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Content

DEVELOPMENTS in the Field of Extended Education

Doing Masculinity in School-age Child-care: An Ethnographic Study

Anna-Lena Ljusberg

Abstract: This article is based on data from a two-year ethnographic study on children in school-age child-care in Sweden. It describes a boy's way from positioning himself as a "boy who does not fight" to a "boy who fights". In Sweden, independence is viewed as paramount. Fostering children to independence can be seen from different perspectives, and the teachers in this particular setting hand over the power to the children. The social climate in the setting was quite tough, and the children – especially the boys – formed a social hierarchy by using their fists. The material was studied with help from analytical tools dealing with gender, position and power.

Keywords: independence, gender, masculinity, position, power, school-age, child-care

Introduction

Over a period of two years, I followed a group of children in two different school-age child-care settings. Being independent was something that both children and teachers sat high on the agenda. The competent child was seen as the norm (Andersson & Källström Carter, 2014; Börjesson & Skoglund, 2014; Kampman, 2004; Sjöberg, 2011; Sjöberg, 2014). The educators charged the act of independence with positive meaning, as reflected in quotes like "children are better than staff at solving conflicts", by telling children who called for help to solve their problem themselves. In addition to the teachers pulling back, they also positioned girls and boys differently. For example, they stayed more often near the girls, giving the boys more space.

When both children and teachers share the view of independence as good and important, it can result in unwanted consequences. It may be important to add that the researcher of this article sees raising children to independence positively. However, the issues that occupied me during the three semesters I spent taking part in these children's lives has a bearing on gender, position and power, which I want to focus on in this article.

Research question

What unwanted consequences can be identified as a result of the teachers in school-age child-care pulling back from power and not offering any gender positions apart from traditional ones?

Review of the literature

Independence

Research has identified the strong role of independence (Tulviste, Mizera, de Geer & Tryggvason, 2007) in Swedish school-age child-care expressed through cherishing "free play" where the children themselves decide what to do and with whom (Andishmand, 2017; Elvstrand & Närvänen, 2016; Haglund, 2015; Haglund, 2016; Hansen Orwehag & Mårdsjö Olsson, 2011; Hjalmarsson, 2013; Klerfelt & Haglund, 2014; Lager, 2015; Saar, Löfdahl & Hjalmarsson, 2012). According to Simoncini, Cartmel & Young (2015) and Pálsdóttir (2010, 2013), school-age child-care in Australia and Iceland also provide an arena where children can take their own initiatives and develop activities together with other children.

Power distribution

Regarding the substance of everyday life and learning in school-age child-care, studies show that it largely concerns the social content of relationships and friendships (Dahl, 2011; Dahl, 2014; Evaldsson, 1993; Ihrskog, 2006; Pálsdóttir, 2010; Øksnes, 2008). Both Evaldsson (1993) and Johansson & Ljusberg (2004) claim that interaction patterns differ between both children and teachers and separated the children's group interaction from the teachers.

In a research summary of 0-18 year-old girls and boys in different educational settings, Paechter (2007) claims that the study of children's communities of practice should be linked to the analysis of power and individuals' different opportunities for agency. This is partly because power is rarely equally distributed among individuals, partly because there are spatial manifestations of gender norms that create diverse offerings for children (Paechter, 2007). Thorne (1993) points to the importance of children's friendships as a key to understanding how gender is constructed and how the boundaries between gender categories are established. This relationship, she says, applies to the construction of gender according to age. She shows how children establish and negotiate the dichotomies between the sexes in different practices. She argues that the way the normalizing gaze is manifested in the room plays a significant role in children's ability to negotiate masculinities and femininities without risking marginalization (Thorne, 1993).

The traditional masculine position

When boys are described in research, it is essentially "typical / problematic / protesting" boys who are described (Eidevald, 2009; Hellman, 2010; Jonsson, 2014; Nordberg, Saar & Hellman, 2010; Thorne, 1993). I have not found any studies of school-age child-care and

gender, but several studies of pre-school boys show that teachers do not expect the boys to regulate themselves in any significant way (Eidevald, 2009; Hellman, 2010; Månsson, 2000). According to Hellman (2010), who studied pre-school children, a calm position is noticeable by its absence in previous research on boys and learning environment, which, according to her, is an indication that the boys are invisible even in research. She asserts that it is difficult to find research where boys do not have conflicts with other children, play with toys that are coded as "girlie" or play with both boys and girls (Hellman, 2010). Hellman (2010) states that this may lead to research contributing to the definition of the "real" boy being a "problematic" boy. She claims research causes traits such as lack of self-control, aggression and dominance to become normalized for boys as a group, while the other daily traits of boys, such as kindness or tenderness, might go unrecognized as "real" boy traits. Although Hellman (2010) shows in her thesis that most boys – despite this – regulate themselves, it may mean that they will not be understood as boys. To summarize, this would mean that to be understood as a boy, boys should play with boys and position themselves as such by playing traditional boyish games and practice independence in terms of "typical / problematic / protesting".

Doing gender

My theoretical point of departure combines a Butlerian perspective on identity and gender with a Foucauldian perspective on subject positions and power. More specifically, I use tools such as gender, positions and power to describe how a boy in social interaction with individuals in school-age child-care changes position.

Discourse is used to describe a certain way of speaking, understand the world and determine how some knowledge is considered "true" (Foucault, 1980). Since language is action, different ways to use language construct the world differently (Bakhtin, 1981; Mehan, 1993; Wertsch, 1991). Children are formed by and form themselves in interaction with their context depending on the various discourses they encounter. I use Davies and Harrés' (1990) definition of position:

> With positioning, the focus is on the way in which the discursive practices constitute the speakers and hearers in certain ways and yet at the same time is a resource through which speakers and hearers can negotiate new positions. A Subject position is a possibility in known forms of talk; position is what is created in and through talk as the speakers and hearers take themselves up as persons (Davies & Harré, 1990, p. 62).

When a child positions him/herself it is in relation to the recipient, which means that the presentation concerns both. Discourses provide ways of understanding the world that exclude alternative ways. Language and power (Foucault, 1980) are linked to the concept of performativity surrounding standards of social and discursive practices (Butler, 1990). Performativity is that words do that words are; action, language and expressions of all kinds create the social world. So, for example, masculinity can be created performatively by people repeating the words, acts, and practices, in a historical and social context, that are specifically coded masculine. *There is no gender identity behind the expression of gender; identity is performatively constituted by the very "expressions" that are said to be its results* (Butler, 1990, s. 25). Butler (1990) claims that not being perceived as "either or" in these contexts makes it more difficult to be a subject. *It thus becomes difficult to be placed*

if you are not gendered (Hellman, 2010, p. 45, my translation). In the article I use two different positions: a traditional masculine position (one of the gang) and a position as a boy who does not fight. With Hellman (2010), these can be called a "visible" (a traditional masculine position) and an "invisible position" (a boy who does not fight).

Method, settings, ethics and quality

This is an ethnographical study spanning three semesters. Ethnography is about studying everyday life, trying to understand how people give meaning to and organize their lives (Aubrey, David, Godfrey & Thompson, 2002; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007; O'Reilly, 2012; Zaharlick & Green, 1991). In line with Zaharlick & Green (1991:207), the ethnographic focus centers on how participants engage in *constructing the roles and relationships that exist within the group and explore how particular cultural practices function within the social group* (which in this study concerns ways of doing masculinity). This include among others participant observations and active dialogue together with individuals and the contexts in which they interact. The research in this way becomes a shared commitment. This is reflected in this study through the child's active participation in interviews and in spontaneous stories and conversations of everyday life in school-age child-care. It is my understanding of my observations of the children and their everyday life that creates the material. The focus is on the interaction between different elements of behaviour: socially, culturally and linguistically. For other ethnographic work on peer groups in school settings see, for instance, Danby & Barker (1998) and Evaldsson (2004).

Data collection occurred over three semesters: spring 2001, autumn 2001 and autumn 2002. During the spring of 2001, the children studied attended one school-age child-care setting (Neptune), but in the autumn of 2001 changed to another setting (Jupiter) where they remained for the duration of the study. The settings studied were located within the same school in an area with a lower socio-economic profile in a well-established suburb south of Stockholm. The study was conducted on a group of 24 children attending school-age child-care. The children were six to seven years old when the project started and seven to eight years old when it ceased. Six focus children, three boys and three girls, were selected to represent the social variation in the group. One of these boys was Klas. He was selected because he differed in part from the other boys by position as calm, funny, nice, verbal, and not involved in the brawling. He was playing with both girls and boys. In this article, material is used from participant observations and from my first and last interviews, from late spring 2001 and late autumn 2002. Ethnographic fieldnotes (Emerson, Fretz & Shaw, 2011) were continuously taken with the purpose of studying the children's sentence construction and social context.

Research involving children raises ethical issues, since the children are in a dependent relationship (Eide & Winger, 2005; Ljusberg, 2011; Ljusberg, Brodin & Lindstrand, 2007; Mayall, 2002). Teachers, parents and children were asked for permission to take part in the study and all gave their consent. An interview is always a co-creation, and the results depend on the pupils' willingness to share their thoughts (Kolrud, 1999). The Swedish Research Council's ethical principles (Vetenskapsrådet, 2011) were all taken into considera-

tion: the requirement of information, the requirement of consent, the requirement of confidentiality and the requirement of restricted use of research material. All names have been anonymized (including the names of the two settings). A further discussion, see Johansson & Ljusberg, (2004) and Ljusberg *et al.* (2007). The strength and quality of the material is that I participated in the life of the children for a long time. This has enabled the study of both the view of independence and gender as changes over time, with respect to Klas's change of position. Another strength in the material is that I used not only participatory observations and conversations in daily life but also conducted four semi-structured interviews with the focus children over time, a total of 24 interviews.

The settings

At Neptune, in spring 2001, there were 24 children in the group and five staff, including a full-time pre-school teacher, a full-time school-age child-care teacher, two pre-school teachers who shared a full-time position and a full-time "support" for one of the children.

In the fall of 2001 the children started first grade in the school-age child-care setting of Jupiter. That meant a change of premises and staff. The new premises were bigger, and the number of children was almost twice as many, while the number of staff member decreased from one for every six children to one for as many as sixteen children.

During the last year of the study, in the fall of 2002, the children in the study were the eldest at Jupiter. At this point the group included 17 children from first grade in addition to the original group of 24 children from second grade. What was new was that after snack time, the pre-school class (20 children) joined together with their 2-3 pre-school teachers.

Results

The results are presented under four headings.

Children gain independence – Neptune spring 2001

Initially, the social environment at Neptune will be described, a discourse where the teachers do not reveal a strategy to break the gender-stereotyped choices by, for example, offering different positions. In fact, they acted in a way that strengthened the traditional gender positions. The observations show that the teachers would be around the girls and that the boys recurrently were left by themselves.

One can say the children were trained in independence, given that the most common activity in the afternoon was "free play". During "free play" the teachers decide the location: outdoors or indoors. Apart from that, the children are left to decide what to do – where to be and whom to play with. When the children themselves chose whom to play with, most of them chose to play along gender lines.

The discourse is usually very noisy and rough, with many conflicts. Even misunderstandings and small incidents can lead the children to use physical force. The teachers' position is that the children fend for themselves and through that develop the independence and power to clear up their problems and conflicts themselves. The teachers prefer to be in

the background and rarely intervene unless the children themselves request them to, which does not happen very often. Even when they are asked to help, the teachers often tell the children that they can handle the problem themselves. Independence is hence valued by both boys and girls, who would rather do without the teachers and resolve their conflicts themselves.

When the power was handed over to the children, it was not equally distributed. Amongst the boys, status was built by being skilled at playing and physically strong. It was about being proficient at ball games, standing up for oneself, not showing weakness and being able to defend oneself, especially physically. In practice this meant that among boys it was the boy who hit the hardest who had the power.

The schoolyard is divided into different areas with multiple activity options, which the children took advantage of. When outdoors, there is always at least one teacher present. Every now and then the teacher walks around the schoolyard. In the following fieldnotes, one can see how the teachers leave the boys alone: the power is distributed based on age and how the boys show independence and take care of themselves.

> Everyone is out in the schoolyard. The teacher are talking to each other facing the girls who are playing with some sort of spinning swing. The boys are playing hockey. The six-year-olds from Jupiter are playing with the first graders who are older and who interpret the rules.

The teacher does not interfere with how the children position themselves in terms of power, which in practice means that the older kids are holding power.

> The older ones score all the time and adapt the rules to their own advantage.

One way the teacher and children position the boys is to tell them that they should be able to withstand physical pain:

> The asphalt has not been swept after the winter and is covered in small gravel. Several boys fall into the gravel, some cry but usually they just get up and continue. At some occasions, a boy cries loudly and a teacher member comes over.

The teacher encourages the boys to be strong and show no signs of sympathy such as kneeling or looking into the eyes:

> and helps them to their feet, brushes them and declares to the rest of the group some sort of rule and leaves. Field Notes Neptune, 2001-02-20

As summarized: The teachers were seen handing over the power to the children, for example when the children asked for help, the teachers told them that they could handle the problem themselves. The power given by the teachers is not equally distributed amongst the children but is taken by the children who are able to hold the power through physical strength and proficiency in play. One common way to hold power is to fight, especially among the boys. When the children get the power to decide what to do, i.e. "free play", they most often play stereotypical games with children of the same gender. The teachers did not show a strategy to break the gender-stereotyped choices; on the contrary, they acted in a way that strengthened the traditional gender positions, for example, through positioning the boys like they should be able to withstand physical pain.

During the first semester Klas positioned himself as a boy who does not fight and plays with girls – Neptune autumn 2001

One of the focus children, Klas, was different from other boys in the study because he often played with girls and did not fight. Those were some of the things I wanted to discuss with him during our first interview. Below is a transcript of this opportunity. We are sitting in one of the playrooms at the school. We have talked to each other for a while when I ask:

1.   A-L: What is it like when it is best (at school, my note.)?
2.   Klas: When it's best, yeah, what was the question? ... I think all games
3.   are good except fighting. Playing families, bleah.
4.   A-L: But I hear that you are playing a lot with both boys and girls. ...
5.   some kids are playing with both girls and boys.
6.   Klas: Yeah, I'm one of those who play with all their friends.
7.   A-L: Do you think there is a difference between playing with the boys and
8.   girls you know?
9.   Klas: Noo.
10.   A-L: You do not play different games, some with the boys and some with
11.   girls?
12.   Klas: That's a bad question, it doesn't matter, Noo.

Later in the same interview

13.   A-L: Sometimes it's such a big fight that you need help from a grown
14.   up?
15.   Klas: Yeah
16.   A-L: *What do you do?* Do you fetch a grown-up?
17.   Klas: *Yeah* the best thing is to fetch *a teacher. The worst* is to *start*
18.   *fighting. If* you want to *be friends again*.
19.   A-L: *Do you think the children are good at this*?
20.   Klas: No, e*specially* not *Stig and Hedi. They fight a lot*.
21.   A-L: *I had actually meant to ask you if you are afraid of anyone or*
22.   *anything*.
23.   Klas: *I'm not afraid of anything*.
24.   A-L: *No, I just thought that you said that the two are fighting*, *you are not*
25.   *afraid of it?*
26.   Klas: *NO*!
27.   A-L: *They prefer to fight than settle conflicts*
28.   Klas: Anyway, *I thought you meant felt afraid of animals. I'm not*, I'm not
29.   *afraid of anything*, *I'm not even afraid* of falling off my *bike ... ...*
30.   If you fall, you fall

Klas relates to and negotiates with two possible positions: the traditional masculine one and the position as a boy who does not fight. When I asked him (line 1) when it is best at school-age child-care, he answers (lines 2-3) *all games are good except figh*ting. This implies that he is positioning himself as a boy who does not fight, where to hold his own by fighting is not seen as a way forward. He also positions himself in a more traditional masculine position with the statement (line 3) *playing families, bleah*, distancing himself from marked gender-coded games.

I (line 4) addressed the issue that Klas plays with girls as well as boys. I start with *I hear*, but then add (line 5) *some*. This way of asking the question can be seen as a means of reinforcing an existing discourse about boys and girls having different positions and per-

haps also that girls have a subordinate position. The response (line 6) is *Yes, I am one of those who play with all their friends*. Klas positions me as someone who does not understand him, and as belonging to a discourse that does not gender differentiate in the same way. He also uses the word "friends" instead of a gender-positioned name. Klas speaks of play and peers in a way to tone "her" down. When I (line 7-8) then further emphasize the traditional way by asking if he did not think there is a difference between playing with boys or girls Klas, responds (line 9) *noo* and (line 12) that it *is a bad question* when I (line 10-11) ask if he plays different games with boys and girls.

When I (lines 13-14) ask *sometimes it's such a big fight that you need help from a grown-up?* Klas positions himself again as a boy who does not fight and (17-18) stresses that fighting is bad; yes, *The best thing is to fetch a teacher. The worst is to start fighting.* Klas positions two boys as those who do fight (line 20). When I position him as a boy who does not fight (lines 21-22) by asking whether he is afraid, Klas positions himself (23) as a traditional masculine boy and says that he is not afraid of anything. I continue with the same line of questioning (lines 24-25) and Klas responds with a powerful (26) *No*. When (line 27) I try to save Klas' position he helps with the repair process by responding (28) that he thought I *meant afraid of animals* and positions himself as a traditional masculine boy when he enhances that he is *not afraid of anything*, and by giving explicit and concrete evidence by saying (line 29) that he is *not even afraid to fall off* his *bike*, he continues (line 30) with *If you fall, you fall*.

As summarized: Klas relates to and negotiates with two possible positions: the traditional masculine and the position as a boy who does not fight. In the transcript Klas takes distance from the fighting and says that he prefers to resolve conflicts in other ways, such as fetching a teacher. Klas also says that he plays with all his friends, which includes girls. Klas does, however, also take a traditional masculine position during the interview, claiming, for example, that he is fearless and that traditional feminine games are boring.

During the second semester Klas positioned himself as a traditional masculine boy – Jupiter autumn 2001

In the autumn, the second semester of following the children, they start first grade and change school-age child-care to Jupiter. Klas continues to play with girls but he plays more with boys than before. What is new is that Klas has begun to fight and through that positions himself as a traditional masculine boy. At Jupiter, teasing is common, and one day Klas does something I had not seen him do during the spring. When some of the girls tease him, he throws a stone.

> Fanny is suddenly crying. She and Jo have teased Klas and he has thrown a stone at them. Mia (teacher) sits down and talks to Klas. Fanny stands on her own, crying. Field Notes Jupiter, 2001-09-12

Later that day, out in the schoolyard, I see Klas at the soccer field, he seems angry, then he takes a bat and hits a boy, Olle, on the leg. At the same time, I see his father approaching who neither says nor does anything. However, one teacher intervenes**.**

> Suddenly, I see how Klas hits Olle on the legs with a bat! Klas' dad is stunned. Field Notes, Jupiter, 2001-09-12

As summarized: In the autumn, the second semester following the children, they start first grade and change school-age child-care to Jupiter. Klas plays more with boys than before, but also continues to play with girls. What is new is that Klas has begun to fight, positioning himself as a traditional masculine boy.

During the third semester Klas positioned himself as a boy who fights – Jupiter autumn 2002

I continue my research the following autumn, when I conduct the last interview with Klas. This is the transcript where we discuss his starting to fight and why he does so.

1.   A-L: Can you get peace from the staff at school-age child-care?
2.   Klas: Yes, when we are outside but there is a monitor then of course in
3.   case you fall.
4.   A-L: Are they around and watching?
5.   Klas: Yeah,
6.   A-L: Is that good or bad?
7.   Klas: Good in a way, in case you fall and break your leg.
8.   A-L: When you fight, is it good to have staff around then?
9.   Klas: The teachers think so anyway.
10. A-L: You don't think so, do you?
11. Klas: No because if someone has beaten me then there's an important
12. thing that I must do. I have to get my own back. My dad has said that I
13. may. So I can say stupid things to the teachers if they say that if you fight
14. I will call to your father and say that you are retaliating. I can tell them to
15. do it because he will say that I have to get my own back because he has
16. said so to me and he makes the rules for me and not the teachers.
17. A-L: What do you think of this getting your own back?
18. Klas: It's not fun but you have to.
19. A-L: Why?
20. Klas: [Opens his arms and shakes his head]
21. A-L: People have different ideas about this so it is interesting to hear why
22. you think you have to get your own back.
23. Klas: It's difficult.
24. A-L: What happens if you do not get your own back?
25. Klas: Oh, oh, oh! Then I can get bullied all the time. So if they hit me and
26. I tell the teacher all the time then they will say that I am a geek so it is
27. better to get your own back. Then they won't go for me again because
28. then they know that I hit them, you know.
29. A-L: I know.

I am interested in Klas' thoughts on the desire for the children to fend for themselves, both from the teachers and children. I therefore ask (line 1) if they are left in peace at school-age child-care. Klas nods (lines 2-3), and, by saying that there are monitors in case they fall, positions himself as a boy who has confidence in the teachers and their role as professionals. Later I ask (line 8) if it is good to have teachers around when they (the children) become adversaries. In his response, Klas positions himself in a new way compared to our first interview, in a traditional masculine way, by answering (line 9) *[T]he teachers think so anyway*. I answer (line 10) *(Y)ou don't think so, do you?* There are several interesting elements to Klas' response. First (Lines 11-12) he starts by telling me that there is something important he needs to do if someone has hit him. Here he is positioning himself as a person

who does not start a fight but who reacts to a fight. This reaction is to get his own back. Then (lines 12-13) he is positioning himself as a boy listening to his father. In the next sentence (lines 13-16) Klas is positioning himself as a boy who knows what to say to the teachers, but in some cases says things other than what is right *[S]o I can say stupid things to the teachers if they say that if you fight. I will call to your father and say that you are retaliating. I can tell them to do it because he will say that I must get my own back because he has said so to me.* This is because it (line 16) is his father who is responsible for his welfare and he makes the rules for me and not the teachers. Then I ask him (line 17) what he thinks about getting his own back. He positions himself as a boy who does not fight and says that (line 18) it is not fun and then, in the same sentence he positions himself in a masculine position and says that you must. I (line 24) ask what happens *if you do not get your own back*. In reply Klas (line 25) says that he can be bullied and points out the important rule within the group to be independent by saying that (line 26) anyone accepting help from the teachers are geeks. Then, Klas points out what happens when power is confirmed by means of physical force (line 27-28*) Then they won't go for me again, because then they know that I hit them, you know.*

As summarized: Klas describes how his father has told him to fight back, to not be considered a geek and to prevent the children hitting him again. Through this, Klas is more clearly positioning himself in a traditional masculine way.

Discussion

The article highlights a boy's efforts to change position (Davies & Harré, 1990) from what Hellman (2010) describes as an invisible position – a boy who does not fight – to a visible one – a traditional masculine position of becoming a part of the boy community (Butler, 1990).

Shares discourse independence

In Sweden, independence is viewed as paramount, as is visible in Swedish child-rearing (Tulviste, et al. 2007). This study, like other research on school-age child-care, shows a discourse (Foucault; 1980) where the teachers see "free play" as something important for allowing children to choose for themselves how, what and with whom to play, the "free play" is thus a valued element of the school-age child-care (Andishmand, 2017; Haglund, 2015; Haglund, 2016; Hansen Orwehag & Mårdsjö Olsson, 2011; Holmlund, 2018; Johansson & Ljusberg, 2004; Lager, 2015; Saar, Löfdahl & Hjalmarsson, 2012). The competent child is the norm (Andersson & Källström Carter, 2014; Börjesson & Skoglund, 2014; Kampman, 2004; Sjöberg, 2011; Sjöberg, 2014). In the datamaterial, the teachers and the children share a discourse where independence is seen as good and important. Another dominating discourse is maintaining traditional gender roles, as shown earlier by several studies of pre-school boys (Eidevald, 2009; Hellman, 2010; Månsson, 2000).

In a way, the findings in this article show that the children and teachers live in social spheres, which, in many respects, are different and distinct, as Evaldsson (1993) has earlier described. However, here the results are interpreted in another way with the teachers and

the children sharing the social sphere, sharing a normalizing gaze when it comes to independence and gender roles. Either the teachers stay in the background, which helps the children repeat the traditional gender role patterns, e.g. play gender stereotypical games, or they support this activity directly.

Power distribution amongst the children

Regarding the content of everyday life and learning at school-age child-care, this study, like earlier research, shows that it is largely characterized by relationships and friendships (Dahl, 2011; Dahl, 2014; Evaldsson, 1993; Ihrskog, 2006; Pálsdóttir, 2010; Øksnes, 2008).

Due to the large amount of independence given by the teachers, the power distribution amongst the children is an important aspect to analyse, according to Paechter (2007). In the child group at the studied school-age child-care location, the power is not equally distributed but depends on different opportunities for agency. The children, most often the boys, gain power through fighting, which results in the strongest child getting the highest status. This strengthens the stereotypical gender positions.

The position as a boy who does not fight

This study is the first on school-age child-care that discusses gender and describes an "invisible boy" (Hellman, 2010) who does not fight and who plays with girls. The boy, Klas, was initially selected for the study since he differed in part from the other boys in the school-age child-care. During the first semester of the study, the boy was never seen fighting and often played with the girls. He is also aware of the different positions, relating to and negotiating with them during the interviews.

The transition chancing position

The boy, who is in focus in this article, attends a school-age child-care where the children, and the boys in particular, solve conflicts and attain power through fighting. The dominating discourse, where the children are positioned and position themselves, (Bakhtin, 1981; Mehan, 1993; Wertsch, 1991) is one where traditional gender roles and independence are highly valued. The teacher's interpretation of independence is that the children should manage by themselves, and therefore the teachers can be seen to retreat from power.

Being a part of this context, the boy, Klas, supported by his father, changes to a traditional masculine position. This is shown by his starting to play with the other boys to a greater extent, his entering the boys' community, and his starting to fist fight. One can say that the boy studied avoids marginalization by – with help from his father – learning to fight and to be a boy among boys (Butler, 1990; Hellman, 2010; Thorne, 1993). The material shows how a boy repositions into a "real" boy (Butler, 1990; Hellman, 2010).

Conclusion

Regarding the content of everyday life and learning at school-age child-care, this study – as other studies (Dahl, 2011; Dahl, 2014; Evaldsson, 1993; Ihrskog, 2006; Pálsdóttir, 2010; Øksnes, 2008) – shows that school-age child-care is largely characterized by relationships and friendships, and that the teachers see "free play" as important (Andishmand, 2017; Haglund, 2015; Haglund, 2016; Hansen Orwehag & Mårdsjö Olsson, 2011; Holmlund, 2018; Johansson & Ljusberg, 2004; Lager, 2015; Saar, Löfdahl & Hjalmarsson, 2012). In Sweden, independence is highly valued (Tulviste, et al. 2007). The teachers and children in the article share a discourse where independence and maintaining traditional gender roles is dominant, the competent child is the norm Andersson & Källström Carter, 2014; Börjesson & Skoglund, 2014; Kampman, 2004; Sjöberg, 2011; Sjöberg, 2014) and teachers retreat from power. In the child group, power depends on different opportunities for agency. The boys gain power through fighting. The boy Klas, described in the article, differed in part from the other boys. During the first semester of the study, he was never seen fighting and often played with the girls. As a part of this context, Klas, supported by his father, changes to a traditional masculine position. He starts to play with the other boys to a greater extent, entering the boys' community, and starts to fist fight. One can say that the boy studied avoids marginalization by – with help from his father – learning to fight and to be a boy among boys (Butler, 1990; Danby & Baker, 1998; Hellman, 2010; Thorne, 1993). The material shows how a boy repositions into a "real" boy (Butler, 1990; Hellman, 2010).

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