' experience more highly than having the control of the play. Social competence in friends making could look like: *Not giving up on finding a friend*, to keep trying to be accepted into plays and contribute to the progression of the play.

8.4 What are features of boys and girls interaction and play?

Both girls and boys initiated cross-gender interaction inside and outside of the classroom. Inside the classroom the gender barrier was smaller as the children cooperated in schoolwork and in team activities. Outside boys and girls participated in kiss chasing but also play that were not 'romantically motivated'. The boys occupied the soccer area while the girls played everywhere else. The sand pit, monkey bars and jump rope were gender-neutral areas of the schoolyard. When boys and girls interacted and played together they negotiated the understanding of rough play, as the girls preferred less rough play. When the play progressed to be too rough, the girls usually ended the play. These situations could be prevented if the children learned each other's boundaries did not overstep them.

The children had their own special play culture; they would use media as raw material for their play and construct their own play routines. Social competence could look like practicing the 'play skill' and be so good that one could improvise (Mouritsen, 2002:24). In conflict and negotiations social competence was a constantly negotiated dynamic where the children used the cultural and social resources available to pursue personal interests. To display social competence can also be compared to agency: that children are actors that makes things happen that the children actively participated in the interactions and play to gain control over own life and share the control with others (Corsaro, 1997).

I will now continue to discuss the concept of social competence going back to the definitions from Ogden (2009) and Hutchby & Moran-Ellis. I will also discuss the role of social competence in conflict and negotiation situations.

8.5 Social competence, to never give up?

In order to discuss the children's social competence I will compare some situations from the fieldwork that in my view displayed varying degree of social competence. I will engage with Corsaro's studies on the role of conflict in peer culture (Corsaro, 1997).

Terje Ogden's (2001) definition portrays social competence as skills that are developed individually as characteristics that children possess to a varying degree. The characteristics are more or less stable; a socially competent person takes his/her personal skills in any and every situation. Ogden's personal skills fits well to the children description of a friendly person, and I think many would like to have a friend that exhibit these characteristics. Many children showed these characteristics on a number of occasions, but it was not constant. It is not like tying ones shoelaces, another skill that the children developed around the same time, when you know it you can tie any pair of shoes and you will never forget how.

In some situations the children were uncaring, bossy, conforming and not sticking to the rules. The children were surrounded with adults who did not act socially competent at all times. I find that this definition does not capture the children's social competence, because social competence might look different in different situations, especially in

conflicts and negotiations.

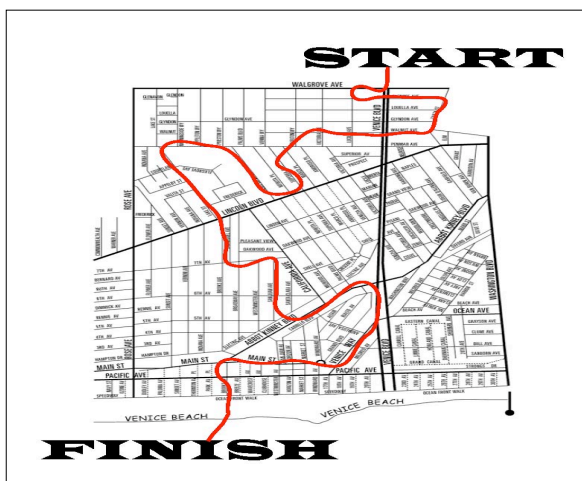
Hutchby & Moran-Ellis deny that social competence is a unitary phenomenon. It can look different from situation to situation; it is not a property of individuals. (Hutchby & Moran-Ellis, 1998:16). The authors explain:

“The Possession/ Display of social competence is something that is established in situ, for this particular here- and- now occasion; and competence, its possession or the lack of it, is something that children themselves negotiate, argue about and struggle over in local occasions of activity, rather than being a function of the attainment of some specific stage of a development” (Hutchby & Moran-Ellis, 1998:16).

This view is closer to the view of children as active participants in their own lives. It accounts for the complexity of the children's social relationship. It is also a more positive view of children because it displays social competence as something the children can practice and negotiate. When they are pushed beyond their boundaries, when they are dealt bad cards such as being chosen last in the soccer play.

The authors further argues that social competence is a contextual matter as one is manipulating the culturally available resources to manage the trajectories of interaction and the social impact of others actions in the setting (Hutchby & Moran-Ellis, 1998).

8.6 The map metaphor



When trying to make sense of this I started to think of social competence as having a 'sense of direction. When finding the school for the first time I looked it up on Google Maps to get directions, the streets, turns and roads I should take to get to my destination. As I walked I got lost when taking a wrong turn, then the rest of the direction made no sense either, I was lost. From the map I remembered a couple of

milestones, a house of a friend used to live, a 7-Eleven and a school. Knowing these things, I had a sense of where I was that I could navigate in the right direction. As I got closer I asked someone about the school, they gave me further directions and then I reached my destination. As I walked these streets every day it became easier I even found short cuts that made the walk shorter.

Social competence can be likened to using one's 'sense of direction'. The children have certain personal interests: it might be to be included in a certain group, find a best friend, play a special role, get respect or maintain a relationship. When I asked the children in the interview about how to make friends, they answered: *You have to ask someone if you can join and then, after playing for a while, you will be friends.* They told me friendly and unfriendly behavior and how to solve conflicts. The children had their map of directions, and their desired outcomes, as they started the journey from A to B. But just as I did the play or interaction took a wrong turn and they got lost. Someone was mean, one was excluded from play, a major conflict happened or one was denied the leader role one wanted. One might have been so secure in day care, and then everything changed.

Luckily the children have experience from social interaction and they have been through processes before. Even though it was a new map- a new culture they might have some milestones that could help them find the direction. The milestones were the social rules and understandings and the social experience they brought with them. The children could keep trying new 'streets' strategies, to try to find the milestones and they could ask adults for direction and eventually they might reach the destination. When walking the same route next time the children have experience so it is easier because they know the route, and one would come up with new personal interests, new destinations to reach.

8.7 Social competence in conflict

Conflict often started when the children's personal interests collided or when someone did not follow the social rules. Perhaps a personal boundary is crossed; these could be heated situations involving strong emotions. In these instances we see how social competence is a constantly negotiated dynamic, which can be stabilized in situated activities. I would like to show two situations to discuss further.

The first example is from Day 15 (page 96) with the boys who was excluded from the

soccer play, he was not picked two times and when he asked Simon if he could join he got a 'no'. He asked me for help and I tried to encourage him to go back on the field and keep trying but he had given up.

The boy's personal interest (destination) was to be an active part of the soccer play but he got 'lost' as Simon excluded him from the play. He had to choose a strategy for joining the play. The boy tried a few things, first he asked Simon and then me but then he gave up. He lost his sense of direction. This was not the only time he was ranked lowly by the others. Knowing the YES rule (directions) did not help him because he had lost his sense of direction so he gave up. A key line was: *They don't want me to join.* This mattered more to him than his wish to play. Having this experience he might try different strategies the next time. He can potentially use the experience to develop a more socially competent strategy. According to the children the best strategy was to: *Never give up finding a friend (or group).*

The other example is the Lego play on Day 15 (page 101). The conflict started when Simon took a Lego piece from Sebastian. Sebastian responded by trying to get the piece back by asking and then using physical strength. He also asked for my support. Simon threatened to hit Sebastian who responded by saying that Simon was not welcome in his birthday party. Simon threatened to hit him again and also used the 'strong dad' argument. Sebastian referred to social rules, which Simon was not allowed to hit him.

There are similarities between these two situations. Both are having a conflict with Simon, they are feeling unfairly treated, being humiliated amongst peers. Sebastian displays more social competence because he does not give up, he keeps trying new strategies. And it is effective to the extent that he defends 'his ground'. Sebastian was quite experienced in 'conflict management' as he and Simon have been in similar situations a number of times.

I cannot predict the future but the change that Sebastian has gone through, from being perceived as the small and weak boy, to increasingly resisting Simon's treatment, might lead to less conflict and to Sebastian changing his role and position in the peer group. He and Simon might not become best friends, but they might come to some kind of shared understanding so that at least they don't bother each other. How did the change happen? Sebastian got help from Elizabeth, and other adults and Simon was well when he asked

for it. Sebastian also had meaningful play-activities together with other boys; he learned from experience, and did not give up.

8.8 The role of conflict in peer cultures

In his book: *The Sociology of Childhood* (1997) Corsaro refers to several of his own studies on the topic of peer culture in Italian and American preschools.

Corsaro did a comparative study on the role of conflict in three different settings: An Italian Scuola Materna (preschool), an American Head Start program in a lower economic area and an American middle- class private preschool. Corsaro describes the role of conflict in these three cultures.

8.8.1 The Italian school

The Italian children frequently participated in something called *discussione*, defined as:

“High styled and dramatic public debates in peer interaction. Such debates are highly communal activities in which the children addresses concerns that are important to them and, in process, develop a shared sense of control over their social world” (Corsaro, 1997:160).

8.8.2 The African American preschool

These children were often engaged in oppositional talk, where children would playfully tease and challenge each other in peer play. The function of this activity was: “ 1) That a particular child can hold his or her own ground, and 2) that participation oppositional talk signifies allegiance to the values and concerns of the peer culture. “There were much conflict, opposition and debate in the children's interaction. Yet a general group ethos existed in which the children competed individually to collaborate collectively (Corsaro & Maynard, 1996). In these groups there was less exclusion of particular children and they also complained less to the teachers about hurt feelings (In: Corsaro, 1997:160). This collective collaboration was similar to the Italian context where the group developed a shared sense of their social world.

8.8.3 The upper-middle-class American private preschool

Corsaro explained that this culture values individual expression and a recognition of the uniqueness and rights of others (Corsaro, 1997:159). He refers to a study by the teacher Vivienne Paley who introduced the social rule: *You can't say: you can't play*. In a middle-class American school. When the rule was first introduced many of the children protested because they wanted to choose whom to play with. The children who were often excluded appreciated the rule. Instead of seeing exclusion as a group's need to protect interactive space Paley saw it as examples of rejection and considered it hurtful. The rule achieved its purpose as fewer children were excluded from play (Corsaro, 1997:161).

When comparing the middle-class white American school to the Italian and African-American schools these children took conflict much more seriously:

“Disputes were much more emotionally intense and were often related to attempts to control the behavior of other children they saw as friends. The function of conflict was contributing to the social organization of peer groups, the reaffirmation of cultural values, and the individual development and display of self” (Corsaro, 1997:161).

8.8.4 Discussion

The Upper-middle-class American context is the peer culture that reminded me the most of my school. The YES rule is the same as the 'You can't say: you can't play' rule. The rule emphasizes individual rights before protecting the groups desire to protect the activity from intruders. The flexibility rule takes the focus away from the individual rights to collective rights.

In my study, the participants involved the teachers in their conflicts often. I realized this as I observed the children during the breaks. Sometimes the teachers took a while to come outside in the break and I was one of few adults outside in the big schoolyard. I noticed that many children of all ages, came to me for support: in arguments, when they were hurt, unfairly treated, bored and didn't know what to do. It seemed like the children were often 'adult dependent' in their interaction. Corsaro argues that: “Peer relations are in many ways a reflection of the values and practices of the local and more general communities and cultures in which they emerge” (Corsaro: 1997:149).

From a cultural perspective our school system is built upon equality, that all children should have the same rights to education, and that education is a tool towards social cohesion. The teacher should adapt the teaching to meet the needs of the student. The principal of equality is reflected in the YES- rule, that everyone has the right to be included. My observations show that the rule challenged the children's need to protect their play from intruders.

It is interesting that the conflicts were more emotionally intense in the middle-class white American school where they focused on social exclusion and conflict. In the Italian and the African American schools with oppositional talk and discussions there was less exclusion of particular children and fewer complaints to the adults about hurt feelings. It seems in these schools children had more agency in solving their own conflicts whereas the Middle-class American children depended on the adults much more when faced with conflicts.

In my study I saw both and, the children involved the teachers often. Being a teacher outside was a busy job because one was constantly approached by students to solve all kinds of issues from injuries, to conflicts to boredom. In a transition phase children naturally depend more on adults, but older children also sought after adults. Involving the adults indicated that the children trusted them, but a disadvantage might be that the children rely on the adults' social competence and power instead of practicing their own. Only further studies would tell us whether or not the children grew more independent from the adults as time passed and their social relationships became more established.

8.8.5 From: *They do not want me there.. To: Who are you to say I, or anyone is not to play in this!*

Corsaro argues that even if the 'you can't say: you can't play'-rule was effective and achieved its purpose, it takes more than adult-implemented social rules to create a group ethos: that the children competed individually to collaborate collectively like they did in the African American preschool. Or in the Italian preschool where they used discussions to develop a shared sense of their social world.

Corsaro uses an example from the Italian context; in a *discussione*, a girl named Sara attempts to exclude a boy, Franco, from the activity but Franco does not accept this and argues back: “Who are you to say I or anyone is not to play in this!” (Corsaro, 1997:160). The boy displays social competence by speaking up and resisting the exclusion. He is accepted in the play and the situation does not evolve into a more intense conflict.

8.8.6 Protecting collective rights

I tried to find signs of a developing group ethos in my field-notes and I found some examples.

In an interview Jamie explains about unfriendly behavior: *If one is rude, if he wants to be in the group but he pushes people, hitting or kicking then they don't want him in the group.* If the children's behavior deviates too much from the shared social understandings then she/he is not wanted in the group.

Tommy shows group ethos in a Hangman sequence on Day 16, when Elizabeth challenged them saying: *I'm going to find a word so difficult that you will never guess it!* Tommy responds: *We can do anything!* (Vi kan klare alt vi!) In reading Tommy had more confidence as a part of a group than as an individual. The children expressed that they preferred 'being together' more than 'being alone'. This was a collective social understanding and can explain why the children sometimes promoted collective group rights over the individual rights. The collective rights being the progression of the play. And the individual rights being the YES rule or the individual child's interests.

9 Concluding remarks

9.1 What did I learn from my own study?

From the beginning my overall goal was to learn to do research with children. I wanted to explore the methods and see how involved I was able to be in the children's world. I wanted to learn to talk with children in a way that they felt free to express themselves. And I wanted to try a new role, the least adult role; that the children would teach me and not the other way around. These goals made me interested in the children's everyday lives. I wanted everything to be as ordinary as possible, to remove things that complicated the research process. Therefore I chose Norwegian children, so I would understand their language and background, and ordinary context: school. I did not have a special group of children in mind, just ordinary children. I considered following a group of children from day care to school but the formalities and logistics would complicate the process and potentially take the focus away from the research process.

9.2 Good and bad

I am happy about the access process and the relationship I had to the school. After doing participant observation I share the view that it is a good method for child research. I am glad I spent two months doing fieldwork because it gave me the time I needed to get into the culture and to do group interviews in two series. With the group interviews I have both good and bad experience, as I wrote about in the method chapter. I learned a lot from the process of failing (asking too difficult questions, giving tasks that the children did not understand, and talking about abstract processes the children did not relate to). However, when I transcribed the interviews and organized the data into topics I found that the data were rich and that I could use much of it.

Having a broad focus (the transition and the social interaction and school work) made the process of organizing the analysis difficult. I felt that I had a bit of everything. To decide on what to analyze and how to organize it was hard. However, I am glad I kept the broad focus, that I did not only look one certain thing, this was how I came to the gender factor and social competence concept.

9.3 What did I find particularly interesting?

I think the children negotiating social competence were very interesting. To learn about

play dynamics; how the children developed and organized their play. I enjoyed watching the children helping each other and learning together. I also found the boy and girl interaction interesting, how the children were doing gender (Thorne, 1993). The children's construction of friendship and reconstruction of social rules were also fascinating.

9.4 Limitations and further research

I still wonder what I missed by not observing the children in the SFO, as they had so much time for free play there, and the Year 1 students were mixed together. I also think it could have been beneficial to get informed consent from all the Year 1 student even if I only observed one group, as the children played across the groups all the time. I also wish that I would have asked for permission to take pictures, there were so many situations that I would have love to have on tape. To include pictures would have complicated the process though, because I would need permission from NSD, and all the children at the school.

I did choose a homogeneous group (in ethnically and culturally), it was not on purpose as there was only two schools one who wanted to participate in the study. One can only assume that the children's interaction would look different among a more heterogeneous group of children. I have focused on conflict and this would be interesting to research further in a heterogeneous group. Maybe my study portrays children's interaction 'too perfect' and far away from the reality of most Norwegian schools. It would be good to do a comparative study in a different school, but the same time period, topic and methods. Then I could compare the children's experiences. Another idea would be to follow the participants over a longer period of time that I would do a new fieldwork period in the spring semester to look for change. I believe children's interaction and play are important topics to investigate, how the children experience the social aspect of school probably has a lot to say for their learning. To do research that focus on the children as competent social actors with complex social worlds is important. Often we problematize childhood, one can just read the newspapers and see that most often when children are mentioned it put children and childhood in a negative light: bullying, child abuse and murder, kidnapping, child obesity, problematic child rearing and more.

10 Literature list

- Atkinson, P., Hammersley, M. (1994) *Ethnography and Participant Observation*, Handbook of Qualitative Research.
Retrieved from:
<http://hevra.haifa.ac.il/~soc/lecturers/sgooldin/files/6461181041799.pdf>
- Barne- og Familiedepartementet (1995) *Rammeplan for barnehager- En kortfattet presentasjon* [Guidelines and brochures for parents]
- Berentzen, S. (ed.) (1989) *Ethnographic Approaches to Children's worlds and peer cultures*. Report no. 15. Trondheim: The Norwegian Centre for Child Research.
- Christensen, P. (2004) Children's Participation in Ethnographic Research: Issues of Power and Representation, *Children & Society*, 18, pp. 165-176
Published online in Wiley InterScience (www.interscience.wiley.com)
DOI: 10.1002/ CHI.823
- Clark, A. & Moss, P. (2005) *Spaces to Play. More listening to young children using the Mosaic approach*. London: National Children's Bureau
- Corsaro, W. A. (2009) Peer Culture. Ch. 20. Pp. 301-315. In: Qvortrup, J., Corsaro, W. A., Honig, M.S. (eds.) *The Palgrave Handbook of Childhood Studies*. London: Palgrave
- Corsaro, W. A (2005) Sharing and Control in Initial Peer Cultures, Thousand Oaks, US: Sage. Ch. 7. Pp. 133-160, In: *The Sociology of childhood*. Second edition. Thousand Oaks, London, New Delhi: Sage
- Corsaro, W. A (1997) *The Sociology of Childhood*. USA: Pine Forge Press
- Ennew, J. Abebe, T., Bangyai, R., Karapituck, P., Kjørholt, A. T., Noonsup, T. (2009) *Knowing children. The right to be properly researched*. Bangkok, Thailand: Black on White Publications
- Hardman, C. (2001) Can there be Anthropology of Children? *Childhood*, 2001 8
Retrieved from: <http://chd.sagepub.com/content/8/4/501>
- Hutchby, I. & Moran- Ellis, J. (1998) *Children and Social Competence. Areas of action*. Ch. 1: Situating Children's Social Competence. USA: Routledge Falmer
- Gudmundsdottir, S. (1992) Den Kvalitative Forskningsprosessen, *Norsk pedagogisk tidsskrift*, 5, pp. 266- 276
- James, A. (2009) Agency. Ch 2, pp. 34-45. In: Qvortrup, J., Corsaro, W. A. & Honig, M.S. Eds. *The Palgrave Handbook of Childhood Studies*. London: Palgrave
- James, A., Jenks, C. & Prout, A. (1998) *Theorizing Childhood*. UK: Polity Press

- Jenks, C. (1996) Constituting childhood. Ch. 1. In: *Childhood*. London: Routledge,
- Korsvold, T. (2011) The Best Interest of the Child: Early Childhood Education in Norway and Sweden since 1945. In: K. Hagemann et al. (eds.): *Children, Families, and States: Time Policies of Childcare, Preschool, and Primary Education in Europe*. London & New York: Berghahn Books.
- Kvale, S. & Brinkman, S. 2009. *InterViews. Learning the Craft of Qualitative Research Interviewing*. Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications
- Kunnskapsdepartementet (2011). *Early Childhood Education and Care Policy*
Retrieved from:
<http://www.regjeringen.no/nb/dep/kd/tema/barnehager/early-childhood-education-and-care-polic.html?id=491283>. Accessed: 25.05.2012
- Kunnskapsdepartementet (2011) *The Norwegian Education System*
Retrieved from: <http://www.regjeringen.no/en/dep/kd/Selected-topics/compulsory-education/the-norwegian-education-system.html?id=445118>. Accessed: 17.11.2011
- Kunnskapsdepartementet (01.11.2011). *Barnefamilienes hverdag forandret*. Oslo: [Press release about a Day care survey] Retrieved from:
<http://www.regjeringen.no/nb/dep/kd/presesenter/pressemeldinger/2011/barnefamilienes-hverdag-forandret.html?id=661842>
- Kunnskapsdepartementet (20.08. 2010) Artikkel: *Lykke til med Leksehjelp!*
Av Kunnskapsminister Kristin Halvorsen.
Oslo: [Article about the homework tutoring] Retrieved from:
http://www.regjeringen.no/nb/dep/kd/aktuelt/taler_artikler/kunnskapsministerens-taler-og-artikler/taler-og-artikler-av-kunnskapsminister-k/2010/lykke-til-med-leksehjelp-.html?id=612678
- Kunnskapsdepartementet (2008) *Veileder: Fra Eldst til Yngst*. [Guidelines and brochures] Retrieved from:
http://www.regjeringen.no/nb/dep/kd/dok/veiledninger_brosjyrer/2008/fra-eldst-til-yngst-samarbeid-og-sammenh.html?id=517292
- Lovdata (2005) Lov om barnehager [The Day care Act]. Retrieved from:
<http://www.lovdata.no/all/tl-20050617-064-002.html#3>
- Mouritsen, F. (2002) Child Culture- Play Culture, In: Mouritsen, F. & Qvortrup J. *Childhood and Children's Culture*, University Press of Southern Denmark)
- Mouritsen, F. (1998) *Legekultur. Essays om barnekultur, leg og fortælling*. Denmark: Odense Universitetsforlag

- Nilsen, R. Dyblie (2004) Searching for Analytical Concepts in the Research Process: Learning from Children. In: The International Journal of Social Research Methodology 8(2), pp. 117- 135
- Nilsen, R. Dyblie (2002): "Sweetheart-ness" - Girls and boys doing gender in a day-care setting. Paper presented at Nordisk sociologikongress. Reykjavik, August 15-17.
- Nilsen, R. Dyblie (1990a): *Rollelekens fortelling. En kulturanalyse*. Trondheim: DMMH's publikasjonsserie nr. 3.
- NOU (2010) No.8. *Med Forskertrang og Lekelyst. Systematisk pedagogisk tilbud til alle førskole barn*. Oslo: Kunnskapsdepartementet [Green Paper on Day care Policy]
- Ogden, T. (2001) *Sosial kompetanse og problematferd i skolen. Kompetanseutviklende og problemløsende arbeid i skolen*. Kapittel 7: Sosial kompetanse hos barn og unge. Oslo: Gyldendal Norsk Forlag AS.
- Ot.prp.nr. 52 (2007-8) *Om lov om endring I barnehageloven (rett til plass i barnehage)* Oslo: Kunnskapsdepartementet [Proposition to the Storting]
- Prout, A, & James A. (1990) A new paradigm for the sociology of childhood? Provenance, promise and problems. In: James, A & Prout, A. eds. *Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood: Contemporary Issues in the Sociological Study of Childhood*. London: Falmer Press, pp. 7-31
- Qvortrup, J. (2002) Sociology of childhood: Conceptual liberation of children. , pp. 43-78 In: Mouritsen, F. & Qvortrup, J. (eds.) *Childhood and Children's Culture*. Odense: University Press of Southern Denmark
- St.meld.no. 16 (2006-7) *Ingen sto igjen. Tidlig innsats for livslang læring*. Oslo: Kunnskapsdepartementet [White Paper on School Policy]
- St.meld.no. 30 (2003-4) *Kultur for læring*. Oslo: Kunnskapsdepartementet [White Paper on School Policy]
- Statistisk Sentralbyrå (2011) Rapport no. 34: *Barnefamiliers tilsynsordninger, høsten 2010*. Moafi, H., Bjørkli, E. S. Oslo- Kongsvinger [Statistics of Norway]
- Statistisk Sentralbyrå (2005) Rapport no.10: *Han jobber, hun jobber, de jobber. Arbeidstid blandt Småbarnsforeldre*. Kitterød, R. H. Oslo-Kongsvinger: [Statistics of Norway]

Thorne, B. (1993) *Gender Play. Girls and Boys in School*. New Jersey: Rutgers University Press

Torne, B. (1990) Children and Gender: Constructions of Difference: In: Rhode, D. L. (ed.) *Theoretical Perspectives on Sexual Difference*. London: Yale University Press, pp. 100-113

United Nations' Convention on the Right of the Child:
<http://www.unicef.org/crc/files/Participation.pdf>

Woodhead, M. & Faulkner, D. (2000) Subjects, objects or participants? Dilemmas of psychological research with children? Pp. 9-31, In: Christensen, P. & James, A. (eds.) *Research with Children. Perspectives and Practices*. London: Falmer Press

Til skolen

Jeg er student ved Norsk Senter for Barneforskning ved NTNU i Trondheim, i ett program som heter Barndomsstudier.

Jeg skriver nå masteroppgave om hvordan barn opplever å begynne på skolen. Første del av prosjektet er å finne ut av hva forventninger barna har til å begynne på skolen. I den forbindelse skal jeg gjøre feltarbeid i en eller flere av barnehagene på Jørpeland. Jeg ønsker å bli kjent med de barna som begynner på skolen i august. Neste del av prosjektet er å besøke barna på skolen i august og i oktober. Målet er å finne ut mer om hvordan barna synes det er å gå på skolen, og hva som er de største forandringene i deres hverdag. Det sosiale aspektet ved overganger er veldig interessant synes jeg, om vennskap og utviklingen av klassemiljøet.

Jeg sender også med den fullstendige prosjektbeskrivelsen sånn at dere kan lese mer om prosjektets formål, metoder og tidsplan.



Etiske retningslinjer

Foreldrene av de aktuelle barna vil bli bedt om informert samtykke, i form av informasjonsbrev og underskrift. Barna vil bli spurt muntlig om samtykke. Det er helt frivillig å delta og barna kan trekke seg til ett hvert tidspunkt.

Jeg har taushetsplikt og alle deltagere og institusjoner vil være anonyme.

Jeg håper dere er positive til å delta i dette prosjektet. I følge FNs barnekonvensjon artikkel 12 har barn rett til å si sin mening i alle saker som angår det. Dette er en fin mulighet til å la barna få reflektere over sin hverdag og den store forandringen det er å begynne på skolen. Som voksne tror jeg vi har så mye å lære av å lytte til barnas tanker og opplevelser.

Ved spørsmål kan dere kontakte meg på telefon: 480 555 38, eller e-post:

kristina_fuglesten@hotmail.com

Med vennlig hilsen
Kristina Fuglesten

Om Norsk Senter for Barneforskning: <http://www.ntnu.no/barneforskning>

Om Barndomsstudier: <http://www.ntnu.edu/studies/mpchild>

Informasjon til foreldre/foresatte om feltarbeid i forbindelse med Masteroppgave

Jeg er masterstudent ved Norsk Senter for Barneforskning ved NTNU i Trondheim, som en del av det internasjonale studiet: Master of Philosophy in Childhood Studies.

I denne forbindelse skal jeg nå skrive masteroppgave om: hvordan barn opplever å begynne på skolen. Jeg vil derfor gjøre feltarbeid i klassen i perioden 22. August til 28. Oktober 2011. Jeg ønsker å informere dere som foreldre/foresatte om min tilstedeværelse i klassen og fortelle litt om hva prosjektet mitt går utpå. I tillegg vil jeg gi dere muligheten til å reservere barnet deres fra å delta i dette prosjektet.

Prosjektets formål

Jeg ønsker å finne ut mer om hvordan barn opplever overgangen fra barnehage til skole. Fra ett barns perspektiv, hva som er de største forandringene i deres hverdag. Jeg er interessert i det sosiale aspektet av overgangen, bl.a om vennskap mellom barn og utvikling av klassemiljø.

Forskningsmetoder

Metodene jeg planlegger å bruke er deltagende observasjon der jeg følger elevene i deres skolehverdag; leke med dem ute i friminuttet, lytte og spørre spørsmål, og observere hvordan barna relaterer til hverandre og til lærerne.

Jeg vil i tillegg gjennomføre fokusgruppe diskusjoner (små grupper med barn fra klassen) ved slutten av perioden der vi snakker om hverdagen på skolen, forskjellen mellom skole og barnehage, og om vennskap.

Etikk

Alle deltagere og skolen vil bli anonymisert i den ferdige masteroppgaven. Det er helt frivillig å delta i fokusgruppe diskusjonene, barna vil bli spurt om muntlig samtykke og informert om at det er lov å trekke seg til en hver tid. Om barnet velger å trekke seg vil alt data som er samlet inn fra dem bli slettet. Jeg vil ikke samle inn noen personlige opplysninger om barna.

Jeg håper at dere ønsker at deres barn skal delta i dette prosjektet, jeg tror det kan bidra til mer kunnskap om hvordan barn opplever sin egen hverdag.

Om du/ dere ikke ønsker at deres barn skal delta gir jeg du/dere nå muligheten til å reservere deres barn fra deltakelse i prosjektet.

Har du spørsmål kan du ta kontakt på telefon 480 555 38, eller e-post:

kristina_fuglesten@hotmail.com.

Med vennlig hilsen Kristina Fuglesten

Slipp leveres til klassestyrer

Jeg/ vi ønsker **ikke** at vårt barn deltar i dette prosjektet

Barnets navn

Foresattes navn

Sted og dato