

# **Child Perspectives and Children's Perspectives – a Concern for Teachers in Preschool**

*Susanne Thulin and Agneta Jonsson*

The aim of this article is to study and problematize the importance of the communicative approach of teachers related to child perspectives and children's perspectives as well as the meaning for children's learning. The article is based on empirical material from two observational studies of preschool teachers at two Swedish preschools, children aged between 1 and 6. One theoretical basis of this article is that teachers not only ought to observe the understanding children are carriers of. Teachers also have to make use of the understanding in the continuing learning process to be able to support children's learning. Children need to be given the opportunity to be aware of and experience how their own understanding can be linked to new experiences. The results reveal qualitatively distinct communicative approaches with regard to how teachers verbally engage in and make use of what children are occupied with. The discussion relates this to child perspectives combined with children's perspectives as a didactic basis.

Keywords: child perspectives, children's perspectives, early childhood education, learning, preschool teacher

Susanne Thulin, Senior lecturer, Kristianstad University.  
*susanne.thulin@hkr.se*

Agneta Jonsson, Senior lecturer, Kristianstad University.  
*agneta.jonsson@hkr.se*

## Introduction

The aim of this article is to study and problematize the importance of the communicative approach of teachers<sup>1</sup> related to child perspectives and children's perspectives and what this would mean for children's learning. The research question is formulated as what characterizes teacher's communicative approaches in some learning situations in preschool?

The concepts child perspectives and children's perspective are often brought to light as two different ways of expressing a view on children. Trondman (2011) writes that both are necessary and legitimate and claims that there is a kind of relation between the concepts. When different aspects of content have been given a prominent position in Swedish preschool activities, the prerequisite for children's learning are also newly updated (Ministry of Education and Science, 2010). All learning is always related to a certain content (Marton & Booth, 1997) and in this article we use excerpts where science is in focus for the communication. The intention here however, is not to discuss science explicitly. Our main focus is rather to highlight the teacher's communicative approach irrespective of content.

Making use of the interests and experiences of children has been emphasized as an important didactic basis throughout the history of the Swedish preschool (Tallberg Broman, 1995; Vallberg Roth, 2011). This is also the case in modern research about young children's learning. How children interpret and understand something depends on the experiences that a specific child brings with him/her into the situation and how they are put in relation to the prevailing whole. These experiences serve as the backdrop for experiencing new impressions and how those impressions get their meaning for the child (Pramling Samuelsson & Asplund Carlsson, 2008). An assumption can then be made that this basis means that teachers in their encounters with children cannot take for granted that the individual child will perceive a content or what is happening in the same way as other children in the group or as the teacher. The main point, as we understand it, is that, if teachers are to be able to support children's learning, then they should not only observe the understanding children constantly develop, but also make use of it in the continuing learning process. Children need to be enabled to be aware of and experience how their own understanding can be linked to new experiences. In this article, such a basis for children's learning is also our common basis. A child perspective and children's perspectives (Sommer, Pramling

---

<sup>1</sup> Teachers and preschool teachers are used synonymously in this article.

Samuelsson, & Hundeide, 2010) stand out as key concepts for preschool staff to align with. Perhaps one might say that understanding of children's perspectives has increased as a result of research revealing what children express (Johansson, 2011; Lindahl, 1995; Pramling Samuelsson & Asplund Carlsson, 2008), which also affects the way of looking at children's abilities.

The introduction of this article is followed below by previous research related to the learning of children in preschool and the importance of the teacher for children's learning. This is then followed by theoretical basis and the study's design, analysis and results. In summary, the conclusions of the study are discussed related to the field of research.

## **Previous research**

The concepts of child perspectives and children's perspectives are here seen as being related to (1) children's learning possibilities in preschool and (2) how adults engage and allow children's mode of expression to influence what is communicated. This section provides examples of what has been found in research concerning the views of children's abilities and concerning the importance, knowledge and responsibility of the teacher with regard to supporting and challenging children's learning.

## **Children's abilities and learning seen from the perspective of a researcher**

The learning that children constantly develop can be supported and utilized in different ways. For example, children's abilities become visible both in cases for children as individuals and when, as in Corsaro's studies, (Corsaro, 2003) they create play worlds together with others where the capacity for reciprocity and a shared interest focus is shown.

How children's own voices are heard and used in preschool's pedagogical activities can be seen as being dependent on what child perspective teachers are carriers of. In modern research (Berthelsen & Brownlee, 2005; Eriksen Ødegaard, 2007; Johansson, 2011; Pramling Samuelsson & Asplund Carlsson, 2008) on children's learning, revealing and making use of children's perspectives is emphasized as a prerequisite for learning and as a leading element in the communication established between the teacher and the child. Children are seen as the subject of their own learning and the mode of expression and experiences of individual children are taken into account (Pramling Samuelsson & Sheridan, 2003). A child perspective of this type includes an attempt to see the world the way children do - a prerequisite for

being able to didactically meet and observe children's learning potential by interpreting the meaning children give to different situations.

A study on how and in what situations children involve teachers in play and learning (Pramling Samuelsson & Johansson, 2009) indicates that the youngest children do this to a greater degree than older preschool children. The youngest invite teachers to participate in creative and playful conversations more often. One explanation for this is that teachers, at least in groups of young children, spend more time on the floor close to the children. These teachers are therefore physically closer and easier to communicate with, as opposed to teachers that work with older children (ibid.). Bjervås' study (2011) shows that the way teachers talk about children in pedagogical documentation can be seen from the perspective of the theoretical figure "child as a person" and "child as a position" (ibid., pg. 154). Child as a person is used for children with a coherent identity and is associated with the inherent abilities of children, while child as a position is about possible subject positions that can be limited or seen as a resource depending on the context created. Thulin's results (2010) show how scientific content is handled in a preschool context with children between the ages of 3 and 5. This study focuses on children's questions where children show great interest in the current content by asking their own questions and where their interest also increases over time. It can be understood as that children's exploration need to be given time, both by getting to go in-depth in a given situation and by taking up content that recurs and is deliberately linked to past experiences with the help of the teacher's active approach.

### **The importance, competence and responsibility of the teacher**

A recent report about evidence in preschool education shows that "Children benefit most when teachers engage in stimulating interactions that support learning *and* are emotionally supportive. Interactions that help children acquire new knowledge and skills provide input to children, elicit verbal responses and reactions from them, and foster engagement in and enjoyment of learning" (Yoshikawa et al., 2013, p. 1). As we understand it this report shows evidence for the teacher's important role supporting children's learning. Further, a large-scale longitudinal study (Sylva, Melhuish, Sammons, Siraj-Blatchford, & Taggart, 2010) shows results from British conditions related to the learning of younger children, which includes children aged between 3 and 11 in preschools and schools. With regard to the preschool

activities, the study demonstrates the crucial importance of the teacher for quality aspects. A conscious balance between structured and freer activities was one of the differences between preschools with high quality and preschools with mediocre quality. Other differences appeared in terms of more active teaching and that the content issues in high-quality preschools are more often connected to the curriculum content, such as communication, literacy and understanding of the world around us. This means better cognitive and language pre-conditions for children's learning than at the preschools that were categorized as mediocre (*ibid.*). These results are in line with a study where preschool quality is revealed and discussed from the perspective of separate dimensions and that the competence of the teacher is crucial for how structural factors as well as content dimensions are handled in the activities (Sheridan, 2001; Sheridan, Williams, Sandberg, & Vuorinen, 2011). An overview of knowledge (Skolverket, 2010) about learning in preschool and in the early years of regular school points out that there is a consensus in the research about the importance of the staff's competence and the interaction between child and adult.

A Swedish cross-sectional study (Sheridan, Pramling Samuelsson, & Johansson, 2009) highlights the learning environments in preschool related to children's knowledge and how children experience different aspects of content. Teachers participated in the study both as informants and as participants in the collection of other empirical data to a certain degree. The results show that, when a teacher with the ability to develop high-quality activities, the quality in the communication and interaction is prominent in both everyday contexts and with regard to more specific content aspects. This general image from the cross-sectional study also includes teachers that exhibit less knowledge, which in turn leads to lower quality activities. The study emphasizes the teacher's pedagogical awareness. How the teacher's view of knowledge and view of learning is expressed can be seen as a key factor for what forms a boundary between high-quality and low-quality preschools (*ibid.*). The communicative approach of teachers together with children is an example of a context where pedagogical awareness gets its meaning. Teachers' contribution to and responsibility for the communication with children in preschool has in that way a central role (Jonsson, 2013; Snow, 2000). As pointed out by (Johansson, 2011), communication is not just about who is communicating, but also how the content in the communication is received, interpreted and responded to. Our point of departure is that a teacher's child

perspective is of importance for how the learning environment is established in preschool.

### **Theoretical basis**

The concepts child perspective and children's perspectives are found in both ideological and methodological discussions, (Halldén, 2007). Halldén describes the distinction between a child perspective and children's perspective using the question of *who* is formulating the perspective; if it is someone representing the child or if it is the child himself/herself that has a say. A child perspective means showing understanding for the conditions of children and acting in the best interests of children, while children's perspectives means that children make their own contributions that are taken into account and made use of by an adult (*ibid.*). The concept child perspective can therefore be understood as it is children's opinions interpreted by adults and, where children's perspectives are referred to, children's own voices are emphasized and sought.

One basis for a child perspective expressed in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNICEF, 2009) is that children have the same right as every adult to be heard and to feel that they are involved. In the preschool curriculum (Ministry of Education and Science, 2010), an example of this is formulated as "Children in the preschool should meet adults who see the potential in each child and who involve themselves in interactions with the individual child and the group of children as a whole." (*ibid.* p. 5). Our interpretation of this citation is that children in preschool should be able to have a say, be involved in conversations and communication and be able to have an impact on day-to-day life in preschool.

With reference to a sociocultural perspective on learning, human actions are situated in social practices (Rogoff, 2003; Säljö, 2000). From this perspective also communication and interaction are seen as social practice and verbal speech as a discursive tool/artefact (Linell, 1982; Säljö, 2001). Learning can be understood as an ability to take part of and communicate in the prevailing practice. The learning environment that is created in preschool, the view of children that exists, and the communication patterns used setting up the boundaries of what constitutes a specific learning or teaching area thus also influence children's perceptions of the content in focus (*ibid.*).

Hundeide (2003) states that all of us – adults, educators or a specific teacher in preschool – are carriers of different taken-for-granted ideas about how to define a "good" childhood or a "good" preschool. These taken-for-

granted ideas are the basis for how children are viewed and what is in the best interests of children. For example how teachers communicate with children and how they set up learning environment in preschool. You could convey this by saying that teachers are carriers of different ideas about what would be a “good perspective” on children. These ideas form filters of interpretation for what constitutes the child perspective in actual practice, at the individual preschool and for the individual preschool teacher. We assume that these ideas also are the ideas that become filters of interpretation for how teachers put the preschool curriculum into practice, in other words, for how a child perspective of the curriculum is being expressed in actual encounters with the children. Preschool teachers can therefore also be seen as playing critical roles in implementing the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNICEF, 2009), and more specifically, the preschool curriculum (Ministry of Education and Science, 2010) in the sense that the task may be subject to different interpretations and understandings.

In this article, we use the concepts child perspectives and children's perspectives to get a view of and base an argument on the approach of teachers in potential learning situations in preschool. We choose to understand the definition child perspective as adults' interpretations of what can be seen as in the best interests of children, which does not mean *per se* that children's voices are expressed or taken into account. Children's perspectives is here used in the sense that children's own experiences and modes of expression are listened to and taken into account (Sommer et al., 2010). Our standpoint is that it would be useful to study and problematize the distinction between the concepts in preschool activities but also turn the attention towards the consequences of the one on the other.

## **Method and analysis**

The empirical basis in this study consists of material collected in conjunction with two previous qualitative studies (Jonsson & Williams, 2012; Thulin, 2006). A qualitative method can be used to capture a view of constantly changing social reality (Bryman, 2002). The basis consists of video observations of activities where children and teachers communicate about certain content in two different preschools. The video observation from Preschool One comprises children aged one to three and one teacher (Jonsson & Williams, 2012). In Preschool Two it comprises children aged three to six and three teachers (Thulin, 2006). A strive to follow good research practice

(Research Council, 2011) has been a point of departure before, during and after our contacts with preschools, staff and children.

The video observations are transcribed to text with a focus on the verbal conversations that occur between the children and the teacher. The transcripts in the next phase have been analysed in terms of the teachers' qualitatively distinct communicative approaches in the respective conversational situation (Bryman, 2002).

In all excerpts it became visible that the teacher asks for the children's opinions and experiences, but differences can be found in the way the teacher responds and make use of the children's perspectives. Two categories of the teachers' communicative approaches were able to be distinguished (Bryman, 2002). Each category represents a qualitatively specific approach. Category I is called *Meet and respond* and Category II *Respond and consider*. The communicative approach attributed to Category I *Meet and respond* is characterized by a teacher dominated communication. It is the teacher who sets the framework for the communication. The teacher responds to the children's expressions but do not wait for any answers. The communication is rather a kind of confirmation than an interaction around a content. Excerpts belonging to this category also show that the teacher has an own agenda and are not responsive to the children's perspective. Further, a more detailed analysis of the excerpts shows that two sub-categories could be distinguished. The sub-categories distinguished in Category I are: (i) *Addressing everyone* and (ii) *Steer in the right direction* and indicate the specific orientation the teacher has when responding to children's expressions within the category. In Addressing everyone the teacher is orientated to include everyone but the communication is fragmentary without mutual dialogue. In the subcategory Steer in the right direction the communication is characterized by the teacher's own perspective, searching for a specific answer from the *child*. The communicative approach that is common for the excerpts in Category II *Respond and consider* is characterized by a mutual teacher - child dialogue. By linking the verbal conversation to the child's perspective - to previous experiences or opinions - the teacher makes the child confirm or develop their arguments. Within a deeper analyze two sub-categories also can be distinguished within the scope of Category II (i) *Expand and go in-depth* and (ii) *Directing attention*. Excerpts belonging to sub-category Expand and go in-depth show how the teacher relates to children's experiences and combines verbal communication with other modes of expressions. The common communicative approach for the excerpts in sub-

category Directing attention shows how the teacher confirm children's experiences and makes efforts to direct their attention to the specific content in focus.

### **Method reflections**

In this study we use a qualitative approach where the video observations meant options to consider when processing data. The qualitative approach was chosen as a way of studying preschool contexts in which verbal communication took place, but can, of course, be criticized for not being described sufficiently detailed and transparent. Thus, being aware of these conditions during the process has meant that efforts have been made to show trustworthy and reliable results (Bryman, 2002).

### **Paths to educational encounters**

Category I *Meet and respond*, and its sub-categories, Addressing everyone and Steer in the right direction, will be presented as follows. Category II *Respond and consider* and its sub-categories, Expand and go in-depth and Direct attention, are then presented. An example from a conversation between children and a teacher will be given in conjunction with each sub-category. The excerpts are intended to illustrate the specifics of how the teacher responds to children's expressions that is representative of each category. The presentation of the different categories is concluded with an analysis and reflection in relation to children's learning and to how child perspective respectively children's perspective has been made visible in the category. The main category with its sub-categories will be headings.

### **Category I Meet and respond**

In the example below, the teacher is sitting in the sandbox with five children between the ages of one and three. The children are sitting or standing around the teacher. The material available consists of sand moulds, spades and buckets. The teacher holds a sand mould and a spade.

#### ***Sub category (i) Addressing everyone***

Excerpt 1

Teacher: Bang hard now. You have to pack it hard. Bang hard. Bang, bang, bang, bang. (The teacher does this as it is being said.)  
Teacher: There! Do you think it's done now?

Children: Yes.

Teacher Where do you want to put the octopus? (Picks up the mould and looks at each of the children.)

Algott: There! (Algott points).

Teacher: OK! 1, 2, 3. (Says this at the same time as she turns the bucket upside down. Five children watch.)

Teacher: Do you think any eyes and mouth were made? (Looks at the children around her.)

An older child comes forward and looks

Teacher: Hey, hey, how are you doing today? (Turns toward him.)

Teacher: Fine? What?

Hannes: We are working over there. (Points.)

Teacher: Are you working over there?

One child squishes the sand shape.

Teacher: Now it broke, didn't it? (Pretend disappointed voice, looks at each one of the children in the sandbox.)

### **Analysis and reflection**

The teacher in the example makes sand shapes while the children watch and can be perceived to have a demonstrative role. The nine statements that can be attributed to the teacher contain eight questions which require short, simple responses. One or more of the children comment on the teacher's statement, which guides the teacher's continuing behaviour. The activity is interrupted when the teacher turns to another child that is walking by, but is resumed by the teacher who, with a playful voice, feigns disappointment over the sand shape being flattened. A child perspective can be considered to be visible in the sense that the teacher describes with simple words what she is doing at the same time she is doing it in front of the children, while she simultaneously implies a playful attitude. The teacher meets the children with glances and questions and at the same time is aware of the ones around her and invites them to participate in communication. The children's own perspectives involving the sandbox activity are not given any special opportunities for expression. The communication is interrupted when the teacher turns her attention towards another child right after she asked a question to the ones watching. No attention is paid to what responses or other reactions the children can be expected to have in response to the question and it is not brought up again.

The teacher's listening and work to include all of the children and give all of them attention contributes to fragmented communication. It is directed, with or without questions, to several different children in a short period of time. Her communication also has different content depending on who is addressed. On the one hand, this can be interpreted as a child perspective where the teacher puts the child in the centre. On the other hand, it seems as if, to a great degree, the teacher's directed attention is what steers the communication and events via questions. The potential of reciprocity, in other words, making use of children's experiences and expressions, is overlooked, which probably will have consequences on the children's ability to achieve a deeper understanding of the content communicated.

### ***Sub-category (ii) Steer in the right direction***

Children and teachers have in the following situation designed an experiment which aims to investigate what woodlice eat. Some woodlice have been put together with leaves in a glass jar with a cover. The glass jar has been put away for days so that it could be taken out at the right time for studies on what could have happened in the jar. In the example that follows, a child, Liv, talks with a teacher about what has happened in the jar.

#### **Excerpt 2**

Liv: Hey, they aren't getting any air when there are so many leaves.

Teacher: They aren't getting any air?

Liv: Nah, I don't want to have leaves in there.

Teacher: Do you think that they shouldn't have any leaves in there because they aren't getting any air?

Liv: No.

Teacher: Well then, what do you think they should eat in that case?

Liv: Just nuts.

Teacher: Nuts, do you think that they like these kinds of nuts?

Liv: Yep

Teacher: No leaves, you don't think they like leaves?

Liv: Nope.

Teacher: But if we take a look at this (points to the leaves on the table), you saw that they had been there and eaten and made holes, didn't you?

Liv: Yes.

Teacher: Well then, don't you think they like leaves?  
Liv: But hey, they can eat nuts too.  
Teacher: So they are satisfied with just nuts? So we shouldn't put any leaves in?  
Liv: (Shakes her head.)  
Teacher: What if they die?  
Liv: I don't know.  
Teacher: Do you think they'll die?  
Liv: But I'm not going to put any nuts there, because leaves are what they eat.  
Teacher: Do they eat leaves?  
Liv: (Nods.)  
Teacher: How do you know for sure?  
Liv: Well, because they like leaves.  
Teacher: How can you say that they like leaves?  
Liv: Umm... I don't know.

### **Analysis and reflection**

The conversational sequence shows how Liv initially expresses concern over there being too many leaves in the jar and that the woodlice are not getting air. Upon a closer analysis of the conversation, you can get the impression that Liv's attention is directed to the survival of the woodlice in the jar, while the teacher's attention is focused on a conversation about what woodlice eat. The teacher chooses to focus on the food of woodlice instead of continuing with Liv's perspective and how Liv actually experiences the leaves and the woodlice's ability to survive. Liv maintains that the woodlouse eats nuts, even though the teacher confronts her with some leaves that have holes in them. It is as if the teacher does not accept the perspective of the child, and instead challenges Liv to move on by posing to her the possibility that the woodlice might die if they don't get leaves as food. This seems to make Liv insecure, upon which the teacher repeats the possibility that they could die. The following statement shows how Liv changes her mind and says that she is not going to put any nuts there, because leaves are what woodlice eat. The remaining statements reveal how the teacher is not satisfied with Liv having changed her mind, and instead continues to problematize how Liv now can say that woodlice eat leaves. *“How do you know for sure?”* and *“How can you say that they like leaves?”* are examples of the questions the teacher

asks. The reproduced conversational sequence ends with Liv saying that she doesn't know.

The reproduced conversational sequence has 27 statements, with 14 of them by Liv and 13 by the teacher. The teacher's statements include 14 questions and the approach in this example can be characterized as the teacher being the questioner and Liv being the answerer. The teacher does not ask Liv to explain her thoughts about the leaves in the jar and her perception that the woodlice are not getting air. Liv maybe sees the leaves as an obstacle to sustaining life, which could be a reasonable explanation for Liv maintaining that nuts are more relevant food for woodlice. Instead the teacher chooses to use the risk of the woodlice's death as a counter-argument against Liv's suggestion that the woodlice can eat nuts. In the end, it may be perceived that Liv does not have a choice, and is instead encircled by her expressed concern for the life of the woodlice as a counter-argument and then chooses to give up and say that woodlice like leaves. The teacher leads the relevant conversation and the communication is perhaps more akin to an interrogation than a mutual conversation. Liv's perspective, i.e. the perspective of the child, is more of a tool which the teacher uses to help persuade the child rather than as a source of understanding and further knowledge development.

The child perspective in this category can be said to be child-centred in a way where the teacher approaches the children, communicates with them and asks them questions. The children's perspectives become visible by the teacher, like in the sandbox example, getting/enticing the children to express themselves, but the teacher is not engaged beyond that. Via the teacher's questions, the child/Liv, in the example with the woodlice, is also given the opportunity to express her opinions. However, in this situation, the teacher chooses to use Liv's perspective more as a counter-argument than as an expression of Liv's experience and understanding.

## **Category II Respond and consider**

In the following sequence, the teacher is sitting together with children aged one to three. They are sitting on the floor in a large playroom. Children come and go, sometimes to show something or say something.

***Sub-category (i) Expand and go in-depth***

Excerpt 3

Teacher: Owie owie owie (Says this with a playful voice to Algot as he pecks at the teacher's arm with a magpie beak).

Teacher: What a sharp beak, sharp.

Algot: Sharp

Teacher: It can eat a lot of worms. Magpies like worms.

Algot: (Says something inaudible.)

Teacher: Like worms.

Ella: (Shows worms.)

Teacher: Oh, Ella has two Pelle Jöns. (Worms made out of pipe cleaners based on a Swedish song they sang about a worm called Pelle Jöns.)

Teacher: Did you see? (Calls Algot's attention to Ella's worms.)

Algot: (Pecks at the teacher's shoulder with the magpie's beak.)

Teacher: Owie owie, it's biting me (playful voice) owie owie (pretending to be sad).

Teacher: It's pointy, the beak.

Algot: (Says something inaudible.)

Teacher: Do you see the mouth there? It is very pointy. (Points at the beak.)

Algot: Can I touch it? (The teacher hands the magpie to Algot who touches the beak.)

Teacher: (Pretends to peck at Algot, makes clucking sounds and laughs.)

Algot: (Pecks at the teacher's head, makes clucking sounds).

Teacher: Owie, owie, careful, careful.

**Analysis and reflection**

The statements show how the teacher responds to the child's attempts to initiate contact with a response that both makes use of what the child is expressing and expands the content of the communication from that. In that sense the child's own perspective is used as a base for expanding further learning. The teacher combines a playful child perspective with discoveries and knowledge related to the different aspects of the content. This occurs by way of conversations and encouraging joint focus on the specific material

that the children contribute with. Algot pecks at the teacher who playfully starts a conversation directed at scientific content and, for example, goes in depth by introducing the term beak. Ella shows worms that she probably heard Algot and the teacher talking about. The teacher expands the conversation to also include joint content focus with aspects of mathematics and ties them into the group of children's joint, past experiences. The language contains known terms used in parallel with new ones. Pelle Jöns-worms, mouth-beak, sharp-pointy where variations of verbal communication are combined with different other modes of expressions, (like i.e. pointing out the beak, pretending sad emotions) offer the children opportunities to deepen their understanding. The children's attention is called to each other's contributions to the communication and they are invited to share content and participate. The teacher's child perspective puts both the children's experiences and the possibility of learning subject content in focus. The playful communicative approach can be interpreted as a child perspective in order to elicit and respond to children's own perspectives and expressions.

### ***Sub-category (ii) Direct attention***

In the example that follows, children between three and six years of age and their teacher examine life in a stump and study woodlice up close. The relevant conversation concerns how woodlice cope with the cold. One woodlouse wound up in an upside down position and the teacher begins by asking the children to count how many legs a woodlouse has and encourages them to count.

#### **Excerpt 4**

Lisa: Ten legs  
Teacher: Ten legs  
Lisa: Yeaah  
Teacher: Imagine if we had ten legs, how would that look?  
Per: It wouldn't look.  
Per: I have two.  
Teacher: You have two legs, yes, imagine if we had ten, imagine if we need shoes for all ten legs, feet.  
Lisa: Naah.  
Teacher: You need shoes when it gets colder now, don't you? Do you think woodlice need shoes?  
Per: No

Teacher: What do they do to get warm then?  
Per: They put in to get warm...  
Olof: I don't think so, I think that they put their hands inside their shell.  
Teacher: Inside their shell?  
Per: They go inside the stump.  
Olof: No, they go inside their shell.  
Teacher: Is it warm in there?  
Olof: I think they go inside their shell.  
Olof: And get warm there.  
Teacher: And get warm there like a blanket you could say.  
Olof: Like a turtle.  
Teacher: Like a turtle.  
Lisa: Snail.  
Teacher: Snail.  
Teacher: Snails also go inside and lay down when they are cold.

### **Analysis and reflection**

In the above communication, how woodlice keep themselves warm is discussed. The teacher chooses to make use of a situation that occurs when a woodlouse winds up in an upside down position and the woodlouse's legs become visible. The teacher's intention is to call the attention of the children to how woodlice can keep themselves warm. By first asking the children to count the woodlouse's legs, the conversation is linked to how many legs we humans/children have. Per says that he has two. The teacher then chooses to further problematize how it would be if we humans had ten legs and if we would need shoes for all of our feet. In the next stage of the communication, the teacher turns her attention to how woodlice cope with the cold by first linking this to the children's current situation "*You need shoes when it gets colder now, don't you?*" and then asks the children to reflect on whether woodlice need shoes. Per immediately distances himself from the statement, which leads the teacher to ask a follow-up question about what woodlice do to get warm. In the following exchange, a discussion emerges about whether woodlice go inside their shell or the stump when it's cold. By linking to previous experiences - to the children's perspectives - the children confirm or develop their arguments by making comparisons with other animals, what a turtle or a snail does.

In this communication its demonstrated how the teacher makes use of a situation that has emerged for reasoning and reflection on the living conditions of woodlice. The questions the teacher asks enable the children to make connections with their own perspectives, but also think one step further in the direction of new knowledge. The example shows how children interact with each other. They listen to each other's statements and give each other responses. By tying in their own experience, they can make comparisons with how other animals that also have a shell react when it's cold. In the given situation, the teacher is considered to have a deliberate and active approach, where there is an idea of where the situation can lead to. The teacher's questions relate to children's perspectives and at the same time have a direction and enable links to something new. The children are also given time to express themselves and talk with their peers.

### **Summary analysis**

The child perspectives that appear in the four sub-categories may be said to be child-centered in a way where the teacher approaches the children and asks them to express their opinions. What distinguishes Category I: Excerpt 1, which takes place in the sandbox, and Excerpt 2, the work with woodlice, in comparison with Category II: Excerpt 3, the magpie's beak, and Excerpt 4, how woodlice keep warm, is that the teacher not only asks for the perspective of the children in Category II, but also takes what the children say into account for further developing of the content in the conversation. The perspectives that children express in these excerpts enable teachers to see children's experience in relation to a relevant content and get an idea of further direction of the conversations. In this category the children's perspective thus constitutes, on the basis of the perspective of the teacher, a didactic point of departure for learning. In light of this background, the teacher's child perspective in Category II can be said to include something qualitatively different from what was the case in Category I. In Category II, the teacher does not only encourage and engage in the children's perspectives—the teacher also seems to be aware of the value of observing and involving what children express in the actual context.

### **Concluding discussion**

In the following, we discuss the approach of the teacher in relation to the concepts child perspective and children's perspectives as well as their meaning for children's learning.

### **The teacher's child perspective as a didactic basis**

In category I presented above that are characterized by a relatively one-sided teacher's perspective (i.e. the situation in the sandbox, excerpt 1, and the experiment with woodlice, excerpt 2) we can see how children are assigned roles as observers who answer questions. In both of these excerpts the teacher takes the role of the questioner, but does not build on the answers from the children. Instead, the teacher seems to be busy with her own agenda. Based on Bjervås (2011) we compare this with the theoretical figure "child as a position" where the context created limits the children's subject positions as resources in the communication. In the sandbox excerpt, the attention of each child is caught via eye contact and/or conversation, but the children's answers are not followed up on in the form of continuing engagement from the teacher. In the woodlouse excerpt, what the child says is made use of to a certain extent, but the child's answers are, if anything, turned against the child rather than becoming a source of understanding and further learning. The reproduced conversation seems to create insecurity in the child more than trust in his/her own opinion. In both examples, we can see how the teacher dominates the conversations. In the first via a general approach directed toward all the children and in the second by getting the child to say the "right answer".

From a perspective of learning, we can think about whether or not the children in these situations have in fact been left to search for meaning on their own. Children want to understand the world and are oriented toward searching for meaning. Communication and participation constitute an important factor in this endeavor (Pramling Samuelsson & Asplund Carlsson, 2008; Vygotskij & Kozulin, 1986). On the basis of the excerpts we have chosen to define the learning opportunities offered as characteristic of a one-sided teacher's perspective. This can be interpreted as centered on the teacher's idea of what is in the best interest of the child – the teacher's child perspective. In the sandbox excerpt, the teacher is active in the situation with the aim of teaching the children the technique for building sand shapes, which seems to get a certain amount of interest from the children. On the other hand, one might say that the children's self-initiative and opportunities for communication are limited, since the teacher primarily asks questions directed to everyone and the answers seem less important.

This approach risks the quality of the activities stopping with the curiosity the child has shown and a sense of community in conjunction with the activity, while the children's own perspectives are reduced to individual an-

swers that are not further taken into account by the teacher. In the excerpt with the woodlice in the glass jar, the children are given opportunities for their own statements, but the content is not developed. Instead, it is linked one-sidedly to the teacher's agenda. The quality of the activities shows signs of a direction in terms of content, while the encounter in the communication seems to make the child uncertain about her position.

### **Children's perspectives as contributions to learning**

In both Category I and Category II, the children are given an opportunity to express their opinions, but the key difference is that the teacher in the two latter examples makes use of what the children say and uses it actively – not as a general statement or as an argument against the child – but as a respectful contribution to a mutual dialogue. Respectful in the sense that the teacher's approach in the communication contributes to that the children's voices are being heard and that the children's understanding or experience of the relevant object of knowledge thus also becomes visible to the teacher and the children and can be reacted to. The communication is characterized by being partly initiated by the child and partly initiated by the teacher where children's different subject positions (Bjervås, 2011) are taken into account. The teachers in Category II observe the children's perspectives. They respond to and consider what the children express and they also seem to be carriers of an idea about where the communication can lead in relation to the current object of knowledge (Larsson, 2013).

Researchers are calling attention to the importance of an interaction that has both a democratic and a pedagogical perspective (Pramling Samuelsson & Sheridan, 2003). Democratic to the extent that children's voices - opinions, experiences - are sought, and are even seen as the actual prerequisite for further learning. Pedagogical in the sense that the situation is led by pedagogically aware teachers that have knowledge of children's learning and have an idea of where the specific communication can lead. In all excerpts above, we can see how both the concept of child perspectives and children's perspectives are given different meanings and specific interpretations in practice. The voices of children appear in all of the excerpts above. However, a difference comes to light in Category I in comparison to Category II in the way children are enabled to participate and in the way what children express is taken into account.

With the help of his theoretical model, Shier (2001) pinpoints five levels of children's participation in decision-making, see e.g. Årlemalm-Hagsér &

Pramling-Samuelsson (2013). The lowest level involves children being listened to, while the highest, fifth level entails children participating in both power and responsibility for decision-making based on their experience and knowledge. The levels in between involve supporting and observing children's expressions and actively involving children in decision-making processes. We assume that the level of children's participation is also reflected in the consequences on children's learning. The quality of what and how children learn is also affected by their ability to be heard, get support and be involved in potential learning situations. Pramling Samuelsson and Sheridan (2003) assert that participation can be seen both as a value and as a deliberate teaching method, mutual depending on one another. One danger could be that adults lack the knowledge to analyze and draw conclusions about the use of children's voice in the activities, which results in a risk of children's participation not being seen as a pedagogical issue.

### **The teacher's child perspective combined with children's perspectives**

Research shows that questions can be an important way of communicating and getting children involved in their own learning (Elstgest, 1999). Children can be asked questions for different purposes and one can therefore encounter different reactions, which in turn contribute to the establishment of specific patterns of communication. Considering the results of this study, perhaps it is time to nuance the image of the teacher as the questioner and questioning as being equal to revealing children's perspectives. Revealing the children's perspectives is a basis for obtaining new knowledge, but constitutes only *one* phase of the communication. Several researchers call attention to the importance of reciprocity in the child-teacher dialogue (Sheridan et al., 2009; Siraj-Blatchford, 2010) a reciprocity that we can see in the latter two examples above. But we also find an approach by the teachers in these examples which can be characterized as a type of mutual simultaneity (Thulin, 2011). Mutual in the sense that the teacher is open to listening to the children's opinions and actually making use of the children's opinions as an honest and respectful basis for further reasoning. Simultaneously to the extent that the teacher also has the ability to establish connections between children's experience and everyday language and expanded learning. The teacher has an idea of a potential direction for learning and can be said to use a didactics of the present moment (Jonsson, 2013) to support both children's mode of expression and learning potential. The didactics of the present mo-

ment is considered the ability to pinpoint specific learning content closely linked to the child/children involved and make children aware of and participate in what is being seen, done and experienced or what is going on in a potential learning situation.

The concepts child perspective and children's perspectives are discussed from time to time as a manifestation of different pedagogical and methodological approaches (Halldén, 2007; Sommer et al., 2010) our intention here is not to assign a value to such different approaches. Both concepts can be used advantageously to study and discuss different parts of ongoing activities or to distinguish specific discussion topics. However, what we want to problematize is a distinction between the concepts in preschool activities. On the basis of the results from this study we assume that the prevailing child perspective of teachers constitutes the basis for how children's perspectives are expressed and taken into account in pedagogical activities. Instead of separating the concepts, it is therefore important to turn one's attention toward the consequences of the one on the other.

Trondman concludes "...that children's perspectives has a strong dependence on adult's child perspective", our translation, pg. 77 (Trondman, 2011), that it is safeguarded by the adults. On the basis of our results and our reasoning in this section, we are inclined to agree with Trondman. Seen from a sociocultural perspective (Linell, 1982; Säljö, 2001) the communication used set up the boundaries for a specific learning area or learning situation. Children are dependent on adults' values, views on children and the epistemological perspectives that preschool teachers are carriers of. It's not about one right way to behave, but about how preschool teachers can consciously manage their responsibility in preschool learning situations in a number of different ways. We wish to argue for the weight of pedagogical awareness where a child perspective and children's perspectives are kept together in both didactic discussions and in encounters with children. This basis is of special concern for how teachers make use of children's own perspectives in the daily work at preschool and ultimately to children's learning.

## References

Berthelsen, Donna, & Brownlee, Joanne (2005). Respecting Children's Agency for Learning and rights to participation in child care programs. *International Journal of Early Childhood*, 37(3), 49-60.

Bjervås, Lise-Lotte (2011). *Samtal om barn och pedagogisk dokumentation som bedömningspraktik i förskolan: en diskursanalys* [Teachers' views of preschool children in relation to pedagogical documentation – A discourse analysis]. Göteborg: Acta universitatis Gothoburgensis.

Bryman, Alan (2002). *Samhällsvetenskapliga metoder* [Social research methods]. Malmö: Liber.

Corsaro, William A. (2003). *We're friends, right?: inside kids' cultures*. Washington, D.C.: Joseph Henry Press.

Elstgest, Jos (1999). Rätt fråga vid rätt tillfälle [The right question at the right time]. In W. Harlen (Ed.), *Våga språnget! Om att undervisa barn i naturvetenskapliga ämnen* [Primary science taking the plunge]. Stockholm: Liber.

Eriksen Ødegaard, Elin (2007). *Meningsskaping i barnehagen. Innhold og bruk av barns og voksnes samtalefortellinger* [Narrative meaning-making in preschool]. Acta Universitatis Gothoburgensis, Göteborg studies in educational sciences; 255. Retrieved from <http://hdl.handle.net/2077/17065>

Halldén, Gunilla (2007). *Den moderna barndomen och barns vardagsliv*. [The modern childhood and children's everyday lives]. Stockholm: Carlsson.

Hundeide, Karsten (2003). *Barns livsverden. Sosiokulturelle rammer for barns utvikling*. [Children's life-world. Socio-cultural frames for child development]. Oslo: Cappelen Akademisk Forlag.

Johansson, Eva (2011). *Möten för lärande: pedagogisk verksamhet för de yngsta barnen i förskolan* [Encounters for learning: Educational activities for the youngest children in preschool]. Stockholm: Swedish National Agency for Education.

Jonsson, Agneta (2013). *Att skapa läroplan för de yngsta barnen i förskolan: barns perspektiv och nuets didaktik* [Creating curriculum for the youngest children in preschool. Children's perspectives and didactics of the present moment]. Acta Universitatis Gothoburgensis, Göteborg. Retrieved from <http://hdl.handle.net/2077/34089>

Jonsson, Agneta & Williams, Pia (2012). Communication with young children in preschool: the complex matter of a child perspective. *Early Child Development and Care*, 183(5), 589-604.

Larsson, Jonna (2013). Children's encounters with friction. Friction understood as a phenomenon of emerging science and as 'opportunities for learning'. *Journal of Research in Childhood Education*, 27(3), 377-392.

Lindahl, Marita (1995). *Inlärning och erfarande: ettåringars möte med förskolans värld* [Experience and learning: one-year old children's encounter with the world of pre-school]. Göteborgs Universitet. Retrieved from <http://hdl.handle.net/2077/12605>

Linell, Per (1982). *Människans språk* [Human Language]. Malmö: Gleerups.

Marton, Ference & Booth, Shirley (1997). *Learning and awareness*. Mahwah: N.J.: Erlbaum.

Ministry of Education and Science. (2010). *Curriculum for Preschool. Lpfö98*. Retrieved from [www.skolverket.se](http://www.skolverket.se).

Pramling Samuelsson, Ingrid & Asplund Carlsson, Maj (2008). The playing learning child: Towards a pedagogy of early childhood. *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research*, 52(6), 623-641.

Pramling Samuelsson, Ingrid & Johansson, Eva (2009). Why do children involve teachers in their play and learning? *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, 17(1), 77-94.

Pramling Samuelsson, Ingrid & Sheridan, Sonja (2003). Delaktighet som värdering och pedagogik [Participation as valuation and pedagogy]. *Pedagogisk Forskning i Sverige* 8(1-2), 70-84.

Research Council (2011). *Good research practises*. Stockholm.

Rogoff, Barbara (2003). *The cultural nature of human development*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Sheridan, Sonja (2001). *Pedagogical quality in preschool: an issue of perspectives*. Göteborg: Acta Universitatis Gothoburgensis.

Sheridan, Sonja, Pramling Samuelsson, Ingrid & Johansson, Eva (2009). *Barns tidiga lärande: en tvärsnittsstudie om förskolan som miljö för barns lärande* [Children's early learning. A cross sectional study on the preschool as an environment for children's learning]. Göteborg: Acta Universitatis Gothoburgensis.

Sheridan, Sonja, Williams, Pia, Sandberg, Annette, & Vuorinen, Tuula (2011). Preschool teaching in Sweden - a profession in change. *Educational Research*, 53(4), 415-437.

Siraj-Blatchford, Iram (2010). A focus on pedagogy: Case studies of effective practice. In K. Sylva, E. Melhuish, P. Sammons, I. Siraj-Blatchford & B. Taggart (Eds.), *Early childhood matters: Evidence from the Effective Preschool and Primary Education project* (pp. 149-165). London: Routledge.

Skolverket (2010). *Perspektiv på barndom och barns lärande: en kunskapsöversikt om lärande i förskolan och grundskolans tidigare år* [Perspectives on childhood and children's learning: An overview of knowledge about learning in the early years of preschool and regular school]. Stockholm: Swedish National Agency of Education.

Snow, Catherine E. (2000). On language and literacy development. *Early Childhood Today*, 15(2), 1-46.

Sommer, Dion, Pramling Samuelsson, Ingrid & Hundeide, Karsten (Eds.). (2010). *Child perspectives and children's perspectives in theory and practice*. Dordrecht: Springer.

Sylva, Kathy, Melhuish, Edward, Sammons, Pam, Siraj-Blatchford, Iram & Taggart, Brenda (2010). *Early childhood matters: evidence from the effective pre-school and primary education project*. Abingdon, Oxon, England: Routledge.

Säljö, Roger (2000). *Lärande i praktiken. Ett sociokulturellt perspektiv* [Learning in Practice: A Sociocultural Perspective]. Stockholm: Prisma.

Säljö, Roger (2001). The individual in social practices: Comments to Ference Marton's The practice of learning. *Nordisk Pedagogik*, 21, 108-116.

Tallberg Broman, Ingegerd (1995). *Perspektiv på förskolans historia*. [Perspectives on the History of the Preschool]. Lund: Studentlitteratur.

Thulin, Susanne (2010). Barns frågor under en naturvetenskaplig aktivitet i förskolan [Children's questions during a science activity in preschool]. *Nordisk Barnehageforskning*.

Thulin, Susanne (2011). *Lärares tal och barns nysikenhet. Kommunikation om naturvetenskapliga innehåll i förskolan*. [Teacher talk and children's queries. Communication about natural science in early childhood education]. Acta Universitatis Gothoburgensis 309, Göteborg.

Thulin, Susanne (2006). *Vad händer med lärandets objekt? En studie av hur lärare och barn i förskolan kommunicerar naturvetenskapliga fenomen* [What Happened to the Object of Learning? A Study of how Teachers and Children in Preschool Communicate Scientific Phenomena]. Licentiatavhandling i pedagogik. [Licentiate's Dissertation in Pedagogy], Växjö: Växjö University Press.

Trondman, Mats (2011). Snälla fröknar [Nice Teachers]. In I. Tallberg Broman (Ed.), *Skola och barndom. Normering, demokratisering, individualisering* [School and childhood. standardization, democratization, individualization]. Malmö: Gleerups Utbildning AB.

UNICEF (2009). *Barnkonventionen: FN:s konvention om barnets rättigheter* [The United Nations Convention on the right of the child]. Stockholm: UNICEF Sverige.

Vallberg Roth, Ann-Christine (2011). *De yngre barnens läroplanshistoria: från 1800-talets mitt till idag* [The history of the curriculum for young children: From the middle of the 1800's to the present]. Lund: Studentlitteratur.

Vygotskij, Lev Semenovič & Kozulin, Alex (1986). *Thought and language*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.

Yoshikawa, Hirokazu, Weiland, Cristina, Brooks-Gunn, Jeanne, Burchinal, Margaret R., Espinosa, Linda, M., Gormley, William, T., Ludwig, Jens, Magnuson, Katherine, A., Phillips, Deborah & Zaslow, Martha, J. (2013). Investing in our future: The Evidence Base on Preschool Education. In Society for Research in Child Development (Ed.).

Ärlemalm-Hagsér, Eva & Pramling-Samuelsson, Ingrid (2013). Kulturer av hållbarhet: Förskolebarns aktörskap och meningsskapande [Cultures for sustainability: Preschool children's agency and meaning-making]. In I. Tallberg Broman & I. Pramling-Samuelsson (Eds.), *Barndom, Lärande och Ämnesdidaktik* [Childhood, Learning and Subject Didactics] (pp. 145-159). Lund: Studentlitteratur.