

TODDLERS AS SOCIAL ACTORS  
IN THE SWEDISH PRESCHOOL

Ingrid Engdahl



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# Abstract

## Toddlers as social actors in the Swedish preschool

This thesis focuses on interaction among young toddlers during their second year of life in a Swedish preschool. The overall aim of this thesis was to explore interaction, communication and the creation of friendship between the young children during self initiated play activities. Play is looked upon as a rich arena for observing toddler interaction. In addition, this thesis presents the background of Early Childhood Education in Sweden, which may serve as an extended context for the study.

An ethnographic study was carried out in a toddler unit with 15 children. Six one year old girls and boys were in focus during the observations for nine months. Participatory methods, photos, fieldnotes and videorecordings, were used for the data collection.

The theoretical framework for the study is built on phenomenology, the view of the child as a social person and a child oriented perspective. The overall findings support a theoretical perspective where the young toddlers are seen as social actors, with social competencies. Their play invitation strategies, as well as their play enactment and play-closing moves, were mostly found to be based on nonverbal communication such as movements, gestures, voice quality and facial expressions. The competencies of attunement, taking others' perspectives and turn-taking were found in play among the young toddlers, and they also showed negotiating skills while playing.

The findings also show how young toddlers make friends. During their second year of life, they monitor and pay attention to individual peers, displaying intentionality and agency by spontaneously greeting their peers, by offering play invitations, and by helping peers. Mutual awareness, joint attention, shared smiles, coordinated movements, as well as other types of synchronized actions are seen as parts of nonverbal elements in emerging friendship.

The findings in this thesis support an understanding of young toddlers as social persons in the preschool, engaged in consistent interest and attention towards each other while playing.

**Keywords:** toddlers; one year olds; preschool; play; interaction; friendship; communication; phenomenology, social person; agency

# Abstract

## Toddlare som sociala personer i svensk förskola

Avhandlingens fokus är hur små barn interagerar med varandra under sitt andra levnadsår i en svensk förskola. Det övergripande syftet var att undersöka interaktion, kommunikation och skapandet av vänskap mellan yngre toddlare under lekstunder då barnen hade möjligheter att ta egna initiativ. Lek betraktas som en rik arena för studier av toddlers samspel. Avhandlingen presenterar även svensk förskolas utveckling som en bakgrund som placerar in den enskilda förskolan i ett större sammanhang.

En etnografisk studie genomfördes på en småbarnsavdelning med 15 barn i åldrarna ett till tre år. Sex ettåriga flickor och pojkar fokuserades särskilt genom observationer under nio månader. Deltagande observationer, fotografier, fältanteckningar och videoobservationer, användes för datainsamlingen.

Teoretiskt vilar studien på fenomenologi, synen på barn som sociala personer och ett barnperspektiv. Resultaten stöder ett teoretiskt perspektiv där mycket små barn betraktas som sociala aktörer med social kompetens. Deras initiativ till lek, under lek och avslut av lek byggde framför allt på icke-verbal kommunikation, som exempelvis rörelse, gester, röstkvalitet och ansiktsuttryck. Barnen visade i sin lek förmåga till intoning, att ta andras perspektiv och turtagning samt att de förhandlade med varandra under lekens gång.

Resultaten visar också hur yngre toddlare bygger vänskap. Ettåringarna uppmärksammar sina kamrater även som individer, exempelvis genom att spontant hälsa på dem, bjuda in till en särskild lek och genom att hjälpa varandra. I skapandet av vänskap använde barnen sig av icke-verbala handlingar i form av ömsesidig och gemensamt riktad uppmärksamhet, smittande leenden och koordinerade rörelser, vilka kan tolkas som intentionellt agerande.

Sammanfattningsvis visar resultaten att små barn under sitt andra levnadsår kan betraktas som sociala personer som i leken i förskolan intresserar sig för och uppmärksammar varandra.

**Nyckelord:** småbarn; toddlare; ettåringar; förskola; lek; interaktion; vänskap; kommunikation; fenomenologi; social person; aktörskap

# List of original papers

This thesis is based on studies reported in the following articles, which will be referred to by the roman numerals I to III.

- I. Engdahl, I. (2011). Toddler interaction during play in the Swedish preschool. *Early Child Development and Care*, 181, 1-19, iFirst Article.
- II. Engdahl, I. (2011). Doing Friendship during the Second Year of Life in a Swedish Preschool. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*. (accepted for publication, October 2010)
- III. Engdahl, I. (2004). Implementing a National Curriculum in the Swedish Preschool. *International Journal of Early Childhood Education*, 10(2), 53–78.

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# Preface

The toddlers are my favourites in the preschool. After more than twenty years as a preschool teacher and almost ten years of teaching in teacher education programmes at the Stockholm Institute of Education, I knew exactly what I wanted to focus on when I became a graduate student – the young toddlers, the one year olds. I believe most people who have had the privilege to share the everyday lives of toddlers might share my interest. I am truly impressed by the intense energy and liveliness that are housed in their small bodies. Toddlers also have competencies, thoughts, ideas, feelings and experience of their own, and are not to be underestimated. I truly believe that one should interact and treat toddlers as respectfully as you meet older people.

In January 2008, the Stockholm Institute of Education and Stockholm University merged and I became deeply involved in starting the new Department of Child and Youth Studies. At that time I had completed my licentiate degree (2007) and I dedicated myself towards building the department together with my colleagues. However, the vice chancellor had other plans. I am sincerely grateful to Stockholm University for making the wise decision to give me the opportunity to continue my research training to a doctoral degree and the chance to further understand what goes on between young toddlers while playing in preschool. My second thanks go to my advisors, Professor Ann-Christin Cederborg and Associate Professor Peg Lindstrand. I am truly amazed by Ann-Christin's indefatigable and close readings, and Peg's well informed comments have really helped me to structure my thesis. In addition my colleagues at the department have all supported me, during the research seminars expertly lead by Professor Karin Aronsson, but also during informal talks around the coffee table. Thank you all.

This study would not have been possible without the cooperation of the preschool where I made my observations. I am very grateful for the warm welcome to the preschool I was given by the teachers, the toddlers and their parents. Thank you for your continued interest in my study and for all your help.

I really appreciate the concerned interest in my research expressed within my rich network of teachers and researchers in Early Childhood Education, especially my Summer Vacation team and my Dinner Collective. And of course, a special thanks to my OMEP friends; Ingrid Pramling-Samuelsson, Eva Ärlemalm-Hagsér, Bibi Karlsson and all others.

I owe sincere thanks to Ingrid Hylander, for involved and critical reading during the last seminar, to Robin Cooper for English proofreading and to Elisabet Engdahl for continued support throughout the whole process. During the last hectic weeks Anna Westberg Broström, Jane Brodin, Gunnel Mohme and Ingrid Olsson helped me with qualified proofreading, thank you.

Although I am solely responsible for this thesis, it is also, as shown above, in many ways the result of working together. That is the way I prefer to do things, which is also why I finally want to thank my sons for accepting that I have not been a very responsible team member at home during this process.

Stockholm in January 2011

Ingrid Engdahl

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

Enrolment in early childhood education and care is growing around the world. Statistics from a survey of the OECD countries on access to education show that on average 25 percent of children below three years spend time in subsidized and regulated child care services (UNICEF, 2008).

In Sweden, during the last 35 years, the percentage of children (aged 1-5 years) in preschool has increased significantly. In 1975, only ten percent of children younger than seven years attended preschool, whereas in 2009 47 percent of one year olds, 86.5 percent of two year olds and 90.6 percent of three year olds did so (National Agency for Education, 2010). Swedish preschools are most often run by the municipalities. They offer full days and the parents choose how many hours per day their child will spend in preschool.

The rising enrolment in Swedish preschools indicates a dramatic change in child rearing practices compared to thirty years ago, when only two percent of children under the age of three years attended preschools (Woodhead, 1979). The new situation, with high numbers of toddlers being raised both in their family and in their preschool, can give young children access not only to more adults, but also to multiple peer relationships outside their families. Early childhood in Sweden today is lived both at home and in preschool, which can be seen as transformation from a historical and societal perspective.

During the last few decades children in western countries have been increasingly recognised as citizens based on research where children are understood from the perspective that they influence and are influencing their life-world (see for example Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 1999; Danby & Baker, 1998; Giddens, 1984; Sommer, 1997; Woodhead & Montgomery, 2003). These studies explore children's social competencies, as well as their relationships with siblings, peers, parents and teachers. However, most previous studies about early childhood education involve three – six year old children.

I have always been interested in young children's play and my original interest, when starting this research project, was to look at toddler play within a modern preschool context. However, already after a couple of weeks, my interest moved from the actions to the agents. The chosen ethnographic observations within a phenomenological framework, made me focus on the children, more than on the activities. I will exemplify what made me redirect the focus towards the children with the following example. This episode took place during my second week in the preschool. Molly (23 months) is

observed when she is caring for the joint physical environment in the preschool.

Molly was walking around in the kitchen area, clicked on the stove switches. On the wall, there is a group of the children's paintings. Molly found a painting on the floor, it had fallen down. She picked up the drawing, looked at me and started walking towards me. She stopped, turned around and went up to the wall. Molly pressed the painting to the wall, but it didn't stay.

- *He ha hama*, Molly said, and again walked towards me.

On her way, she tried to hang the painting on a chair by pressing it to the back of the chair. Molly came up to me and reached out to me, the drawing in her hand. She held up the drawing towards me, and looked at the wall, back and fore. She showed me that she wanted to replace the drawing on the wall.

- *Do you want to put it back on the wall? Shall I help you?* I asked.

- *MMMM*, Molly said, and I put it back on its place.

- *Is this OK?* I wondered.

- *Mmm*, Molly said.

She pointed at the drawing, nodding her head. Molly stayed there for a while, looking at the drawings.

What makes this episode special is the fact that Molly is not yet two years old. Still, I think that she shows an awareness of the environment, an aesthetic sense, and a sense of order. She moves freely in the room and acts as a competent agent in relation to the perceived disorder. A drawing has fallen down, and she takes the initiative to put it back where it belongs. She stays focussed on the self appointed task to hang up the painting, although she fails many times. Molly uses her social and cognitive competencies when she is making her intentions clear to me, the new researcher. Although her mother tongue is not Swedish, Molly demonstrates her competence in communication as she invites me to help her correct the disorder. With the final confirming nod, Molly shows that her acting is intentional. Although I have considerable experience of working with toddlers, the skills and competencies shown by the children in the preschool surprised me. Hence, focus was turned from play to the players.

There is still insufficient knowledge about how the youngest children interact and react in preschool. That is why this thesis seeks further knowledge within the everyday life of the youngest children in preschool.

## 2. AIM

The overall aim of this thesis was to explore interaction and communication between young children during self initiated play activities in a Swedish preschool. The youngest children, the toddlers, are in focus, and among them, the youngest toddlers, aged between 13 and 24 months during the study, have received special attention.

The aim of study one was to explore how these young children express themselves when playing with peers. More specifically it is concerned with how they interact and communicate with each other.

In order to further understand how the youngest children make friends in preschool, the research focus in study two was on children during their second year of life. The study explores how they create friendship and what type of actions they use in such a process.

The first two studies reveal how very young children can interact with peers in preschool. The aim of study three was to present aspects of the institutional context which affect the activities of young children. This study investigates the historical background of Early Childhood Education and the political processes leading up to the first National Curriculum for the Preschool in 1998 and the first years of its implementation.

### Definitions and limitations

In this thesis *child* and *children* are used as general terms, sometimes followed by the age of the child in parentheses.

*Babies* and *infants* refer to children during their first year of life,

*toddlers* refer to children aged one – three years,

*young toddlers* refer to children during their second year of life, and

*preschoolers*, in Sweden, refer to one – five year old children.

This study focuses on the young toddlers and the interaction among them. As a consequence, the preschool teachers, the parents and the interplay between children and adults are not included in the study.

A list of terms and their translation into English is found in Appendix 1.



### 3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This thesis represents an interdisciplinary research approach to the study of young children. This approach tries to integrate various perspectives through which a comprehensive understanding of the life situation of children can be accomplished. Interdisciplinary research focuses on multiple understanding of child development that may explain the intertwined processes, which depend on the environment and the initiative and activity of the child and responses from other children and adults. In this way it differs from traditional research where the understanding is accomplished within the framework of one discipline. To be able to understand parts of the life situation of children in preschool and to try to find explanations for how they experience their time there, a combination of perspectives is used. The thesis emanates from a child perspective based on a theoretical orientation influenced by humanistic, cultural-dialogical and interpretative traditions (see for example Sommer, Pramling-Samuelsson & Hundeide, 2010) which is designed to let children's subjective worlds come through. Such a child oriented paradigm has grown during the last thirty years and is reflected in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (Davis, 2010; Rogoff, 2003).

This chapter presents the theoretical framework for this thesis.

#### Phenomenology

This study is placed within a phenomenological framework (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). The main reason for choosing this framework is to accomplish close descriptions of the phenomena studied, elucidating both what appears and the manner in which it appears. The close descriptions help to balance influences based on presuppositions and biases and to widen the understanding of individuals or groups of people through the relationships and actions they carry out in their environment. Within phenomenology, the focus is on different perceptions of phenomena. Each individual can perceive reality in various ways which consequently lead to different actions. With its descriptive and qualitative approach, phenomenology encourages the researcher to strive for close, immediate descriptions of original experiences (Gray, D. E., 2004; Merleau-Ponty, 1962, 1999; Willig, 2008).

According to the philosophy behind this approach, the ways in which we perceive the real world create our image of it, and we cannot separate our

image from the real world. A phenomenological approach can be of scientific relevance when exploring peoples' different and varied perceptions (Husserl, 1989). Merleau-Ponty (1962, 1999) further developed the phenomenological approach for research on and with children. He looked upon childhood as an independent period of life, with specific forms and characteristics. Thus, the recommendation was that researchers should study children in their own right and according to their own prerequisites. Following Merleau-Ponty, one should not focus on children's deficiencies or lack of competencies, and not compare children with adults.

The phenomenological term life-world refers to what appears in everyday life and it represents a direct and immediate experience, independent of and before explanations (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, 1999). It is described as subjective and objective at the same time. How we perceive the world depends on our previous experiences, which implies that each individual creates his or her own conception of the world. Thus, the life-world represents something more than the mere sum of physical facts and is seen as a complex and multifaceted phenomenon. In addition, it accommodates both physical experiences and changing qualities of values, meanings and traditions. Merleau-Ponty described the life-world as pre-reflective; it both precedes and is a precondition for thoughts and reflections. That is why the life-world cannot be reduced to physical objects. Instead, the experiences of nature, culture, society, history and subject units are seen as intertwined (Willig, 2008).

Phenomenology also uses the concept the lived body when explaining experiences from different life-worlds. Merleau-Ponty (1962, 1999) claims, for example, that human beings perceive their body in one collaborative process including body, soul, emotions and thoughts. The lived body represents an understanding of the unity of body and soul when perceiving experiences. The body should not be seen as an object, but rather as a subject which acts in the life-world. The body is understood as being aware of the qualitative difference between people and objects. The lived body is seen as a unity of thoughts, emotions, sensations, motor activity and physiology, with which we interact and communicate in a certain time and place in our life-world (Johansson, 1999; Løkken, 2000; Rasmussen, 1996).

Inspired by this phenomenological perspective the goal of this thesis is to reach a further understanding of how young toddlers interact, communicate and create friendship with peers. Their everyday life in preschool is understood as their life-world. In addition, this thesis starts from the perspective that children perceive their surroundings through their bodies and by using all their senses. They live within combined intentions from the surrounding world; the society, the teachers and the other children and their families (Bengtsson, 1998; Johansson, 1999; Løkken, 2000).

## Children as social persons

In this thesis, children are also understood as social persons. From this perspective the toddlers may be perceived as actors and subjects with social purposes, goals and intentions (Meadows, 2010). Being a social person includes an active development of social skills. A variety of coping strategies seems to promote social agency. How children cope with strong emotions or stress, for example, have impact on their mental health and their achievements (Meadows, 2010). Further self-regulation of emotion, cognition and action may be crucial for developing responses related to coping with stress. The importance of being able to let go, to be playful, which seems to open up for creativity and flow, was shown by Csikszentmihalyi (1990) who claims that developing a positive and open outlook seems to be related to more resilience than a pessimistic approach to life.

Childhood psychology has also contributed to the image of a competent child. Children are described as being born with a social competence of togetherness (Sommer, 1997). From this perspective socialisation is seen as a process where the relatively competent human being is capturing and handling the surrounding society and culture in an active and continuous way (Sommer et al., 2010). This may also be understood from a relational perspective, stressing the importance of qualitative relationships between people. Bruner (1996) argues, for example, that intentionality and agency are fundamental human characteristics. He claims that intentions are expressed through actions and can thus be studied in social practices.

Children are influenced by but also influencing their environment and the people involved and this perspective offers opportunities to study children's situated activities. The factors that affect their development as social persons are numerous, varied and complicated. How children are seen, what they are expected to do, and in what ways their development is understood, is dependent on accumulated socio-cultural contexts and cannot be taken for granted. Even within a particular historical and socio-cultural context, different people experience childhood differently, as part of what they believe about human nature and social life (Meadows, 2010). The persons and the environment will also change over time as a result of physical development, of interaction, and of other experiences. One key assumption when understanding children as social persons is that the meaning of childhood is depending on a particular place, time and culture, as well as on the family structure and preschool structure in which it is embedded. Children's mental processes and experiences are thus seen as situated (Klein, 1989; Rogoff, 2003). With this theoretical perspective each individual's activities may be seen as unique.

This thesis is inspired by Meadows (2010) and Bruner (1996) who argue that children take other positions and take part in different activities than what their parents or teachers do, which indicates that toddlers' experiences

of the life-world in their preschool differ from that of their teachers. The chosen perspective is aligned with an understanding of learning and development as constructed in social contexts through active participation.

## A child oriented perspective

Another important source of inspiration for this study is from the field of childhood sociology, developed in the 1980s. In this discipline, childhood is studied as a category of its own, parallel and somewhat different from adulthood. Different childhoods are constructed through the societal conditions and children's actions (James & Prout, 1990; James, Jenks & Prout, 1998; James, 2004). In addition, there are qualitative differences between the ways children and adults are influenced by societal changes (Qvortrup, 2002). Childhood is seen as a social institution where children participate, constitute and are constituted by their social worlds. Children learn from the adult's world and they reciprocally influence the adult culture, while at the same time they also participate in and produce their own culture (Danby, 2009).

Furthermore, as all adults have been children, they may think these experiences qualify them as knowledgeable about children and childhood. However, the conditions for childhood change over time, and one's own childhood is mostly not relevant (Meadows, 2010). James (2004) argues that children's voice must be understood in a broad sense including all different means of expression. James uses voice to refer to: '... that cluster of intentions, hopes, grievances, and expectations that children guard as their own and that only surfaces when the adults have learned to ask and get out of the way' (James, 2004, p. 8).

When using childhood sociology as a research approach, children are understood as agents in a continuous interplay with the surrounding environment (James, Jenks & Prout, 1998; James 2004). Children are looked upon as agents, who should be studied in their own right, in their contexts, in their culture, and understood as contributors to society (James, 2004). In childhood sociology, scientific approaches are used to describe, explain and interpret the children's worlds within a political and ideological framework, relating to perspectives such as gender, race, sexuality and religion. Children inhabit social space and through their agency (James & Prout, 1990), they contribute both to stability and to social change. Even if children are recognised as social agents, there are of course limits on how far children actually can change their social reality, and the approach gives knowledge about childhood and about children as a category, not about the individual child (Meadows, 2010).

Studies of childhood have shown that children act on their own initiatives and through their agency, they influence and may change their everyday lives (Löfdahl, 2007). According to Corsaro (2003), childhood studies do not

attempt only to approximate individuals who are being socialised by society at large by internalising the adult's world. Rather, the focus is also on the children's attempts at appropriating, repeating and reproducing culture which is understood as expressions of cultural production.

The research perspective of childhood sociology argues that children should be understood as complete human beings from the beginning, and when studying them, focus should be on the situation at hand, on what is happening here and now (Clark, Kjörholt & Moss, 2005; James, Jenks & Prout, 1998; Qvortrup, 2002). Recognising children as human beings draws on a fundamental respect for the child as a subject, with a right to influence the situation at hand. Focusing on goals for children to achieve, on the other hand, draws on a view of children as incomplete, as human becomings (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005; Eriksen-Ødegaard, 2007; Halldén, 2009). Taking the idea of life-long learning (Delors, 1996) into account, even adults may be seen as human becomings as we are all learners. There are positions, both in psychology, sociology and education that draw on the growing interdependency between children and adults (Dahlberg & Lenz-Taguchi, 1994; Halldén, 2009; Lee, 2009). Halldén (2007) argues that taking one or the other position, that the child is either a complete human being or in the process of becoming a human being, is not scientifically supportable, and instead the views are to be combined.

When trying to further understand young children as citizens, researchers need to be aware of the asymmetric aspects of the relationships between children and adults. Children are dependent on care and trust (Sommer, 1997; Halldén, 2007). Care does not necessarily include a superior care-giver and an inferior care-taker, however. In an educational setting, as for example a preschool, a care-giving sequence can be recognised as a situation of guided participation (Rogoff, 2003) where both care-giver and care-takers are learners. The care-giver can learn from the child's responses and the child as a care-taker may learn how to become a care-giver (Steinsholt, 2004).

Studying children from a child oriented perspective is an attempt to 'direct adults' attention towards an understanding of children's perceptions, experiences, and actions in the world' (Sommer et al., 2010, p. 22). With such an approach, researchers' attention is directed towards children's perceptions, experiences and actions by getting close to and gaining insight into their worlds. Although it is based on everyday experiences and on professional insights, the researcher is supposed to have an objective relationship to the world of children, which means the researchers only present interpretations of the children's perspectives. The term children's perspectives has been introduced for studies aiming at the children's own perceptions. Children's perspectives could be defined as 'to represent children's experiences, perceptions and understanding in their life world' (Sommer et al., 2010, p.

23), where the experiencing child is seen as a subject in his or her own world.

By careful listening, observing and analysing the ways in which children communicate researchers may develop a better understanding of how children make sense of their lives (Souto-Manning, 2009; Farrell, 2005).

## Concluding remarks

This thesis aims at further understanding of young toddlers' communication and interaction in a Swedish preschool. To reach this aim an interdisciplinary approach is used. The ambition was that a combination of perspectives and research findings, as well as my own experience from many years as a preschool teacher could make a knowledge foundation when exploring the life-world of toddlers. The theoretical framework for this thesis is built on phenomenology, the view of the young child as a social person and a child oriented perspective.

## 4. PREVIOUS RESEARCH

Research on young children has mostly focussed on the older preschoolers, aged three to five years (Fleer, 2009). There has so far been relatively little research on toddlers in education, and there is a need for competence building (Berthelsen, 2010). This chapter is a review of previous research starting with research on preschool children, and especially on toddlers. The next section focuses on research performed in everyday life with special interest in studies in a preschool context. The final section presents research on interaction and friendship.

### The toddler

The term toddler is described as related to age; a child between one and three years old, but it is also linked to a certain embodied style with special body movements and a certain way of walking. Løkken (2000) described a special toddling style recognised by running, jumping, trampling, twisting, bouncing, romping and shouting, falling and laughing. Toddlers' ways of being together are characterised by mutuality, embodiment, freedom, spontaneity and joy. There seems to be a tacit understanding between toddlers and they are social and involved in establishing cultural patterns and norms in preschool settings (Løkken, 2000). Toddlers' way to get to know their surrounding world has been described as primarily embodied. Toddlers live and inhabit their world, which is used as a prolongation of their own bodies (Johansson, 2004).

There is no corresponding word to the English toddler in Norwegian or Swedish languages. Løkken (1999, 2004) chose to introduce the word toddler as a Norwegian word, in order to give recognition to the special group of children and the social category of toddlerhood. In Swedish, the English – Norwegian word toddler has been translated as 'toddlare'. Inspired by Løkken, this thesis uses the categories toddlers for 1-3 year olds and young toddlers for children during their second year of life.

### An active and interacting child

Recent studies of children's ways of acting, reacting, behaving and learning have produced a somewhat different picture of children's abilities. Studies of

infant development have, for example, shown that a child can be socially active from the first minutes of its life and that learning can take place in interaction with others in meaningful contexts. Newborns can imitate expressions of the care giver (Meltzoff & Moore, 1999; Stern, 1985; Trevarthen, 1988). These results indicate that infants are aware of and interested in other persons. Perceiving children as active and meaning-making is considered as a major change in the view on the youngest children (Sommer, 1997). Drawing on research within developmental psychology, it has become common in the literature from the 1980s and later to describe children as explorative and resilient rather than receptive and vulnerable (Sommer, 1997).

The key insight that children are born with a capacity to relate to others, and especially to significant others such as their parents and primary care givers, was described by Bowlby (1954) as a theory of attachment. The theory describes how children develop an emotional relationship to the mother, or other primary care-giver, and underlines the importance of attachment for future social and emotional development and mental health. Later, attachment theorists have adapted to changes in society. Mothers and fathers are found to engage in similar parenting behaviour, and other people are actively involved in everyday life of children (Lamb, 2004; Shaffer, 1977). A secure attachment developed in infancy and early childhood is still seen as a foundation for positive functioning hereafter (Meadows, 2010). Studies on upbringing and parenting have pointed out warmth, level of control and mutuality as important approaches. Warmth tends to promote prosocial behaviour as do controlled practices that are based on warmth, responsiveness, explanations and negotiations. Good relationships between parents and children seem to involve a system of reciprocity and mutual obligations (Meadows, 2010).

Babies notice and show interest in other babies, and the interest seems to increase for most children during infancy and the early years in life. During their social actions, they make use of observing, imitating, responding, helping and sharing as means of interaction (Hay et al., 1999). Hay found that even young children may act reciprocally and they seem to remember previous interactions, something which could be seen as the beginnings of friendship. Gender differences are not commonly described during infancy, and there seems to be no findings showing significant gender differences in interaction and communication among young toddlers. Children start using verbal gender connotations and gender stereotypes around the age of two – three years (Meadows, 2010). Two Swedish toddler studies confirm these results; young toddlers did not show preference for peers of the same sex (Michélsen, 2004) and no gender differences were found among one year olds' contact initiatives although the preschool context was found to be partly gender stereotyped (Månsson, 2000).

Stern (1985, 1990) found that children have an emergent sense of self from birth, and they develop more senses (in his terminology a core sense, a subjective sense and a verbal sense) during interpersonal lifelong processes of communication. Already during their first year in life, infants show a beginning competence for emotional attunement with the care-giver, and an emerging insight of other persons' feelings in a shared situation. The emotional attunement is interrelated between both the child and the adult. Interplay, co-existence and mutuality are other competencies growing already from a child's first year in life.

Stern's theory has been spread in Sweden, and is used in training of early childhood educators (Brodin & Hylander, 1997). This theory recognises, for example, that development and learning are seen as processes that always involve feelings. Cognitive aspects and thoughts are not isolated phenomena since the whole child, body, mind and soul, is involved in these processes (Stern, 1985, 1990). Stern's concept the present moment (Stern, 2004) points to the importance of the lived experience of phenomena in the life-world. The feelings perceived in the present moment are looked upon as an existential force. The present moment consists of a subjective, psychological unit of which the perceiving person is totally aware. It is brief (4-10 seconds), uninterrupted, grouping many small meaningful perceptions in a specific context. The present moment can, according to Stern, be considered as the fundamental building stone for creating experiences of relationships.

### The child as a learner

From the 1990s, the preschool child has increasingly been looked upon as a learner, as a thinking human being who poses questions and explores the surrounding world (National Board of Health and Welfare, 1990). According to research based on variation theory (Marton & Booth, 1997; Valsiner, 1989), learning may take place anywhere and at all times, but does not necessarily follow the intentions of the adults. Children develop learning strategies in interaction with the environment, and they are described as capable of solving problems.

Dahlberg and Lenz-Taguchi (1994) made a historical review of the images of the child in education and found two different views which have dominated education; Children as sprung from nature and Children as reproducers of culture and knowledge. The first was predominantly found in preschools, with references to Rousseau, Fröbel and learning through play. The second view was mostly found in schools, with references to Locke, the Christian church and instructional teaching. Drawing on the historic review, a possible vision of Children as producers of culture and knowledge was suggested. In this vision, children are understood as having the same value as adults and that adults can learn from children, a reasoning that may be linked to the philosophy behind the Dialogue Education (SOU, 1972a). Teachers' primary

task would be to listen to what the children try to communicate. According to this perspective, children are described as researchers and the teachers as co-researchers (Dahlberg & Lenz-Taguchi, 1994).

The view of children as producers of knowledge is also inspired by the educational philosopher Loris Malaguzzi, one of the founders of the preschools in Reggio Emilia, Italy. Malaguzzi (1993) looked upon children as competent, actively involved in their own learning and development processes. The image of this rich child was contrasted by the poor child, a view that, according to Malaguzzi (1993) still dominates in school. A pupil is often looked upon as an empty receiver for teachers to fill, and their previous experiences are not sufficiently recognised in school. However, the image of the competent child in a democratic preschool context has also been challenged by research, showing that the teachers use their power in many and indirect ways to steer the children's play and everyday lives (Emilson, 2008; Tullgren, 2003).

Other children, as well as adults, were found to be of importance for learning and development (Williams et al., 2001; Rogoff, 2003). In Rogoff's theory of guided participation in cultural endeavours, she describes how participants in a learning process adjust themselves in varying and complementary ways to reach a common understanding, a mutual bridging of meaning.

Another concept of interest in this thesis is imitation which is seen as gradually emerging and rests on both cognitive and physical development (Garvey, 1990). Imitation among and between toddlers is not only related to previous imitation of adult behaviour, but should rather be seen as an interactional project (Sacks, 1992). In a study of participation in multilingual play between 3–5 year olds, for instance, children were seen to shadow their peers' initiatives, thus showing social agency beyond imitation. Shadowing includes an individuality added by the actor, even though the behaviour at first glance can look like imitation (Björk-Willén, 2007).

### The child as a communicator

The field of speech development is not reviewed in detail here since the young toddlers who are in focus in this study did not use verbal communication much during their play sequences. However, as the study is carried out in a multicultural area, a general comment is made. Migration and globalisation have made multilingualism more common, also in countries that used to be monocultural. Ochs (1988) underlines the interface between the linguistic and the sociocultural structures as crucial when children are developing their communication skills. Linguists have shown that children may learn two (or even more) languages at the same time. Still, the position that a child has to learn the majority language as quickly as possible exists, which may lead to that insufficient support is given to the development of the mother tongue.

Such reasoning implies that the young brain has limited learning capacity. What matters for language development instead is that infants and toddlers are in an effective language-learning environment, whether it is a supportive preschool or at home (Prieto, 2009).

Aukrust (1997) studied language development of two year olds during informal learning situations in a preschool setting. It was found that these situations gave good opportunities for child-adult dialogues, where the two year olds took initiatives to talk also about aspects of life beyond the immediate situation. The two year old children also seemed to adapt to unconscious signals of what to address and when. Another study showed how the language of two boys (2 years of age) developed during peer play in preschool. Different types of repetitions were used and during the four month study, a more narratively organised language developed, based on their joint play (Aukrust, 1997).

In a study with relevance for preschool and family life, outdoor walks were found to be of importance for language development. Zeedyk (2008) saw that young children in prams who face the pusher are more likely to talk, laugh and interact. However, it was found that 62 percent of the 2 700 children observed were riding in away-facing buggies, and 82 percent of the one – two year olds. Parents in away-facing buggies talked less to their children and the children appeared to be more stressed. Zeedyk (2008) showed that when the buggy was turned around, the parents' rate of talking to their baby doubled and it allowed the children visual input. Gestures also seem to carry significance for language development (Goldin-Meadow, 2003). The more a baby points and uses gestures, the larger vocabulary she or he develops. Among 50 studied infants, the ones with parents who frequently use gestures and body language were found to have a richer language. These differences remained three years later.

## Children in everyday life

Since the introduction of video recordings in research, the usage of this method has increased. This may be due to the fact that the video camera enables recordings of children in their natural environment, whereas previous filming was done mostly in laboratories or in other places specially prepared for observation (Johansson, 1999; Lindahl, 1996; Meltzoff & Moore, 1999; Pramling, 1993; Stern, 1985, 1990; Trevarthen, 1988). Daniel Stern described the qualitative change provided by the video recorder in the following way:

Over the past three decades, there has been a revolution in the scientific observations of babies; in fact, we have more systemic observations of the two first years of life than of any other period in the entire life span. This revolution

turned, in part, on our learning to ask the sort of questions that babies could actually answer. (Stern, 1990, p. 2)

From the beginning of 1990 toddler researchers in the Nordic countries have been using video recordings when observing children in their daily life. Twenty years later, video recordings of children are used as a complementary data collecting method at most universities in Sweden (Persson, 2008).

There is less research on toddlers in early childhood education than research on older children. This may be due to the way preschools are organised. In the Nordic countries, except for Denmark, the preschools are integrated for children aged 1-5 years. In the rest of Europe separate institutions are more common, as for instance in Denmark with institutions for toddlers (*vuggestue*) and for children aged 3-5 years (*daginstitutioner*). Most often the toddler institutions are seen primarily as providers of child care, which belong to the social sector. Preschools, in these countries, are open for children from three years of age and are classified under Education (Rabušicová, 2008). In Greece, a research review shows that there is almost no research on toddlers in child care centres. This could possibly be explained by the fact that toddlers and 3-5 year olds are part of separate organisations (Petrogianis, 2010). There is little research on toddlers in Danish universities (Broström & Hansen, 2010). One of the few Danish studies recognised that culture is transmitted not only by the adults, but also between the children themselves (Andersen & Kampmann, 1988). Another study found that the pedagogues focus in the centres was primarily socio-emotional, concentrating on the relationships between adults and children (Michelsen et al., 1992). The pedagogues were reluctant to suggest specific activities for the children; free play was prioritized over situated learning activities. Qualitative differences between Danish toddler care centres were related to the degree of empathy, attention and interest shown towards the children by the pedagogues (Thyssen, 1995). Two year old children were found to play in a more developed manner and to have more complex social relationships in centres where the pedagogues were warm, empathic and involved in the children.

There has also been little research on toddlers in preschool in Finland, partly because the issue of toddlers is a peripheral field at universities in comparison to research on older preschoolers, especially six year olds (Hännikäinen, 2010). The research is practice-driven and performed by female preschool teachers, with predominantly qualitative ethnographic approaches.

Early childhood education is a growing research field in Norway, including research on toddlers. This might be partly explained by the growing number of preschools, and the fact that the number of toddlers in preschools has increased substantially during recent years. In 2008, almost 75 percent of children under the age of three attended preschools, led by university trained teachers (Greve & Solheim, 2010). However, the Norwegian government has does not address the contemporary Norwegian research on toddlers in

preschool. Verbal language development, reading and writing are marked as research areas of interest, but the nonverbal ways that has been shown to dominate toddler communication is not given priority (Greve & Solheim, 2010).

During the last twenty years in Sweden toddler research has mostly been on children's learning, on values in everyday interactions with peers and adults and about preschool culture (Johansson & Emilson, 2010). Lindahl (1996) studied ten children (13-20 months) during their three first months in preschool. The aim of the study was to record how the children spontaneously focused their attention during the process of becoming a preschooler. Based on the ten children's different experiences and life skills, it was found that they used different strategies when getting to know the preschool. This result called for changes in the planning of the introduction periods in Swedish preschools. Lindahl's phenomenographic study also showed qualitatively different ways and varied learning strategies among toddlers.

In another study, toddlers' learning in multiple fields was studied during a three year project (Sheridan, Pramling-Samuelsson & Johansson, 2009). Methods of observing children's knowledge relating to communication, interplay and mathematics were developed. The results show that there was considerable variation in the toddlers' learning, and that this variation could not be explained only by the age of the child. Another important factor which seems to influence the toddlers' learning was the way in which teachers communicate with and approach children, showing that children do not have equal opportunities for learning in preschool. According to the observations made by their own teachers, the children seemed to be involved in creative and reciprocal interactions, characterised by joy and interest. The results indicate that a significant change in knowing/learning occurs between the age of 1 and 3 years with regard to different tasks related to mathematics and communication.

In a study of toddlers and ethics, Johansson (1999) found that the toddlers develop and defend norms and values in the preschool context. The children cared for their peers and they also defended their own rights. Furthermore, toddlers stood up for the right of being together as well as their right to specific toys. Johansson (1999) also showed that the toddlers used their bodies when they expressed their ethical standpoints, sometimes in contradiction to the rules set by their teachers.

Researchers have also studied the relationships between parents and teachers (Musatti & Picchio, 2010). Out of home day care for children below three years of age has increased considerably during the last thirty years in Italy, although the most common solution still is that infants and toddlers are taken care of at home, typically in a one adult – one child arrangement. This situation was characterised by a high degree of social isolation. As a consequence of these findings centres for children and parents have been opened. The centres are also considered as important services for the growing num-

ber of immigrant families in Italy. Another focus for research in Italy has been the transition between home and child care setting. The findings showed that the transitions were emotionally challenging not only for the child, but also for the mother and the teacher, which had consequences for the relationships in the following years (Musatti & Picchio, 2010).

Toddlers who moved from their familiar classrooms to a new classroom were found to react negatively during the first period in the new environment (Cryer et al., 2005). The moves were associated with increased distress, especially for young toddlers. The distress was less when children moved along with a peer, confirming the importance of recognising the peer relationships and child culture that develops among young children.

### Play and learning within early childhood education

Fröbel, Montessori, Steiner as well as Malaguzzi emphasized the importance of a child oriented environment for children's learning and development (Pramling-Samuelsson & Asplund-Carlsson, 2003; Sylva et al., 2010). The children's competencies were found to be related to and challenged by the affordances in the physical and psychological environment (Clark, 2010; Michélsen, 2004). From this perspective, education has the ambition to give children as rich experiences and opportunities as possible.

Although play is very important in early childhood education, much of the fundamental research on play is now quite old (Fleer, 2009). The socio-political worlds, where children grow up, are very different from the times of Piaget's and Vygotsky's studies and the life experiences of children are diverse, global and technological (Fleer, 2009). A growing number of local and contextualised findings challenge the predominance of western researchers' theories and the view of a universal child (Göncü, 1999; Lillemyr, 2009).

Play is an integrated part of early childhood education, but the role of play has been defined in different ways. Play has been described as an opportunity for children to go beyond their daily behaviour. For example children in play climb up to positions where they are a head above their height (Vygotsky, 1978). This can imply a means for learning (Lillemyr, 2009) since it involves complex forms of learning processes, particularly in the cognitive and social domains, but also moral and intellectual aspects (Sutтерby & Frost, 2006; Wood, 2009). Play can in addition serve as an opportunity for children to learn how to understand their surrounding world, to practice and it can enhance learning about themselves and others (Saracho & Spodek, 2003). The essence of play can also be understood as an opportunity to deal with reality on a child's own terms (Johnson, Christie & Wardle, 2004) or as an activity where young children's inner world can develop, for example, through the child's use of imagination and fantasy (Fleer, 2009). Play is an interpretative cultural activity, where children express, manipulate

and try to understand their surrounding community. Even young toddlers' play is dependant on local cultural routines and traditions (Aronsson, 2009).

Play can also be understood as a social phenomenon where the 'make-believe' aspect in pretend play can be seen as a way for others to look into the communicative world of the child (Sawyer, 1997).

Researchers claim that certain skills are needed in order to be able to play. These skills involve mutuality, reciprocity and turn-taking (Garvey, 1977), but also motivation, the use of verbal and nonverbal communication and free choices (Johnson et al, 2004; Sutton-Smith & Kelly-Byrne, 1984). The use of bodily action, including at times rough and tumble play, is also recognised as an important part of play (Løkken, 2000; Pellegrini, 2006).

Research has found that a mutual involvement between children and between a child and an adult in sustained shared thinking (Siraj-Blatchford, 2009; Sylva et al., 2010) is beneficial for learning. When teachers and children focus on the same things, teachers should adjust their perspective to that of children, in order to promote thinking and learning about the same learning objective. Multiple studies have come up with similar results, put together in a developmental pedagogy (Pramling-Samuelsson & Asplund-Carlsson, 2003). In this theory, the intended learning objectives as well as the acts of learning are to be brought together in learning activities that are characterised by involvement and curiosity. According to this theory children play and learn in many different ways, and the teachers' task is to interpret and try to understand the children's actions and to meet and respond to the children's initiatives. In addition, children are seen as capable of noticing differences and to reflect upon them. Thus, teachers can make learning visible by arranging variations within an invariant frame (Sommer et al., 2010).

In a comparative study of seven countries (Australia, Chile, Hong Kong, China, Japan, Aotearoa/New Zealand, Sweden and Wisconsin, USA), the aim was to gain an updated and detailed perspective on how play and learning are framed, sanctioned and built into the discourses of early childhood education in the participating countries (Pramling-Samuelsson & Fler, 2009). Five to seven toddlers, in different kinds of early childhood settings in each country, were videotaped during one full day, from arrival until the child was collected by their family. For most children, the teachers and parents were also interviewed by the researchers, who used videotaped sequences as a shared focus during the talks. The analysis of the data was carried out from three perspectives; personal focus; interpersonal focus and institutional or cultural focus (see Rogoff, 2003).

The overall finding was that play is a positive element in toddlers' lives. In all countries, play was seen as a feature, ensuring the children a good start in life. In all countries both parents and teachers valued play highly, but the relation between play and learning varied between the countries. The functions of play could be either to support learning and social development or to mediate knowledge and learning. In Aotearoa/New Zealand play and learn-

ing were perceived as reciprocal processes. The view of the teachers' approach varied from being supportive, but not interfering, to being a facilitator, and between being a distanced observer to having an involved approach. The overall findings showed children's competencies to play skilfully, to concentrate, to create social relationships and to show empathic behaviour (Pramling-Samuelsson & Fleeer, 2009). Both parents and teachers were amazed over the children's competencies, as shown in the videorecordings.

Kowalski et al., (2004) studied how older peers may influence toddlers' (aged 17 to 31 months) emerging symbolic play in eight child-care centres. The toddlers were observed and videotaped in the outdoor environment with age matched peers and with three to five years old peers. Fourteen of the participants were first-borns and ten were later-borns. The result showed that all toddlers benefited from playing with their older peers, and especially the first-borns, which may have implications for the organisation of groups (Kowalski et al., 2004).

### Child culture in preschool

Children develop their own habits, play routines and games, traditions, rules, norms and values together (Corsaro, 1979; 1985; 2003; Johansson, 1999; Løkken, 2000). From this perspective one can identify preschool children in a specific group as living in a peer culture with 'a stable set of activities or routines, artefacts, values, and concerns that kids produce and share in interaction with each other' (Corsaro, 2003, p. 40). The culture is, according to Corsaro, public, collective and performatively manifested by the children's interpretive reproduction.

Corsaro has developed a research approach which can be described as interpretive and ethnographic within a micro-sociological approach. The children are seen as actors, acquiring, rediscovering and co-producing culture (Corsaro, 2003). Characteristics for this culture are shared excitement and joy within a group performance, often resulting in a joint climax, as well as the frequent repetition of the joyful play sequences (Løkken, 2000; Corsaro, 2003). These findings contradict earlier assumptions that toddler interaction was rare, short-lived and often aggressive and with constant need for adult support (Løkken, 2000).

Løkken (2000) studied child culture phenomena in a Norwegian group of 13 toddlers (aged 12-38 months). She looked at what meanings and intentions were involved and what greeting routines were being developed. The observations of greeting routines and play routines showed that part of the toddler style is doing things together, mostly nonverbally and to make spontaneous use of the things at hand. The actions were recurrent and developed into routines, forming a local toddler culture. Løkken (2000) noted recurrent situations where for example a child, who was a bit sad or not fully alert on arriving at the preschool in the morning, was shown empathy by the other

toddlers. They stroke or hugged the new arrival, brought blankets, soft toys or simply pushed the child in a stroller until the child was in the mood for playing. Greve (2007) suggests that as a result of child-initiated activities, a multitude of child cultures are being developed within one preschool group.

Looking at preschool as an arena for culture formation, Eriksen-Ødegaard (2007) studied meaning making in toddlers' narratives during mealtimes in a preschool. Toddlers were found to bring their own ideas into the everyday conversations. The themes were found to be serious and varied as well as including feelings of fear, anger, loss and desire. One theme was linked to a popular story concept, which dominated the everyday talk for some of the children. When the teacher became involved and showed interest, the story grew into a theme in the preschool programme in that preschool unit. The multivoiced analysis showed different possibilities for the children to influence the daily content, but also how dependent the children are on involved teachers, who can tune into and enrich the children's narratives. Furthermore, child-initiated stories were found to challenge the authority of the teacher, and were also found to be used as a powerful means, where the dominant 'authors' exercised authority over other children. Eriksen-Ødegaard (2007) points out that traditional and popular culture are related and not to be seen as opposites.

Aukrust (2001) found cultural differences in three year olds' talk-focused talk in preschool, where Norwegian children were involved in more narrations and American preschoolers' conversations included more of discourse management about behaviour and happenings. Conversations during meal times also have been found to differ between cultures with more narratives in Norwegians families and more discussions about regulations in the American families (Aukrust & Snow, 1998). The extent to which the ideas from the children may influence the daily programme was found to be related to the approach of the adults (Aukrust & Snow, 1998; Eriksen-Ødegaard, 2007).

Studies on toddlers' participation have not received strong attention. Based on 21 interviews of child care workers on children's learning, Berthelsen and Brownlee (2005) analysed the right for toddlers to be agents of their own learning. The analyses revealed a sense of mutual engagement in learning between adults and children. Children's participation was encouraged by shared understandings, and by adults who respected their autonomy and independence. However, as a conclusion from their toddler studies, both Løkken (2000) and Berthelsen and Brownlee (2005) suggest that the cultural context of public day care should be recognised as richer than taking care of children while their parents work. The toddler interplay may be viewed as young citizens' visible contribution to public life.

## Quality in preschool

Longitudinal studies show positive effects of early childhood education on development and learning, in comparison with home based rearing (Andersson, 1986, Sylva et al., 2010). However, research also shows the importance of high quality in the children's centres and the important role of skilled educators (Hårsman, 1994; Sheridan et al., 2009; Siraj-Blatchford, 2009).

Drawing on multiple empirical studies in Flemish preschools, Laevers developed a model for measuring quality in early childhood education (Laevers, 1997) based on notions such as children's well-being and involvement during the learning processes. Well-being was described as a state of feeling recognised by satisfaction, enjoyment and pleasure, where the child is receptive and has the basic needs met. Involvement was defined as a quality of human activity that can be recognised by motivation, concentration, persistence and a deep flow of energy. Deeply involved persons work at the very limits of their capabilities with an energy flow that comes from intrinsic sources (see Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). Laevers (1997) process-oriented child monitoring system was based on a holistic perspective that integrates knowledge, sensations and feelings, and its aim was also to encourage discussions about quality in early childhood centres.

Increasingly, research on preschool quality is based on the Infant/Toddler Environment Rating Scale (ITERS) (Harms, Cryer & Clifford, 1990) or The Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS) (Harms, Clifford & Cryer, 1998). The ECERS scale has been adapted for Swedish preschools and been used in multiple studies during the last fifteen years. The results showed that although most preschools in Sweden are of good quality, there are some of low quality, and some of excellent quality (Sheridan & Pramling-Samuelsson, 2009; Sheridan et al., 2009). Over the years the differences between high quality and low quality preschools were found to increase.

Specific procedures for documenting, analysing and assessing quality in the child care settings have been developed in Italy where the ITERS scale has been used and further developed to include parent participation (Musatti & Picchio, 2010).

Johansson (2004) linked quality in early childhood education for toddlers to three dimensions; atmosphere, teachers' view of the child and teachers' view of learning (Johansson, 2004). Learning, seen as relational and contextual, was found to take place in encounters between teachers and children and between children. High quality was correlated to an interactive atmosphere characterised by proximity to the child's life and a respectful approach to the child's expressions and perspectives (a.a.). Furthermore, an education based on a balance between activities freely chosen by the children and initiated or extended by the teachers was found to be related to high quality (Sylva et al., 2010).

## The important adult

Researchers from various perspectives agree on that the first three years of life are critical for children's development and well-being (Laevers, 1997; Margetts, 2005; Meadows, 2010; Roberts, 2010). The care of very young children is highly specialised and challenging work, and the teachers' approach and involvement are the most important quality factor (Pramling, 1993; Sylva et al., 2010). When staff members are emotionally stressed, this affects their work and the children, and may result in rigid routines and practices (Gray, H., 2004; Johansson, 2004). Pedagogical documentation enables teachers to a visible access to observations of children's interests, abilities and learning processes, and may serve as means for recording, reflecting, and supporting children. It also provides parents and preschoolers a view of what is happening in the preschool (Pramling-Samuelsson & Lindahl, 1999; Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 1999; Gray, D. E., 2004; Lenz-Taguchi, 2006).

In an intervention study in Sweden, teachers were trained in affirmative responsiveness and to widen the world of the toddlers (Palmérus, Pramling & Lindahl, 1991; Lindahl, 2002). Drawing on the theory of early intervention (Klein, 1989) which includes concepts like interaction, communication, intentionality, reciprocity, expanding and mediating meaning and feelings of competence, the teachers were supervised during 18 months. Stimulated recall based on videorecordings was used for metareflection. The result indicated that the intervention programme helped the educators to gain new insights on children and on how to promote learning.

Toddler research in Aotearoa/New Zealand has focused on the professionalisation of care in early childhood education and care services (Rockel, 2009). As a consequence of the national curriculum, 'Te Whariki', 50 percent of the preschool teachers must be qualified and registered. The image of the profession as being a carer with the task to 'mind' babies and toddlers has been challenged. The findings show a change among the early childhood professionals, working with infants and toddlers, to an identity as 'teachers', working with a pedagogy of care, rather than as caregivers (Rockel, 2009).

In a study on toddlers' well-being in the United Kingdom, Roberts (2010) also emphasized the important role of the adult. Roberts looked at four dimensions of well-being; agency, belonging-and-boundaries, communication and physical well-being. Although Roberts' study concentrates on child – adult relationships in the family, her definition of children's agency can be of broader interest. According to Roberts toddler agency leans on a positive sense of self, a sense of pride and achievement and a sense of empowerment. The four dimensions of well-being draw attention to the interdependency between affect and cognition. Roberts (2010) stressed the mutual state of intersubjectivity that involves the child and the other, learning together in an equal, reciprocal dialogue, which she called 'diagogy'.

## Children's interaction

There is by now a substantial amount of studies on the relationships between toddlers and teachers (Howes, 1983, 1988; Johansson, 1999; Lindahl, 1996, 2002; Løkken, 2000; Palméus et al., 1991). These studies show that toddlers are capable of engaging in intersubjective relationships with adults. However, these findings have not led to a corresponding increase in research on toddlers' peer relationships (Løkken, 1999). There seems to be a tendency to underestimate the metacognitive and metalinguistic ability of infants and toddlers, and their agency, within play and learning contexts (Macfarlane & Cartmel, 2008).

## Children as active participants in peer groups

Looking upon children as active human beings in their own right has led to the development of new theories about their play and interplay. From this perspective, young children are seen as active in developing relationships with friends, especially while playing. Play is considered to be motivated both by the children's own intentions and by affordances in the surrounding environment (Fleer, 2009; Pramling-Samuelsson & Asplund-Carlsson, 2003).

The social order and the possible positions children may take during play are not static but rather co-constructed through turn by turn interactions between the participants (Danby, 2009). Older preschoolers, aged 4-6 years, were found to continuously co-construct social order, both in relation to the expectations and rules put up by the adults, and by negotiating their own peer constructed social order, norms and values (Cobb-Moore, Danby & Farrell, 2009). Within their peer cultures, they were seen to actively and competently enact regulation. This happened both in the culture made up by the adults and the cultures made up by the peers. This means that children should not be seen as passive recipients in the process of creating social order and rules.

Recognising the child as an integrated and co-creating social actor in cultural routines presupposes that the child has the mental ability to take the perspective of others and to try to understand other people's meaning. In that sense, Corsaro's ground breaking research within micro-sociology (1979) can be understood as carried out with a child perspective. Children's culture may exist in parallel with the culture perceived and supported by adults. The children, even as young as toddlers, can describe what they perceive as important in the adult world and also the rules they have made up themselves (Corsaro, 1979, 2003; Johansson, 2004; Löfdahl, 2007). Two and three year old toddlers were found to include or exclude their peers from playing. When teachers begin to see teasing, taunting or bullying in their group of

toddlers, they can stop these processes by, for example, actively engaging the children in physical and musical activities (Heimes, 2009).

Göncü (1999) stressed that play, development and learning are situated in contexts, including people, meaning that play should be seen as an interpretative cultural activity, where children express, manipulate and try to understand the surrounding community. Further, they shape and reconstruct each other through local practices and relationships within their group. There is, however, a need for further studies on the power of peer culture, in which children shape and reconstruct each other and develop fundamental values and norms (Clark, Kjørholt & Moss, 2005; Danby & Baker 1998; Göncü, 1999).

## Friendship

Friendship has been studied intertwined with research on play because children play with their friends and they develop friendships while playing. Three to six year olds are shown to be active in developing relationships with friends, especially while playing. Play is considered to be motivated both by the children's own intentions and by affordances in the surrounding environment (Clark, 2010; Corsaro, 2003; Danby, 1996; Sawyer, 1997).

Corsaro (1979) studied access rituals among peers (3-6 years), within a group of children spending time together on an everyday basis. Nonverbal strategies were found to dominate the access initiatives even among the five to six year old children. Most common access rituals were nonverbal entry, to produce a variant of the ongoing behaviour, circling around the game and monitoring. The most successful strategies, which led to inclusion in the ongoing play, were to repeat the same access ritual or to combine two or three nonverbal rituals.

Friendship has been defined as a mutual relationship, characterised by companionship, intimacy and affection by Howes (1983, 1988) who defines friends as children who enjoy and prefer playing together. Dunn (2004) looks upon friendship as a voluntary relationship, confirmed by both parties, including reciprocity as well as mutuality of affection. Older preschoolers develop effective social skills and choose friends among their peers. Children show preference for their friends as playmates and friends give and receive more positive support (Dunn, 2004). In addition, friendship is seen as related to closeness, sharing of emotions, both positive and negative, as well as familiarity. Friendship can, however, not be taken for granted and does not develop automatically, compared to relationships with parents, sisters and brothers (Greve, 2007).

Jonsdottir (2007) studied peer relationship with the help of sociograms and by semi-structured interviews with 353 three to six year old children. She found four different patterns of relationships; friendship (mutual preference), belonging (named by a peer), solidarity (naming peers) and exclusion

(not being named or not naming anyone). Around 50 children belonged to the category exclusion; not recognising friends or being recognised as a friend by any preschool peer. This indicates that friendship does not develop automatically, and not for all children. Friends were linked in friendship, recognised by a reciprocal relationship with shared feelings (Jonsdottir, 2007). Peers, on the other hand, were children, who play together and accept each other, without recognising the reciprocal agreements that were seen as characteristic of friendship (Jonsdottir, 2007). Preschool children were seen to engage in the same types of play both with peers and with friends, but friendship seemed to add a more intense experience and to enrich the children's social and emotional competencies.

Individual children form diverse kinds of friendships, and different as well as varied communication patterns are used with distinct children (Greve, 2009). Studies of friendship among toddlers in early childhood education and care have also shown that toddlers orient themselves in different ways to different peers in the preschool group. Howes (1988) studied the composition of playmates in different play groups of young toddlers (13-24 months), late toddlers (25-36 months) and preschoolers (3-5 years). Cross-sex friends were common among the young toddlers (68 %), but showed a dramatic decrease to 16 percent cross-sex friends among the preschoolers. Friends can also influence each other's speech according to Katz (2004) who studied the language used in two dyads, made up by three girls (aged 2.7-3.4 years). The nature of their relationship was similar to the way they talked with each other in the dyads. Their interpersonal awareness was shown when they used differences in voice levels and in realistic versus silly talk. Also young toddlers can be aware of their peers. Musatti and Panni (1981) studied peer group play among six children (aged 11-18 months) and concluded that all children paid more or less constant attention to their peers by following them with brief or extended gazes. Later studies confirm that it seems to be common among two and three year old children to have friends (Greve, 2007; Johansson, 1999, 2004).

Michélsen's study (2004) on toddler interplay in preschool showed frequent but rather short interplay sequences lasting between 5 seconds and 30 minutes. Most common was interplay between two children; one girl and one boy. The interaction started around an active child or around popular toys, which Michélsen defined as social affordances. The majority of the interplay sequences between the toddlers studied were positive and supportive, and only 25 percent were negative or established as conflicts. The conflicts centred on getting access to a specific toy, and were very short, ending when one of the children got the toy. The dominating affirmative interplay patterns were seen to develop into new forms of play or new routines.

In an Italian study with an ethnographical approach (Monaco & Pontecorvo, 2010), the sociability among 18 children (20-40 months) was observed during two months within the social context of their early childhood

centre. The interaction was analysed within a participant framework (compare Goodwin, 1990). The toddlers were positioning themselves on different participatory levels, active or peripheral, and took on multiple communicative roles, for example as initiator and uptaker. Although these children were speaking with each other, the researchers underline the multiple nonverbal ways of communication that were going on during the communication sequences. Being an observer or part of an audience was considered as important participation. Another interesting finding by Monaco and Pontecorvo (2010) has to do with the adults. Although there was practically always an adult present with the children, the social initiatives mainly came from the children. Phases of transition between different daily activities seemed especially to encourage communication. Furthermore, the children around 24 months of age showed beginnings of comprehension of the basic rules of conversation, respecting turn alternation, gaze orientation and body posture.

Although the design and findings of most toddler studies were focused on dyads and triads (Greve 2009; Howes, 1983; Katz, 2004), some Scandinavian findings imply that interplay is open for many players. Multiparty play showed rich experiences of joy in and from movements accompanied with happy laughter (Løkken, 2000; Michélsen, 2004). Since negotiations are central in toddlers' communication with peers, playing can be looked upon as opportunities where they develop social behaviour through interaction with others (Alvestad, 2010).

Jonsdottir's study (2007), referred to above, showed different social positions among children aged 3-7 years. Studies on emotions shown during toddler interaction may give further understanding of the positions the children take and are given (Dunn, 2004; Johansson, 1999, 2004). Conflicts between friends are addressed seriously by children as young as two to three years, and are with increasing linguistic skills resolved by negotiations (Alvestad, 2010; Meadows, 2010).

## Concluding remarks

On the basis of the research reviewed in this chapter, the following standpoints guided the research in this thesis:

- Children are looked upon as having competencies for communication and interplay, and already from birth.
- Toddlers are social actors in a shared world, and their activities influence and change the surrounding environment, including the people present.
- Through their interaction with others, toddlers emerge as meaning-makers who also produce and reproduce culture.
- Learning and development take place as coordinated processes between individuals.



## 5. THE SWEDISH PRESCHOOL

The aim of this chapter is to provide a background for the reader regarding the organisational structure and the development of preschools in Sweden, in particular from a societal perspective. The chapter is structured to complement Article III. From the very beginning of the establishment of child care services, toddlers were included in the Swedish preschools. There were no separate institutions for the under threes. Toddlers in Swedish preschools today are raised under specific and very positive circumstances. I think it is of importance to look close at the institutional context, which also has enabled this study.

There is no distinction in the Education Act or in the National Curriculum for the Preschool between preschool children based on the age of the child. Thus, this overview of the Swedish preschool as a context for the study could be seen as valid for toddlers (1-3 years) as it is for older preschoolers (3-5 years).

### Preschool as part of a welfare system

The first Swedish preschool started in the early 1800s, through initiatives by philanthropists and representatives from the church. The inspiration came from Robert Owen and his Scottish Infant schools, from Friedrich Fröbel and his Kindergarten as well as from Rudolf Steiner and Maria Montessori. The first infant school started in 1836, where the first written curriculum is from 1837, the first crèche opened in 1854 and the first kindergarten in 1896 (Johansson, 1983; Engdahl, 1990). In the middle of the twentieth century, day care, kindergarten and family policy became a political field of interest (Myrdal, 1935; SOU, 1951), with the result that the state and the municipalities took greater responsibility for early childhood development. They started to support general child allowance, modern apartment housing, child health centres, kindergartens (part-time) and day care centres (full day).

In 1968, the government appointed the Commission on nursery provision (Barnstugeutredningen) to come up with proposals, both qualitative and quantitative, for a national preschool policy. The commission reports, *The Preschool, part 1* and *The Preschool, part 2* (SOU 1972a, 1972b) outlined the basis for the Swedish preschools of today and resulted in the first Act of Preschool in 1975. This Act introduced the overall concept preschool, for all

previous forms of early childhood education. It introduced the right to *general preschool education* (allmän förskola) for six year olds, three hours per day, 525 hours per year, and free of charge. For the youngest children (6-30/36 months), a joint toddler group (småbarnsgrupp) with 10-12 children was proposed, instead of the previous three age groups (6-12 months, one year olds and two year olds). A mixed 'sibling group' (syskongrupp) with 20 three to five year old children was also introduced. The advantages with mixed age groups were described as providing more possibilities to play with both younger and older peers, siblings could more often be together in the same group, children would not have to change unit more than once and the staff would have more varied work.

The preschool was seen as an important building block in the modern welfare society, since it would ensure that all children had a good childhood. Preschools were supposed to support and encourage children's development and learning and enabling parents to combine parenthood with employment or studies. Preschools were to be offered full-time or part-time, and all forms of preschools were to combine education and care in the so called Educare model (Walch, 1993). (For further information about the development of the Swedish preschools before 1975, see Engdahl, 1990; Johansson & Åstedt, 1996; Martin-Korpi, 2007; Simmons-Christensen, 1997; Tallberg-Broman, 1993).

### Goal-directed expansion

During the 1980s and 1990s the political aims of the preschool programme developed further. Public childcare was seen as part of the general welfare system which implied that all children in Sweden should have access to child care with low fees. The bill Preschool for all children (Bill 1984/85:209) established that preschools should not only be justified by parents' need for child care enabling them to work or study. Preschools should also be a right for the child – a benefit that all children irrespective of their family situation were entitled to. Thus, the expansion of child care to provide full coverage for children, whose parents were either working or studying, became the major issue for local politicians during the 1980s and 1990s (Bengtsson, 1995).

The local politicians argued for a more decentralised system for the allocation of state contributions, which they meant would ease the process (Bengtsson, 1995). In 1984, the economic contribution system was changed and resources were distributed linked to just one criterion, the number of children in early childhood education and care. All regulation about the buildings, area/ child, group size and teacher/ child ratios was transferred to the local authorities, to a municipal level (National Board of Health and Welfare, 1984). Previous specific regulation of infant and toddler units were put aside (National Board of Health and Welfare, 1973). From the beginning

of the 1990s, following a shift of government, a systemic change was introduced by the government, including deregulation, privatisation and freedom to choose preschool (Bill 1991/92:65). State grants for all forms of private preschools were promised. Early childhood education became a field for entrepreneurship.

### Preschool also for toddlers

To meet a discussion about whether or not toddlers would benefit from being in preschools instead of being taken care of at home or in family day care, the government appointed a Commission into family support (Familjestödsutredningen), which was to investigate the pedagogical conditions for the youngest children in preschool. The findings from this investigation were that infants and toddlers may well benefit from close relationships with preschool professionals and that young children form social contacts with each other and enjoy spending time together in preschools (SOU, 1981). Although the children spent their days in preschool, they were found to be able to maintain primary quality relationships with their parents. The commission's report also highlighted the important role of fathers in young children's lives, the importance of high quality preschools for infants and toddlers, parental involvement as well as shared responsibility between parents and teachers. Furthermore, the commission suggested groups with even larger age span; 1-6 year olds or 1-9 year olds.

However, there was still reluctance among local politicians to build preschools for toddlers. In the 1980s, Andersson started a longitudinal study at the Stockholm Institute of Education of the effects of early childhood education in preschool, compared with home-based care. Andersson followed a large group of children from birth, comparing their living conditions and where and how they spent their preschool years. The first results from this wide-ranging study showed that early preschool start was beneficial for the children's social, cognitive and emotional development, and the effects were stronger the earlier the children entered the preschool setting (Andersson, 1986). The effects remained also in the following reports from the study.

The findings from Anderson's study inspired other stakeholders. The National Board of Health and Welfare was concerned that working with toddlers did not attract enough university trained preschool teachers. The University of Gothenburg, with support from the National Board, initiated research on toddlers and toddler pedagogy, which resulted in a programme The Possibilities of a Toddler Unit (Palmérus et al., 1991). A research review was commissioned, which showed international support for preschools for children under the age of three years. The question was no longer if preschool was a good contribution to children's lives, but how to ensure good quality in the preschools (Pramling, 1993). The opinion slowly turned; parents asked for preschools and the politicians planned also for toddler units.

## Quality at stake

During the last 35 years, preschools have become a major pillar in Swedish society. All children are welcome, and most children start preschool already during the second year of their life (National Agency for Education, 2010). However, the intentions from the national level have not been sufficiently implemented in the preschools (Lidholt, 1999; Ekström, 2007). Financial cuts during the economic crisis in the 1990s resulted in larger groups of children and fewer teachers. Staff reacted in various different ways to the worsening situation, e.g. by leaving the profession, struggling with inadequate resources or simply by adapting to the new situation (Lidholt, 1999).

On the other hand, parents express their appreciation of preschools, and preschool continues to be the most appreciated municipal service (Swedish Quality Index, 2010). The Swedish preschool model has also been reviewed by international panels. The organisation for economic co-operation and development (OECD, 2001, 2006) concluded in their comparative report over 26 countries that Early Childhood Education and Care in Sweden is of high quality, in many areas the very best. In an international comparison presented by Innocenti, Sweden was placed in top (UNICEF, 2008). In this report, ten areas within early childhood and family policy were monitored, among them parental leave, national goals for coverage and allocation of resources, subsidies in early childhood education and care, percentage of trained staff, child/staff ratio, child health services and child poverty. Sweden was the only country, out of the 23 participants, that passed in all ten areas.

## Preschool – the first step in education

In 1996, the responsibility of early childhood education and care was moved from the health and social sectors to the Ministry of Education (Bill 1996/97:1D11). The government's intentions for early childhood education were to build a comprehensive school system, with preschool as the first level of education. Preschool, preschool classes (förskoleklass), after school centres (fritidshem) and compulsory school were challenged to cooperate closely. In this way, the Minister of Education promoted the merging of different educational traditions and the implementation of new ideas about learning and working methods (Bill 1997/98:6). Consequently, in 1998 the responsibility for preschool and child care was transferred from the National Board of Health and Welfare to the National Agency for Education (Bill 1997/98:6) and a national Child care and school Commission (Barnomsorg och skolakommittén) was appointed for curriculum issues.

The commission's reports (SOU 1997a, 1997b) resulted in the first National Curriculum for the Pre-school (Ministry of Education and Science,

1998a), the establishment of the preschool class for the six year olds, and a revised curriculum for the 6–16 year-olds (Ministry of Education and Science, 1998b). Education was thus co-ordinated from the toddler's first days in preschool to leaving compulsory school.

In the beginning of the 2000s, new general reforms aiming at higher enrolment in preschool were successively introduced. Free general preschool education, three hours per day, was introduced for four and five year olds. A low flat fee for full day preschool attendance was introduced in 2002. The parents pay for preschool education outside the hours of the general preschool. The cost for one family is limited to three percent of the family income. In 2010, the fee is fixed at 1260 Swedish crowns (SEK) per month (~110 EUR), with a reduced fee for child number two (840 SEK/~80 EUR) and three (420 SEK/~40 EUR). For a fourth child, within the combined preschool and after school centre systems, there is no fee. In the same year 2002, children enrolled in preschool and whose parents became unemployed or on parental leave, were entitled to three hours per day in the preschool (Bill 1999/2000:129).

A new wave of reforms in education started after the general elections in 2006, resulting in a new Education Act (2010:800) and a revision of the National Curriculum for the Pre-school (Ministry of Education and Research, 2010). The government in 2008 also introduced the possibility for municipalities to introduce a child care allowance of 3000 Swedish crowns (~290 EUR) per child (1-3 years) for parents, who choose to take care of their child themselves. In 2009 a third of the municipalities have decided to introduce the child care allowance and parents of one percent of the possible children use the system (Statistics Sweden, 2010b).

New Teacher Education Programmes (Bill 2009/10:89) were decided in 2010, leading to a restart of a specific Preschool Teacher Education. Teachers involved in preschool have had the task to balance several different and partly contradictory demands placed by other institutions and by different interest groups, while at the same time maintaining a core of identity of its own (Folke-Fichtelius, 2008). The new preschool teacher education programme may serve as strengthening the profession.

## Right to education for all children

The Education Act (2010:800) defines the right to education for all children. The new act governs all types of schools and different kinds of providers of education, e.g. municipal, private, co-operative and not-for-profit organisations. Following the new act, preschools were given the same status as other schools with overall goals, regulations and obligations. With this act, parliament thus defines education to be the primary task for preschools (Education Act, 2010, Ch. 1). The art of teaching is defined as 'goal-based processes, led by teachers and preschool teachers, aiming at development and learning,

through experiencing and developing of knowledge and values' (Education Act, 2010, Ch. 1, §3, own translation).

The new Education Act also includes a specific paragraph linked to the commitment taken on as a result of the ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN, 1989) by the Swedish parliament in 1990. Following this act, all education and other activities concerning children, shall be based on the best interest of the child (Education Act, Ch. 1, §10).

All children from the age of one year shall be offered preschool education. From the autumn of the year they turn three they have the right to free general preschool education (*allmän förskola*), in total 525 hours per year, following the primary school's semester system. The demands for preschool education is to be met without undue delay, which means within three months, and as close to the child's home as possible (Education Act, 2010, Ch. 8.). In 2009, the attendance levels for children in preschool were 47% of one year olds, 86.5% of two year olds, 90.6% of three year olds, 93.8% of four year olds and 93.8% of five year olds. Questionnaires to parents show that only 1-2 percent of all children in Sweden are registered on waiting lists (National Agency for Education, 2010).

### Preschool and gender equality

Preschools have been found to influence the everyday lives of families and gender equality between mothers and fathers. With a good preschool coverage, parents, especially women, do not have to choose between having children and a professional career. The parental leave insurance system (Swedish Social Insurance Agency, 2010), enables a growing number of fathers to spend more months as the primary care giver during the child's first years. In 2009, 22 percent of the parental leave days were used by fathers. A family is more likely to have a second and third child when the father is the primary care giver for his child for three months or more (Statistics Sweden, 2010a).

The system gives all parents the right by law to take parental leave from their work until their child is 18 months. The parental leave insurance gives the parents an opportunity to share 480 days with pay; approximately 80 percent of income for the first 390 days and approximately 18 euros a day for 90 more days. The parents decide how to share the days, although both fathers and mothers have to use at least 60 days. These benefits are general and open for all citizens (Swedish Social Insurance Agency, 2010).

Since the early 1980s, an increase in the birth rate has gone hand-in-hand with high female employment rate and high demand for preschools. More children are born when a woman knows she can both be a mother and keep up a job (Statistics Sweden, 2010a). The fertility rate in Sweden was 1.94 in 2009, which is one of the highest in Europe (Eurostat, 2010).

Parents in Sweden are developing parenthood where both parents are working, rendering dual income, and both parents are active in taking care of

their children and their family tasks (Forsberg, 2009). Other ways of supporting parents in the municipalities are open preschools (Education Act, 2010, Ch. 25) and family centres where social, school and health services work together for integrated family support (National Board of Health and Welfare, 2008).

## The characteristics of the Swedish preschool

According to the National Curriculum and the General Guidelines for preschool (National Agency for Education, 2005), the Swedish preschool is founded on a comprehensive and holistic view of children. The preschool strives for a pedagogical approach, where care, nurturing and learning together form a coherent whole. The education shall be 'enjoyable, secure and rich in learning for all children' (Ministry of Education and science, 2010, p. 4). Preschools are open all year round and daily opening times are varied to fit in with the parents' working hours or study schedules. Preschools can be run by municipalities, companies, parent cooperatives or by non-profit organisations (Education Act, 2010). The preschool groups are organised locally, and can consist of mixed ages (1-5 years), toddlers (1-3 years old), older preschoolers (3-5 years old) or of age specific groups (1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 years old). The professionals work in teams of two – four teachers and child care attendants, with responsibility for a group of children. Around 55 percent of the staff has a university degree in education, and around 40 percent have completed professional training in the secondary school (National Agency for Education, 2010).

## The preschool child

With reference to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN, 1989), children are increasingly looked upon as citizens, with rights of their own to influence the content and the teaching in preschools. The view on children in the curriculum (1998; 2010) states that children of today are active and competent and have the right to influence their surroundings, to play with friends and to be challenged and supported by the teachers.

## Cooperation with the family

According to the national preschool curriculum, the preschools are supposed to complement the homes of the children, and teachers are responsible for building trusting relationships with the children's families. Cooperation between parents and teachers is seen as fundamental, and the preschool should match the demands from the parents on opening hours, activities and envi-

ronmental issues with a pedagogy based on a combination of education and care (SOU 1972; Walch, 1993).

Preschools have become meeting places for groups of parents and for parent – staff cooperation. A settling-in period, which may last for up to three weeks in the case of the youngest children, provides a basis, which is further developed in day-to-day contacts. Through regular parental meetings and individual meetings with staff about their own child's development, parents are invited to participate and to influence the preschool education and the life-worlds of their children (Martin-Korpi, 2007).

### Playing and learning at the same time

The importance of play for the children's development and learning was stressed in the General Guidelines (National Agency for Education, 2005). The view is that children search for knowledge and develop it through play, social interaction, exploration and creativity, as well as through observation, discussion and reflection. It is said that a sense of exploration, curiosity and desire to learn are to form the foundations for pedagogical activities which should be based on the child's experiences, interests, needs and views. The flow of the child's thoughts and ideas are possible starting points for education. Learning and development should be planned so that children have fun, are involved in meaning-making and have the right to influence matters that relate directly to them.

The whole day can be seen as full of opportunities for play and learning. Theme- and project- oriented approaches usually draw on cross-subject and integrated approaches, which in turn have been found to broaden and enrich the children's learning (Davis, 2010; Rogoff, 2003).

According to the curriculum and general guidelines, learning is promoted not only through interaction between adults and children, but also through what children learn from each other. This reflects the view that children are important and active partners in their own development and learning, actively involving each other in co-learning processes (Williams et al., 2000).

### Allocation of resources

It is the task of the municipalities to allocate resources to ensure preschools of high quality for all children, taking into consideration variations of individual, economic, social and cultural origins. Municipalities receive state contributions, based on demographic data. The municipality is responsible for allocating resources to all recognised preschools within the community (Education Act, 2010).

The most common criterion for allocating resources is the number of children placed in each preschool. The average group size recommended in the General Guidelines is 15 children. Indicators that should motivate

smaller group sizes are young age, gender imbalance, high levels of children from lower socio-economic background, in need of special support or of foreign origin, the level of attendance as well as high turnovers of teachers and children (National Agency for Education, 2005). In 2009, the average group size was 16.8, with a child/ staff ratio of 5.3 (National Agency for Education, 2010). For groups of toddlers (children aged 1-3 years old), 41% had 13 children or less, 45% had 14-16 children and 14% consisted of 17 children or more (National Agency for Education, 2010). The large group sizes for many toddlers have recently been criticised by psychologists and paediatricians (Kihlbom, Lidholt & Niss, 2009).

## Concluding remarks

Early Childhood Education in Sweden is recognised by international studies as being of high quality (OECD, 2001, 2006; UNICEF, 2008). National evaluations carried out by the National Agency for Education (2004, 2008) have shown that the national preschool curriculum was well received both by preschool teachers and at municipal and local levels. However, both evaluations also show large variations between municipalities and between preschools in the same municipality, implicating that many children do not receive the intended education. It seems that most municipalities do not seem to take into account the different conditions facing preschools. In 2008, most municipalities still used volume, the number of children, as the major criteria for distributing resources. The differences arising from the character of the reception area and the number of toddlers in the groups were not enough taken into account, according to the evaluation (2008).

In the evaluation of 2004, staff had increased their use of individualised assessments. Local politicians had translated school assessment systems into developmental plans for preschool children. In the evaluation five years later (National Agency for Education, 2008), the informants showed an awareness of the issues described above, but the use of diagnostic and assessment materials and individual development plans was still being introduced. The evaluation also showed an increase in municipal governance around quality and self assessment, which were to be carried out by teachers (National Agency for Education, 2008).

After ten years with the curriculum, the overall aim to strengthen the pedagogical task for preschools seems to have been realised. The child's learning has been given greater importance in the pre-school after the reform (National Agency for Education, 2004, 2008). However, the preschool pedagogy, characterised by the integration of care, nurturing and learning into a coherent whole, could be at risk, and the agency's conclusion was that the reports about the on-going "schoolifying" of Swedish preschools must be taken seriously.

Excessive emphasis on formal learning at an early stage may have negative consequences and be in conflict with the overall goals of the curriculum (Sylva et al., 2010). With a view on learning as a social construction in specific contexts, focus might be put more on education and on the conditions for good quality instead of focusing on the individual child. OECD has recommended an approach for early childhood education in the following way:

In the early childhood field, an instrumental and narrow discourse about readiness for school is increasingly heard. Faced by this challenge, it seems particularly important that the early childhood centre should become a community of learners, where children are encouraged to participate and share with others, and where learning is seen as primarily interactive, experiential and social. Learning to be, learning to do, learning to learn and learning to live together are each important goals for young children. (OECD, 2006, p. 221)

As a contrast, in international research there is dominance of studies focusing on children with hyperactivity, attention deficit symptoms and dyslexia (Skidmore, 2004). If the purpose is to develop the quality of the preschool, research indicates that an orientation towards clear but minor goals and testing may lead to negative effects (Dahlberg et al., 1999, 2005).

## 6. METHOD

This chapter starts with a presentation of the methodological and ethical considerations for the study. The context for the ethnographic study and the children are introduced, followed by a thorough description of data collecting procedures, transcriptions and analysis of article I and II. The next section describes the methods used for article III, the literature review. Finally, there is a section discussing issues linked to validity and reliability.

### Methodological aspects

In an ethnographical study with young toddlers, it is important to get to know the children by giving them attention, to be mentally present and at the same time to give room for the children to get to know the researcher (Løkken, 2000; Johansson, 2004). As mentioned in chapter three, I have chosen to carry out this study using a phenomenological approach. Inspired by scholars in the field, the preschool in this study is seen as part of the children's life-world (Johansson, 1999; Løkken, 2000). Participatory observation was chosen to allow me to get close to the children, which can be seen as a necessity in a study with a child perspective, but not easy to achieve (Sommer et al., 2010). The methods in a phenomenological study shall be as open and exact as possible, striving for unveiling also what was not obvious (Merleau-Ponty, 1962; Willig, 2008). By choosing a phenomenological framework for the study, there are no previously decided categories that steer the researcher's observations, fieldnotes or the analysis of collected data. Learning on predetermined categories emanating from previous research cannot be a substitute for fine-grained, systematic and extended observations of interactions in the environment (Meadows, 2010). Although time consuming, careful and intensive studies of a smaller number of situations, may give significant contributions within a larger field.

I used a long period for settling down, (April – June, 2006), which had the consequence that the majority of the fieldnotes and the videorecordings were made between August and December, when the children were in the second half of their second year (aged 18-24 months). My ambition was to be seen by the children as a well-known and interested adult. I tried to give priority to the children and did not carry out ordinary teacher tasks (Corsaro, 2003). To be present in the environment studied during a longer period of time (in

this study nine months), also adds the possibilities to consider continuity and change over time.

To understand interaction and communication, one must pay attention to more than what is being said or done. Participants in a conversation are constantly negotiating and changing their footing during multiparty talk (Goffman, 1981). Footing includes aspects such as posture, gaze, set and stance as well as changes in the tone of voice and tempo where by-players, cross-players and side-players may make the conversations very complex. All participants are thus to be looked upon as contributors, also the ones which at first glance seem to just make up an audience. Live witnesses are to be seen as co-participants in the social context, responsive to all mutual stimulation that goes on (Goffman, 1981). This means that other children, who were present in the room during play sequences, as well as I myself, may have influenced the interaction and playing.

All but two of the toddlers in the preschool unit were bilingual and the young toddlers did not talk much, which meant that it was not possible to use informal conversations or interviews as empirical methods. Inspired by Emerson, Fretz and Shaw (1995) I used fieldnotes together with photos, video-recordings and a diary as methods instead (Gray, D. H., 2004; Pramling-Samuelsson & Lindahl, 1999; Tobin et al., 2006; Willig, 2008). The combination of such methods (Gillen et al., 2009) ensures rich data which generate detailed documentation of the toddlers' playing and interaction in their everyday environment. However, fieldnotes and videorecordings are not to be seen as neutral and they do not capture everything. The fieldnotes are but one possible way to describe any particular event; someone is holding the pen that tries to put phenomena into words (Emerson et al., 1995). There is also someone behind the camera, who chooses the perspectives, the distances, what to record and how many cameras to use. These aspects are important for the trustworthiness of the study. Thus decisions on procedure should be as transparent as possible (Heikkilä & Sahlström, 2003).

One should also be aware of the influence that the presence of a researcher has in the setting. When using participatory observations, the researcher brings her own preconceptions. The asymmetry and the likely power imbalances that may exist between adults and children must also be taken into account when studying interaction between children (Cederborg, 1997; Corsaro, 2003; Farrell, 2005; Halldén, 2007).

My own experience from many years of working as a preschool teacher made it possible for me to perceive and recognise the multiple on-goings when the children were playing, instead of becoming overwhelmed or intimidated (see Sawyer, 1997). The familiarity with the field and my prior knowledge about toddlers were helpful for getting a contextual understanding of the preschool. An experienced preschool teacher, who turns to research, may at the same time strive for improvements of the practices and to challenge the field (Eriksen-Ødegaard, 2007). However, there was also a risk

that my background would lead to taking-for-granted assumptions about the events, based on my familiarity with the field. The choice of an unknown preschool as well as an ethnographic and phenomenological methodological framework enabled me to keep a distinct line between my previous experience as a teacher and the position as a researcher. By making notes of my thoughts and reactions in fieldnotes and in a diary, it became possible to reflect on my own preconceptions during the analysis. According to phenomenology, there are always many parallel interpretations of what seems to be going on.

## Ethical considerations

The presence of a researcher in a preschool unit also brings up questions of ethics. More considerations of different kinds are to be made in a longer study, than in a study based on one – three days of observations (Meadows, 2010; Willig, 2008). This study has followed the ethical rules and practices for research in Sweden (Swedish Research Council, 2010). The researcher must give sufficient information about the study, and receive consent from the participants. In this study, the parents and teachers got written and oral information and signed their consent on a special form. Great concern was given to the information process. As a vast majority of the parents have another mother tongue than Swedish, it was not considered enough to just send home written information. In such a situation, all ethical rules must be carried out in ways that are relevant in the context studied (Sigurdsson, 2001; Farrell, 2005). When recognising the language issue, I first discussed with the preschool teachers if the information should be translated into other languages, or if interpreters should be used. The decision was to follow the ordinary routines for parent cooperation, which were based on small group conversations, where other parents may serve as facilitators.

I decided that initially, I should be present during mornings and afternoons, to be able to introduce myself to all parents. The written information along with a photograph and a presentation of me was put on a notice board by the entrance. The intention was to discuss the aim of the project as well as possible issues, before asking the parents for consent. It was also important for me to clarify that the consent could be withdrawn at any time and that the data should be treated confidentially. The parents of the 15 participating toddlers all gave consent for the participation of their children. However, for two of the two year old children, the parents did not want their children to be videorecorded. This was solved by making sure that these two children were playing elsewhere, when I was videorecording the young toddlers.

A special consideration during the data collecting procedure was that I tried to adopt a child perspective. This meant that I also wanted to receive informed consent from the participating children since young children also

have the right to be listened to and to influence their daily lives (see Halvars-Franzén, 2010; Ljusberg, 2009; Michélsen, 2004; Ministry of Education and Science, 2010; UN, 1989). In a longer study, such as this one, it can be necessary to ask for consent more than once, as the children might get used to the situation and forget that they have the right to deny participation (Farrell, 2005). Thus, I tried to be observant of their body language and their signals, which clearly can indicate acceptance, opposition or denial.

The ethical aspect about anonymity (Swedish Research Council, 2010) was solved by keeping the informants identity hidden during the whole process until publication and also forthcoming. Neither the suburb nor the preschool are identified in this thesis. Furthermore, all children and adults have been given different names. In that process, the names were chosen to be similar by origin to the children's own names. All data and transcriptions have been kept in a locked room.

The researcher's presence in the room can be interpreted by the children as an acceptance of the ongoing play behaviour (Bliding, 2004; Ljusberg, 2009). Even if the play is a bit tough, the children may continue, if the researcher chooses not to interfere. When analysing the videorecordings, I found some examples of quick glances from the observed children towards me, standing behind the camera. These glances indicate that the toddlers seem to be aware of the person behind the videorecorder. In spite of my passive presence, I may therefore have influenced their interaction during play. A couple of times in teasing situations, I gave a suggestion to a child: *Say NO!*, if the child looked at me for guidance. A couple of times I interrupted the observations; once when the children started fighting and some times when the children repeatedly walked away from the camera.

When making observations in real life, some situations may arise where the moral principles of the general ethics are tested (Sigurdson, 2001; Farrell, 2005). I have also discussed sensitive situations arising from this study with my advisors and research colleagues.

## The preschool context

The study was carried out in a municipal preschool in a multicultural Stockholm suburb during March – November, 2006. Of the 31 000 inhabitants in the suburb, 30 percent are children. The number of preschool children from families with a foreign background is high (80%) and growing. In the suburb, a two year in-service training project, for staff working at toddler units, had just finished. I had participated in the project, as a lecturer and advisor. I asked the director of preschools to suggest a preschool for my data collection. I did not know the preschool or the teachers involved from before. They had participated in the training project and volunteered to participate in my research project.

The preschool was built in 1979 and is a typical example of preschools from that period (Engdahl et al., 1998). It is located in a park, a short walk from the underground station, in an area with apartment houses. The children's parents have different backgrounds and most of them come from the Middle East and East Africa. Only three of the children in the unit have one or two parents with Swedish as their mother tongue.

There are four units in the preschool, two for toddlers (1-3 year olds) and two for older preschoolers (3-6 year olds). The study is placed within one toddler unit with, in total, 15 children. Two full time preschool teachers and two part time child care attendants work together in this unit; together they cover the hours between 7 am and 6 pm.

The unit is located on the ground floor, with its own entrance door. In the entrance, there is a hall where each child and teacher have individual space for clothes, boots, indoor shoes, marked by a photo, name of the child and the family members. The hall leads into an open space with doors to the other rooms; rooms for eating and fine motor play, gross motor play and circle time, family play, bathroom and for the daily nap.

The furniture is in both child size and adult size. There are materials and toys placed on low shelves and in boxes on the floor, and the children can easily reach most of it themselves. It is possible to walk around the rooms. There are also two low gates, which make it possible to stop the children from entering or leaving the rest room and the family corner, without having to shut a door.

The out-door playground is large, partly natural, partly constructed, with sandpits, climbing frames, small houses, slides, asphalt and grass. The playground is surrounded with a low fence, and it is possible to divide the playground into two, with the help of a gate.

### The children in the study

The 15 children in the studied unit were between 14 and 36 months old during the study. The six youngest children, Theo, Nova, Leo, Robin, Molly and Jasmine, have been the children in focus. They were between 13-24 months old during the study. All the children in the unit are presented in Table 1. They have all been given simulated names.

**Table 1; The children in the study**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Date of birth</b>	<b>Siblings</b>	<b>Comments</b>
*Theo	May -05	0	Starts in October
*Nova	May -05	3	Starts in August Sister of Alice
*Robin	January -05	1	
*Leo	January -05	1, in unit	Brother of Tim
*Molly	November -04	0	
*Jasmine	October -04	3	
Elliot	June -04	0	
Philip	May -04	3	
Oliver	April -04	1	
Olivia	April -04	1	
Max	February -04	1	
Tim	January -04	1, in unit	Brother of Leo
Wilmer	September -03	1	
Alice	August -03	3	Until August Sister of Nova
Julia	June -03	0	Until August

The star (\*) marks the children who are in focus of the study. The oldest children, Julia and Alice, moved to another unit in the preschool after the summer holiday.

## Data collection procedure

The intention was to study the children during periods of the day when they are allowed to decide about their own actions. Self initiated play sequences and non-structured activities were chosen for observations. This intention ruled out teacher initiated activities and daily routines.

Each day while observing, I chose one of the six one year olds to be in focus for my observations. The focus child thus directed my observations through her/his actions, and I followed her/his initiatives, movements, communication and interactions during play sequences. By this methodological

choice, the observations were always linked to how the events and phenomena appeared to the child's meaning making. The method thus helped me to stay focused on what a specific child was experiencing. The other children became part of the observations when they were playing, interacting or communicating with the focus child.

In March, staff in the preschool was informed about my study by the principal and through a letter. The four teachers and attendants at the unit had several meetings with me for information and discussions about the proceedings. In April, the teachers and I had informal meetings with the parents, in the mornings or when they came to pick up their child. Written information was also handed out and the parents signed their consent on special forms (Appendix 2a, 2b, in Swedish). The teachers volunteered to give additional information to the parents.

From the middle of April to the middle of June, I spent two or three half days a week with the children, either mornings or afternoons. My goals for these sessions were to get to know the children and the daily routines at the unit and to make myself known to the children. I followed the children during their play, I helped out when asked by the children and I played along when invited.

The visits in April – June were documented with photos and fieldnotes. Initially, I took photos of all the rooms, the playground and the children, and when changes occurred, I took photos of the new settings. The photos were mostly of the environment and they became of practical use when I tried to remember my experiences from the data collection period. During nine months the preschool environment is changed multiple times as a result of, for example, the weather conditions, rearrangements of corners indoors, and new equipment.

After the summer holidays, I started to document my observations with inspiration from Løkken (2000), and Michélsen (2004). During August to November I used fieldnotes, photos and at the end of the autumn also video-recordings. The children in the Nordic countries are playing outside every day, in the summer time as much as 70 percent of the day, but there are few studies about toddlers' outdoor play (Greve 2007; Moser & Martinsen, 2010). Most early childhood education studies are made indoors, but studies of playgrounds have shown that outdoor environments are increasingly standardised, and cost, maintenance and safety are important factors for decisions made by adults. Children, on the other hand, are found to like challenging places, where they can explore the surroundings (Lindstrand, 2004; Sutterby & Frost, 2006; Davis 2010).

Therefore, I chose to observe both during indoor and outdoor activities.

Inspired by practitioners in Reggio, Italy, the fieldnotes were done in three parallel columns (Project Zero & Reggio Children, 2001). The first captured the actions, the body language, and speech. The second social in-

terventions during the play and the third column involved my thoughts and associations during the working process.

In October when the videorecordings started, the children were first invited to get to know the videocamera. The children showed varied interest in the recordings; some wanted to follow the recordings and looked several times at the result, others did not seem to pay attention to the camera after the first introduction. There was always a teacher present when I was videotaping, thus enabling me to concentrate on the recording. To be able to smoothly follow the children around, I chose to carry the camera. The focus child influenced what was being recorded by her/his movements. I tried not to be too physically close to the child, to leave some space for the children's initiatives without being hindered by a large camera.

## Analysis

The analysis is inspired by a phenomenological tradition, because it strives for rich, intense and complete descriptions, which draw on precise observations (Rasmussen, 1996; Willig, 2008). Further influence is the perspective that interaction is central to the organisation of culture, and face-to-face interaction is a pervasive type of social communication (Goodwin, 1990). Face to face, people show each other what they are doing and what they expect of others in forms of actions or participation. Once we have developed verbal language, communicators tend to give priority to the speech. However, face-to-face interaction enables insight into communication also through gazes, gestures, mimic and posture. Conversation draws on more than the verbal exchange; the units are not isolated words or sentences, but sequences of action within a participant framework (Goodwin, 1990). This means that every turn in a conversation depends on both what previously has been said and on the context in which it is said, where the parties take up and alter different participation statuses. Participation can therefore be understood as a joint social activity, which in multiparty talk leads to a multitude of utterances, where each of them influence all present persons, who in turn can choose to give a verbal or nonverbal contribution to the conversation (Goodwin, 1990).

With close descriptions it might be possible to document things that are not so obvious and hard to notice in the routines and in the environment. In a way, the analysis starts as soon as you begin collecting data. The fieldnotes and the photos were transcribed continuously with special attention given to contact, communication, interplay and emerging friendship phenomena (resulting in 57 pages).

The video observations of the play sequences (8 hours in total) were transformed into DVDs and then first transcribed action by action. With the help of these flowcharts I was able to obtain an overview of what was going

on during the session. Later a time consuming and detailed transcriptions were made of sequences that were considered of special interest for the study; in particular play sequences with intense communication and interaction. The transcription conventions used were inspired by Ochs (1979). She describes that transcriptions should be clear to follow for any reader, and well aligned with the aim of the study. The transcription procedure is a demanding task where for example five minutes of activities can take hours to accomplish. This thorough work is thus of importance since the transcriptions can be seen as the researcher's own data. The way the transcriptions are organised steers the reading and thus the possible interpretations. During the analysis, I tried out different forms of transcription formats, because different formats can open up for possibilities of multiple, alternative readings of the same situation (Lenz-Taguchi, 2006; Eriksen-Ødegaard, 2007).

I have tried to find a transcription format that shows movements, sounds and words simultaneously, as all three expressions can be seen as integrated in toddler communication. As is described by Sawyer (1997) and Eriksen-Ødegaard (2010), the observations have been looked upon as polyvocal text during the analysis. The analytic scheme opened up for new ways of looking at the data. Combining transcripts from videorecordings with fieldnotes made the construction of the transcripts a process. This approach of fine transcription explicates what might otherwise be overlooked and makes it possible to access the rich toddler life-world, without being obscured by pre-considered theoretical concepts (Danby, 2009). This process is also seen in the articles, where I have used different transcription formats.

Table 2 shows the transcription format used in article I. The first column indicates lines, each line capturing one action, and the second column shows names of the actors. The third column shows that special actions are marked with arrows (→), and in the fourth column the toddlers' actions are described in detail.

**Table 2; Example of the format used in article I**

<b>Line</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Actions of special interest</b>	<b>Activity, sounds, words</b>
1	Theo	→	walks towards N. and
2			smiles at her
3	Nova	→	smiles at T. while at the same time swinging and
4			starts to slow down

In article II, the transcripts were presented as comprehensive narratives, where each action is given a new line. The videorecordings together with the fieldnotes gave multiple data. In order to get an understanding of the studied phenomena, all observations and recordings, as well as all the transcriptions, were read multiple times. The ongoing movement from reading to presuppositions of interpretation and back again can result in perceived patterns of understanding (Willig, 2008), which is why I read and reread the data multiple times. The repeated readings about the children's play sequences and interplay created a holistic perception of, and a familiarity with all data. Such a procedure gives meaning to the phenomena looked for (Løkken, 2000).

The analysis of my different observations identified units that carried specific meanings, for example, expressions of initiative, involvement, mutual understanding, or direction. All in all, 128 meaningful situations were identified in the fieldnotes and the video observations. In the analysis of toddlers' interaction (study I), I looked for sequences showing nonverbal communications like movements, gestures, voice quality, facial expressions as well as smiles and laughter. Many variations of turn-taking through various nonverbal actions were found. For study II on how the children made friends, I looked for events, where the children nonverbally or verbally approached or oriented themselves towards each other. On the basis of repeated readings of the fieldnotes and watching of the videotapes, I identified 36 episodes interpreted as showing aspects of creating friendship. The ten respectively nine excerpts shown in the different articles have been chosen as representative examples of recurrent phenomena during the toddler play sequences.

## The literature review

For article III I have reviewed texts, concerning the background of the Swedish preschool and of the political ambitions leading up to the transmission of the field of early childhood education and care from Ministry of Social Affairs to Ministry of Education in 1996 and the educational reforms of 1998.

I searched for relevant literature with the help of different databases of publications linked to the parliament, the government, the national agency for education and national board of health and welfare, the Central Statistics Office and to Swedish research (Libris). My primary sources representing the national level have been Swedish Government Official Reports (especially SOU 1972:26, 1972:27, 1997:21, 1997:157), General Guidelines and monographs on the history of early childhood education in Sweden (see Dahlberg & Lenz Taguchi, 1994; Engdahl, 1990; Johansson & Åstedt, 1996; Pramling, 1993; Simmons-Christensen, 1997). For the local arena, Swedish and international research on the implementing processes have been used (e.g. Bengtsson, 1995; Broström & Wagner, 2003; Dahlberg et al., 1999;

OECD, 2001, 2006; Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2002). The texts studied around activities and pedagogical documentation of learning processes in preschools consisted of a mixture of research and textbooks (Brodin & Hylander, 1997; Doverborg & Ansett, 2003; Nordin-Hultman, 2004; Project Zero & Reggio Children, 2001; Stern, 1990) as well as examples of local municipal plans from one city and one preschool.

The analysis of the texts has been done following a hermeneutic tradition. The hermeneutic tradition leans on the same philosophical ground as phenomenology and is well suited for qualitative research (Ödman, 1992). The reading of a text is to be seen as interpretative, which means there can be many possible readings. Following the hermeneutic tradition, the analysis can be seen as a continuous circular process, going between the totality and different parts and back to the whole text. The understanding grows during the analysis of the individual and the general, and between the object and the subject. With repeated readings over time the circular process can be seen as a spiral, on one hand returning to the same texts, but on the other hand the new readings, over time, open up for new understandings of the texts (Johansson, 1999; Ödman, 1992).

The result is presented following a discursive structure, with sections representing themes and trends, and with theoretical perspectives intertwined.

## Trustworthiness

In this section, the trustworthiness and the transferability of knowledge in the study will be discussed in relation to validity, reliability and generalisation. In a qualitative study such as this one, it is important to pay close attention to the methods used and the choices made.

Validity within social sciences refers to whether the methods used are suitable for the investigation and whether the findings address the aim of the study (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Within the phenomenological research tradition this means that the researcher should consider validity throughout the whole process. How you choose the aims and the setting and what methods and ways of transcription and analysis you apply are of importance and should be suitable for a phenomenological study. Validity depends to a large extent on the quality of the craftsmanship and the researcher's dedication to quality issues throughout the stages of knowledge production. This includes continuous checking and questioning of the findings (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Willig, 2008).

Validity in qualitative research may be assessed by examining if the methods, the analysis and the interpretations are coherent with the theoretical framework, as well as if the results are coherent with what is going on in the context, and may be seen as representing the everyday life in the preschool in a consistent way (Bryman, 2008). If the analysis is trustworthy and fol-

lows a phenomenological holistic tradition, one might talk about the results as being relevant for a broader discussion about, in this case, young toddler's interaction in Swedish preschools.

Reliability in social sciences refers to the consistency and trustworthiness of the research account (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). It has to do with if the events described in a study actually have occurred and in what way. I have tried to make the whole research process transparent in order to give others an informed description and thus a possibility to discuss the consistence and trustworthiness of the findings. The toddlers' life-world is a complex environment and it is not easy to take into consideration all that may influence the situation at hand when designing and carrying out a study. One particular aspect that I had to pay attention to was the effect that my presence might have on the toddlers (see Ethical considerations). Willig (2008) argues that the position of the researcher needs to be acknowledged in the documentation of the research. The credibility of the researcher is also of importance and the researcher must be made known both to the participants but also later to the readers. I tried to adopt a reflexive attitude to my own role throughout the research process and wrote down my thoughts and emotions either in the fieldnotes or in my diary.

In a study with a child oriented perspective it is of utmost importance to become accepted by the toddlers, and that is the reason why I chose to use a long period for acclimatisation. It takes time to become a well-known person and to become familiar with the setting, the daily programme, the rules and of course the toddlers, their families and the teachers. The long acclimatisation period within the nine month study meant that I was present in the life-world of the toddlers from their 14 month to the 24<sup>th</sup>, the larger part of the second year in life for most of the participants. Most of the children were 18-24 months when the observations were made and by then I was a familiar person in the preschool.

There is also the choice between asking the educators to collect data and doing the observation yourself. In this study, the researcher was an outsider, but familiar with the field. Observations made by a skilled researcher are less likely to be subjective than self-descriptions by participants or, in this case their teachers. Such self-descriptions open up for rich data, but they may also lead to methodological misunderstandings. If the observations are made by the teachers, there is a risk that they, subconsciously, choose mainly positive examples, when asked to collect observations in their own practice (Johansson, 2009).

The results of an ethnographic study are specifically interrelated with the observed culture. Fieldnotes draw on active processes of sense-making; choosing what is significant and what is to be ignored. In such processes it is possible that important events are not noticed, but the fieldnotes are still inscriptions of social life in a social discourse (Emerson et al., 1995). The phenomenological framework and the use of a focus child in the observa-

tions facilitated the data collecting procedure and kept me close to the children. This enabled me to get rich descriptions of the interaction sequences.

Validation may also be discussed by bringing up ways and arguments that would falsify the findings (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). I chose to study the toddlers during periods of self initiated play sequences. Being present the whole observation period, I could be certain that the ideas and interactions were initiated among and between the toddlers. There was no external input telling them what to do, and I can thus falsify any suggestion saying that the agency shown by the young toddlers was the result of direct suggestions from teachers.

Another way to increase validity in a qualitative study is to discuss the observations and interpretations with the participants (Willig, 2008). In this study, my collation with the participating toddlers was tacit and related to my checking that the toddlers gave consent to the observations. In addition to being observant of the toddlers, I chose to validate my observations with the teachers. There were formal and informal discussions about the everyday life in the preschool during the research period. During one formal meeting the discussions between me and the teachers circled around the understanding of the accuracy of the observations and their content. I also had four data sessions together with research colleagues at my department, discussing my original data and transcripts. These peer validation sessions can be understood as conversations about communicative validity (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Validity can be expressed through the argumentation during such sessions.

Can the findings in a qualitative study with be transferred to other situations and be given a more general understanding? According to Kvale and Brinkmann (2009), this is often the case and even case studies may show actions and events that change the understanding of people and phenomena. In post-modern times there has been a shift from research aiming at explanations and universal knowledge to research that emphasises heterogeneity and contextuality (see also Sommer, 1997). The findings in a qualitative study cannot predict results or trends. However small qualitative studies can be used to develop or refine theory and thus give rise to questions and potentially to new studies (Willig, 2008).

For this study, the question of generalisation amounts to asking if my findings from this particular Swedish preschool unit may be transferred to other relevant situations. I believe that the phenomena and emerging competencies among the young toddlers shown in this study may be used as a guide to what may occur in another situation, and also in another preschool.



## 7. SUMMARIES OF THE ARTICLES

This thesis is based on three articles which deal with the Swedish preschool. Articles I and II present results from an ethnographic study in a toddler unit within a phenomenological framework. Article III contains an analysis of the development of the Swedish preschool system with focus on the period 1975–2004.

- I. Engdahl, I. (2011). Toddler interaction during play in the Swedish preschool. *Early Child Development and Care*, 181, 1-19, iFirst Article.
- II. Engdahl, I. (2011). Doing Friendship during the Second Year of Life in a Swedish Preschool. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*. (accepted for publication, October 2010)
- III. Engdahl, I. (2004). Implementing a National Curriculum in the Swedish Preschool. *International Journal of Early Childhood Education*, 10(2), 53-78.

In this chapter, these articles are briefly summarised. The articles are available in full in Part two of this thesis with permission of Taylor and Frances Group within Routledge Journals and the Korean Society for Early Childhood Education.

### Article I: Toddler interaction during play in the Swedish preschool

The current situation in Sweden, with a high numbers of toddlers in preschools, gives young children access to additional play arenas and multiple play mates. So far, we do not know much about how young toddlers play and communicate in preschools. Play is an integrated and important part of early childhood education. Play has been described as an opportunity for children to go beyond their daily behaviour, for example that children in play rise above themselves. The quality of interaction during play is based on the

local culture. Improvised play, drama and reality are interrelated in children's play.

The focus in the first study is on toddler interaction. Previous studies mostly look at how three to six year old children play and interact with teachers and peers. The aim was to explore how these young children (17-24 months old) express themselves when playing with peers. More specifically it was concerned with how they interact and communicate with each other during play sequences. Interaction with teachers was not studied.

The study is based on a theoretical orientation influenced by humanistic, cultural-dialogical and interpretative traditions which are designed to let children's subjective world come through. This child oriented paradigm strives to understand children's perceptions, experiences, emotions and actions also from their perspectives. This ethnographic study is placed within a phenomenological framework, where toddlers are at the same time looked upon as spectators, participants and actors in their life-worlds.

The study takes place in a toddler group in a municipal preschool. The three girls and three boys in focus were 17-24 months during the data collecting procedure. They talked very little, and it was not possible to make use of informal conversations or interviews. Thus participatory observations, especially videorecordings, were used for the data collection. Each day during the observations, one of the six toddlers was chosen to be in focus for the recordings. The focus child thus directed the observations through her/his actions. The other children became parts of the observations when they were playing, interacting or communicating with the focus child.

The findings show that the 17-24 months old children can use multiple forms of communication when playing with peers. Their actions involve variations of turn-taking through various nonverbal actions. Play invitation strategies were mostly found to be based on nonverbal communications like movements, gestures, voice quality and facial expressions. The studied young toddlers were found to use one word sentences to underline their invitation moves. The competence of taking others' perspectives was found to be recurrently manifested in their playing. Emotions shown with smiles and laughter accompanied the turn-taking between the young children. Such reactions seemed to reinforce communication during the game and negotiations between peers.

Based on this and previous studies with preschoolers, there is a need to stress the importance of play in early childhood education. The findings from this study indicate that child – child interaction, and time for self initiated activities can be crucial for developing social skills in how to interact with peers.

## Article II: Doing Friendship during the Second Year of Life in a Swedish Preschool

Enrolment in early childhood education and care is growing around the world. In Sweden, a large number, 47 percent of one year-olds and 86.5 percent of two year olds are preschoolers, spending their days in preschools (National Agency for Education, 2010). This new situation, with high numbers of toddlers being raised both in their family and in their preschool, can give young children access not only to more adults but also to multiple peers outside their families.

The aim of the second study was to explore how children during their second year of life in a toddler group create friendship, and what types of actions they use in such a process. What is involved in making and having friends at this age? The focus is on 13-24 months old children in a Swedish preschool and their social interactions.

The data for this article was collected during nine months in a municipal preschool in a multicultural Stockholm suburb. There are four units in the preschool, and the study is placed within one toddler unit with 15 children. The six youngest children in the unit were between 13 and 24 months during the study. These three girls and three boys were in focus for this study.

The ethnographic method follows a phenomenological tradition with participatory observations, including fieldnotes, photos and videorecordings (8 hours). Parents, teachers and children gave consent to the study. The data collection took place both indoors and outdoors. The data was transcribed and analysed, looking for events, where the children verbally or nonverbally approached or oriented towards each other.

The findings show how these young toddlers create friendships: one year olds monitor and pay attention to individual peers, displaying intentionality and agency. The young toddlers spontaneously greeted other children, and they used or recognised their names. The greetings and hugs appear to strengthen the perception of the individuality of the peers and may be understood as the beginnings of friendship. They used a variety of actions to get in contact with or to start playing with another child. They were inviting their peers to interplay, offering toys and helping their peers. The one year olds recurrently looked for special children who could become peer companions in the play. All these social actions were spontaneous initiatives by the child himself/herself, directed at another child, and they primarily took place non-verbally. The overall findings support a theoretical perspective where the young children are seen as social actors, with intentions, social preferences and social competences. The young toddlers demonstrate consistent interest in each other.

Further studies of friendship among the youngest children in early childhood education and care might shed light on the construction of early friendships and whether and how friendship among young toddlers are understood

and taken into account by their teachers. Drawing on this study, from a child oriented perspective, one recommendation could be to carefully plan the preschool groups, especially when moving children between groups. The process of making friends can be at risk, if some of the children are suddenly moved to another group.

### Article III: Implementing a National Curriculum in the Swedish Preschool

During the last 35 years, the Swedish preschool has developed into a general provision for all children. The development has been driven by groups of parents, politicians and teachers, and the situation in Sweden has attracted considerable international interest. The aim of the third study was to give a presentation of the Swedish preschool, for children aged 1-5 years. An additional aim was to compare the national goals and guidelines with how the curriculum has been implemented in some preschools.

Preschools in Sweden offer educational group activity for children enrolled between the ages 1-5 years. As a result of political decisions, the Swedish preschools hold a high standard, both in numbers, providing access to most children, and in quality. In 2003, 75 percent of the children attended, ranging from 40 percent of one year olds to 89 percent of five year olds. Preschools are open all year and for most of the day. Families are charged not more than 3, 2 or 1 percent of their income for their first, second and third child respectively. The group size usually varies between 12-25 children. Overall, 55 percent of the staff is trained preschool teachers (university level) and 42 percent are nursery nurses (secondary school level).

Preschools in Sweden have a long history. The first preschools started in the middle of the 19th century in Stockholm and other larger cities. The inspiration came from Robert Owen and his Scottish Infant schools, from Friedrich Fröbel and his Kindergarten and from Rudolf Steiner and Maria Montessori. In the 1970s politicians were forced to respond to the rapidly growing demand for good day care by the numbers of women who were entering the labour market. The first Preschool Act, in 1975, introduced the general concepts preschool and educare, a combination of education and care, as a pedagogical approach.

The following decades were dedicated to building the new preschools, with access for all children, as a part of the general welfare system in Sweden. When the expansion of preschools had reached a good majority of the preschool children, the government moved early childhood education and care from the social field into the field of education. Continued reforms during the 1990s established preschool education as the first step within the educational system in Sweden.

The paper describes the structure of the first National Curriculum, from 1998, together with a theoretical presentation of how the concepts of the child, knowledge and learning are defined. The implementation processes in some municipalities are explored as is a national evaluation made by the National Agency for Education in 2004. It showed a positive attitude to the curriculum and an impressive implementation at local levels. However, the National Agency for Education also points out some crucial challenges such as the variation in quality between different preschools, the lack of awareness when allocating resources, the tendency to define local goals in addition to the goals in the national curriculum and the problems arising when assessing small children. The conclusions are that there is a need for further discussions on the characteristics of preschool education, compared with education in schools, and of how to define and assess quality in early childhood education.



## 8. CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

The questions asked in this thesis have grown during my long time interest in how toddlers make friends and how they play with each other. When I received the opportunity to first accomplish a licentiate degree and second, a doctoral degree in child and youth studies I knew that my studies were going to be about the youngest children in preschool. When I had finished my licentiate monograph thesis (Engdahl, 2007), the data was not studied in detail. The opportunity to continue my research training to a doctoral degree gave me the chance to problematise and thoroughly analyse what goes on between young toddlers in situated activities at the previously studied preschool. The original data in this doctoral thesis is thus the same as the sample used for my licentiate degree.

The overall aim of this thesis was to further explore interaction and communication between young children during self initiated play activities in a Swedish preschool. The young toddlers are in focus, which refer to children during their second year of life. The aim of the first two studies has been to explore how the young toddlers express themselves when playing with peers, how they create friendship and what type of actions they use in such processes. More specifically, I have been looking at their interaction and communication with each other during self initiated play sequences. Studies of children's interaction can provide insight into a world where adults are outsiders. By examining the everyday interactions of the participating young toddlers, and using careful analysis, we may expand our knowledge of the complex life-world of children, where meaning making constantly is constructed and negotiated (Alvestad, 2010; Johansson, 2009; Lindahl, 1996). In order to understand the prerequisites for the context in which young toddlers' interaction and communication occur, the aim of the third study was to present aspects of the institutional context which may affect the activities of young children.

When planning this research project, it was important for me to choose a theoretical framework that allowed me to maintain an overall perspective and make close and accurate observations. Thus, I chose to combine a perspective of the child as a social person and a child oriented perspective within a phenomenological framework (see chapter three). The presentation and analysis of the development of the Swedish preschool is made with the ambition to show that the context in the studied preschool is related to societal, pedagogical and economic conditions.

Accordingly, the method chosen for Article I and II was ethnography in a phenomenological theoretical framework. Phenomenology points at the situation at hand and draws on rich descriptions of the emerging events where the researcher becomes a participant in the life-world of children. Ethnographic field research involves studying people in their every day lives, where the researcher makes efforts to get to know the setting and the people, registers what she observes and learns while participating in the daily life (Emerson et al., 1995). The triangulation of data, photos, field-notes and videorecordings, during a long research period was found to be useful when observing and documenting the children in their everyday life at the preschool.

My professional previous knowledge has most likely influenced the way in which I perceived the events in the preschool. Other researchers would probably have made different observations. However, by discussing video sequences and transcriptions of the observations with research colleagues, I have been able to collate both methodological aspects and my interpretations of events. The work with this thesis also led to critical discussions on how far a researcher can take the idea of looking for and representing the perspective of a competent child (Johansson & Emilson, 2010).

In a phenomenological study there is not only one way to understand a phenomenon, instead the whole process of choosing aim, setting, children, methods, time of the day and time spent as well as the continuous consideration of these aspects are of importance for the trustworthiness. The excerpts in the first two articles have been chosen from the observations and they can be read as sequential parts, which together can give an overall impression of the toddlers' life-world. Within phenomenology the goal is not to describe individual development and changes among the participating children. My intention has rather been to uncover phenomena perceived during the observed play sequences. This means that the findings from this thesis of specifically six young toddlers in one preschool unit with in total 15 toddlers hopefully can increase the understanding of young toddlers as social persons.

## Young toddlers as social persons

The findings in this thesis support an understanding of young toddlers as social persons. There are many events and signs leading up to this result. The young toddlers were, for example, consistently directing their interest and attention towards each other. They also seemed to be aware of each other's comings and goings and were seen greeting each other on a daily basis. Greeting behaviour involved approaching, smiles and laughter, caresses and hugs. These mostly nonverbal children also showed recognition to the individual peers by using their names or by walking up and pointing at a photo of the child. While Musatti and Panni (1981) studied gaze direction among

young toddlers (11-18 months) and found a clear interest in the other children, I found that the young toddlers in this study also demonstrate their interest by actively addressing their peers.

Other signs of social competence appeared in the young toddlers' varied play invitations (see Article II). Different kinds of nonverbal communication were used; movement, facial expressions, gestures and utterances. Sometimes, the invitation seemed to be to join an on-going game, and in these sequences the movement and emotions seemed to support the invitation, as in the sequence when Theo was outside and climbed up on a bench (Article I, excerpt 4). His movements attracted the interest of Max, who reacted to this invitation and joined in the game. Invitations through movements were also used when the toddlers were jumping and riding on the toy horses in the large play room, making use of their lived bodies (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). A friendly or smiling face could also serve as a play invitation as in the example (Article II, excerpt 2) when Nova, who was playing indoors, smiled at her sister Alice, who was outdoors, but came up to the window and the girls laughed. An example of invitation with the help of gestures (Article I, excerpt 1) was when Leo invited Nova to a horse-riding game by patting repeatedly on the back of an available horse and also underlined his invitation with a few utterances: *Here, here*. Other times, the invitations were manifested by offering toys, as in the examples (Article II, excerpts 4 and 5) when Robin offered a car to Leo. Such actions have previously been found among older toddlers as well (Johansson, 1999; Løkken, 2000; Michélsen, 2004), but the findings in this thesis show that these actions are used among young toddlers too.

The toddlers showed social skills when they were helping a peer, for example, in the play sequence (Article II, excerpt 8) when Molly and Theo both were putting the yellow balls in the pipe. Molly adjusted to Theo and helped him in several ways; first by showing him the pipe and how he could put things in the pipe, second by joining him in the game and finally by fetching a ball that had rolled out of Theo's reach. These actions were self initiated by Molly, and can be seen as examples of social agency (Corsaro, 2003; James & Prout, 1990; Løkken, 2000) and that these young toddlers are social persons. Although the young toddlers' interaction was mostly nonverbal, there were play sequences with children where they took up positions in a co-ordinated game. One time in the family corner (Article I, excerpt 7) Jasmine and Molly were involved in improvised play with what seemed to be agreed positions and mutual actions. Since play, and especially improvised play, draws on different social skills, such as turn-taking, creativity and mutuality (Garvey, 1977; Lillemyr, 2009; Sawyer, 1997) this episode with Jasmine and Molly can be interpreted as if they used their social skills to negotiate positions in play.

The young toddlers also seemed to be strategic, as was shown in the sequence (Article II, excerpt 3) when Robin invited his friend Leo to come and

play outside. Robin found his way through several rooms to fetch the shoes for Leo. He also made an additional round to get the shoes for Leo's brother perhaps because he wanted to really make sure that Leo would come out and play with him. These strategic actions were self initiated and therefore this young toddler seems to have an idea of friendship and thus from his perspective.

The play sequences also involved examples of communication and interaction between the toddlers. At times the children played along, two, three or four of them, in a joyful joint game, accompanying and encouraging each other by laughter. Careful observations of the interface between emotions, playing and social relationships also showed that a young toddler can be a participant in the game, although from a passive position. One of the youngest toddlers, Nova, was often seen among the children, but not always actively involved in the game (see Article I, excerpt 2). When analysing her emotional expressions, her gazes and eye directions, as well as the other children's nonverbal communicative responses, it became clear that Nova was in fact one of the players. Nova can, thus, be seen as a participant but in a peripheral position (Goffman, 1981), within the participant framework of the preschool unit (Goodwin, 1990). This is interesting because a quick glance on the sequence could have led to the conclusion that Nova was by herself and not part of the play. This example can illustrate the importance of understanding participation sequentially and thus from the young toddlers positions, activities and emotional expressions. Young children are constantly involved in developing strategies and abilities to select the most appropriate action in a given situation (Meadows, 2010). This may imply that young toddlers in interactions with peers are continuously involved in learning and developmental processes. If so, the findings from article I and II suggest that young toddlers can develop their skills as social persons through sequential episodes of play with peers.

Another interesting finding was the young toddlers' competence to attune to peers. Development involves social and communicative skills but also regulation of emotions and actions (Stern, 2004). The participating children showed the ability to attune emotionally to other children, for instance when they were sad, but also to the frequent expressions of joy and happiness. In one example (Article II, excerpt 9), Robin accidentally ran into Oliver, who started to cry. Robin looked at Oliver and in a short while he went up to a teacher and made her aware of Oliver's situation. This can be understood as if Robin was experiencing a present moment (Stern, 2004), a moment of intense perception. He then showed emotional attunement towards Oliver, a competence that according to Stern (1985) may be starting to develop from around nine months of age. Furthermore, the walking up to the teacher and taking her hand can be understood as empathic agency, shown by Robin.

Attunement can also be seen as a form of ability to take another child's perspective. Both in play (Garvey, 1990; Lillemyr, 2009) and in communica-

tion turn-taking capacity is described as being of fundamental importance when interacting with others. Such a competence is depending on the ability to take another person's perspective (Ochs, 1988; Stern, 1985). The young toddlers in this study recurrently showed that ability. It was demonstrated for instance in the episode (Article I, excerpt 5) when Robin and Leo lay in the hammock and kicked each other while swinging. The two boys balanced their rather rough kicking by careful attunement and monitoring of their facial expressions. Older preschoolers have also shown to be able to attune to and act within a contextual and participant framework (Björk-Willén, 2007). The finding from article I indicates that attunement can serve as a means to take another child's perspective and consequently to take turns in situated activities.

To summarise, the result shows aspects of young toddlers' agency within their life-world in a preschool. Methods for interaction used by the young toddlers, such as greeting, monitoring, attunement, taking the perspective of others and turn-taking, are the same methods for making sense and facilitating participation and understanding that we use throughout life (Stern, 1985, 2004). However, it has rarely been previously shown how young children, during their second year of life, are able to use such competencies in a preschool setting. According to article I and II, young toddlers may also be seen as capable social persons.

## The preschool as part of childhood

As shown in chapter five and in article III, the Swedish preschool is supposed to offer a unique environment for educare. The Education Act (2010) and the Ministry of Education and Research (2010) state that toddlers in Sweden are raised under specific and child oriented circumstances. The Swedish preschool should according to the national curriculum adopt a child oriented approach, where the children are recognised as participants with rights:

The pre-school should lay the foundations for lifelong learning. The preschool should be enjoyable, secure, and rich in learning for all children. The pre-school should provide children with good pedagogical activities, where care, nurturing and learning together form a coherent whole. ...

The pre-school should actively and consciously influence and stimulate children into developing their understanding and acceptance of our society's shared democratic values.

(Ministry of Education and Research, 1998a, pp. 4 and 8)

These tasks indicate that toddlers in their everyday life are attending preschools, which are seen as part of education. The objectives go beyond taking care of children whose parents are working or studying. Furthermore, it is recommended that the educational practice is carried out by trained staff where the majority has a university degree in early childhood education. These recommendations underline the political ambitions with Swedish preschools, which all together represent an environment for toddlers, which from historical, societal and international perspectives, probably can be understood as unique. However, the ambitions are not always met, as shown in national and local evaluations (Emilsson, 2008; Lidholt, 1999; National Agency for Education, 2004, 2008; Sheridan et al., 2009; Tullgren, 2003).

For many children the preschool represents a substantial part of their everyday life. Within the phenomenological perspective adopted in this thesis (see chapter three) the preschool is seen as a life-world for the children. Preschools may widen the children's world, making the factors that affect the development as a social person more numerous and varied (Meadows, 2010). The teachers in a toddler unit are given the task to produce a wide range of favourable conditions for the children (Clark, 2010; Monaco & Pontecorvo, 2010). When studying the participating children it was found that the toddlers were acting in relation to affordances in the environment. All the observed actions during the self initiated playing were spontaneous, originating from a child or from affordances in the environment. The photos of the children and their families, the mirrors, the horses in the play room and the trucks in the outside playground were often used and can be seen as means for play invitations, identified and used by young toddlers. There were a few examples from the play sequences of denied participation in an on-going game (see Article I, excerpt 3), and there were few conflicts. Michélsen (2004) also showed that interplay most often starts around a toy or an active child. She found that conflicts between two year olds were short and mostly caused by an interest in the same toy. Thus, the ways teachers organise the environment have consequences for the children's possibilities to play, learn and develop that one must be aware of.

Young toddlers' competencies, for example as shown in this thesis, are to my knowledge not commonly recognised. Although this study does not include the teachers, some observations illuminate a presence of the teachers, for instance when the playing was interrupted because of daily routines or misunderstandings by the teachers. The episode with the kicking in the hammock (Article I, excerpt 5), is one example where the teacher in the room interrupted the game, perhaps based on her understanding of the situation. When I later transcribed and analysed excerpt 5, I found these two boys involved in a kicking game where none of the boys showed signs of distress. This indicates that listening, taking in the situation at hand, talking, asking and explaining can be seen as relevant before interrupting toddlers' activities.

The relatively new situation, with toddlers being raised both in their family and in their preschool, can give young children access not only to more adults, but also to peers outside their families. Farrell (2005) refers to the new legal position of the child declared by the Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN, 1989) and argues that children through this convention have been given person status to which human dignity should be accorded. However, even adults adopting a child oriented perspective at time have to make decisions for children on behalf of them. There may be a hidden expectation that children should accept all these embedded adult guidelines (Danby, 2009). Some of the decisions may however be negotiated with children. One routine that may affect the children's life-world is the transition between preschool units and between preschool and school. Drawing on the observations of emerging friendship among the young toddlers in article II, it may be beneficial for the children if such relationships between friends were taken into consideration and negotiated when planning for the moving on.

The findings in this thesis can also have implications for teacher education as they show aspects of young toddlers' competencies in communication and interaction and how they make friends. Well trained staff has been found to be important and related to high quality within early childhood education (Sheridan et al., 2009). A competence to understand toddler interaction would make it easier for teachers to plan for achieving a balance between children's initiatives and teacher initiated activities. Such a balance was found to be crucial for developing preschools of high quality (Sylva et al., 2010).

## Future research

More research that can increase knowledge about toddlers is clearly needed. A transparent validation process may generate new theoretical understandings and questions about toddlers' activities and capacities as social persons. Researchers with the ambition to listen to children, to hear what they say and act wisely on what is expressed might contest some of the assumptions which circumscribe children's lives (Farrell, 2005). Therefore, at the very end of this thesis, I would like to bring up some questions for future research that have become important for me during the working process with this thesis.

- How do young toddlers interact and communicate in other situations during everyday life in preschool, such as teacher initiated activities or daily routines?
- To what extent do these social children have the right to influence the everyday life in preschools, and how are they met in these situations by their teachers?



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## Appendix 1. List of terms in Swedish and English

Förskola	Preschool, in Sweden, for children aged 1-5 years, part-time or full-time. A term that since 1975 replaced all previous terms (day care, kindergarten, nursery et cetera)
Allmän förskola	General preschool education, for all children, three hours per day, during the primary school terms, free of charge, from August the year the child turns three, integrated in the preschools, (sometimes translated into universal preschool)
Öppen förskola	Open preschool, group activity for children and their par- ents/guardians, who are not in preschool, sometimes in combination with social ser- vices as a Family centre
Förskoleklass	Preschool class, for all six year old children, three hours per day, during the primary school terms, free of charge, from August the year the child turns six, usually in the school buildings with 98 percent coverage
Fritidshem	After school centre, optional for children 6-10 years, to com- plement the preschool class and primary school into a full day offer for the children with 60-90 percent coverage, depending on the area (sometimes translated into leisure- time centre)
Skolverket	National Agency for Education <a href="http://www.skolverket.se">http://www.skolverket.se</a>
Utbildningsdepartementet	Ministry of Education and Research <a href="http://regeringen.se/sb/d/1454">http://regeringen.se/sb/d/1454</a>
SOU Statens offentliga utredningar	Government Official Report <a href="http://www.sou.gov.se">http://www.sou.gov.se</a>
Vetenskapsrådet	Swedish Research Council <a href="http://www.vr.se">http://www.vr.se</a>
Försäkringskassan	Swedish Social Insurance Agency handles the general parental leave insurance <a href="http://www.forsakringskassan.se">http://www.forsakringskassan.se</a>

## Appendix 2a. Information to parents

### Till alla föräldrar och pedagoger!

Jag heter Ingrid Engdahl och jag arbetar på Lärarhögskolan i Stockholm med utbildning av pedagoger och lärare för förskola och skola. Det närmaste året ska jag på halvtid arbeta med en studie om

#### **SMÅBARNNS LEK och identitetsskapande i mångfaldens förskola.**

Genom stadsdelens ledning har jag kommit i kontakt med er förskoleavdelning. Jag har särskilt bett om en småbarnsavdelning i er stadsdel, eftersom det pågått ett småbarnsprojekt där i två år, som jag känner väl till. Mer än 40 procent av ettåringarna och cirka 80 procent av tvååringarna går i förskola i Sverige. Småbarns vardag i förskolor i mångkulturella områden är ett i stort sett utforskat område.

Jag är själv förskollärare och har arbetat 25 år i förskolan, de sista 10 åren med de yngsta barnen, min favoritålder. Jag har tre söner, (26, 23 och 15 år nu), som har gått i förskolan, så jag har erfarenhet både av att vara pedagog och av att vara förälder.

Min studie handlar om att observera och försöka beskriva barnens lek. Vad leker de? Hur leker de? Hur samspelar de med varandra? Leker alla samma lekar? Som verktyg i datainsamlingen kommer jag att använda papper och penna och videokamera. Eftersom barnen är små kan jag inte intervjua dem utan jag behöver fånga deras lekar på annat sätt.

Barnen och förskolan kommer att vara anonyma, jag ger dem andra namn i mina texter. Allt material som jag samlar in kommer att förvaras inlåst och bara användas för denna studie. Jag kommer inte att visa bilder för andra än er, som är direkt berörda, och för min forskningsgrupp på Lärarhögskolan.

I april kommer jag att besöka avdelningen några gånger för att vi ska kunna bekanta oss med varandra, barnen, föräldrarna, pedagogerna och jag. Då kan jag också berätta mer om mig och vad jag ska göra.

En sådan här studie bygger på att jag får tillåtelse från er föräldrar. Pedagogerna har redan sagt ja. Om jag får ert förtroende att genomföra studien på er förskola, påbörjar jag sedan arbetet i maj.

Har ni några frågor kan ni förstås också ringa eller maila till mig.

### Hälsningar

**Ingrid Engdahl**

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## Appendix 2b. Form for Consent from parents

### TILLSTÅND för studien

#### Småbarns lek och identitetsskapande i mångfaldens förskola

Under 2006 kommer jag att genomföra en studie om småbarns vardag i förskolan. Det är barnen som är mitt stora intresse och det är deras perspektiv jag ska försöka fånga och beskriva.

Min studie handlar om att observera och försöka beskriva barnens lek. Vad leker de? Hur leker de? Hur samspelar de med varandra? Leker alla samma lekar?

Som verktyg i datainsamlingen kommer jag att använda papper och penna och videokamera. Eftersom barnen är små kan jag ju inte intervjua dem utan jag behöver fånga deras lekar på annat sätt.

Jag kommer att följa de regler som finns kring forskning med barn och vuxna i Sverige och som sammanfattats av vetenskapsrådet i skriften *Forsknings-etiska principer inom humanistisk-samhällsvetenskaplig forskning*.

Reglerna innebär i korthet att barnen och förskolan kommer att vara anonyma, i min studie. Jag ger dem andra namn i mina texter. Allt material som jag samlar in kommer att förvaras inlåst och bara användas för denna studie. Jag kommer inte att visa bilder för andra än er, som är direkt berörda, och för min forskningsgrupp på Lärarhögskolan.

Medverkan i studien kan avbrytas när helst under studiens gång om ni skulle ändra er. Då får inte heller redan gjorda observationer av ert barn användas.

Har ni några frågor kan ni ringa eller maila till mig.

Hälsningar

Ingrid Engdahl

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Härmed ger jag tillstånd att min son/dotter får delta i småbarnsstudien om lek.

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Datum

Underskrift av Målsman

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