Research tools and spaces – ethical questions and data collection in childhood research

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In this presentation, we consider research tools and spaces in relation to ethical issues when doing research with children and young people. We base our discussion on the premises of the new materialism that highlights the importance of understanding matter as an entity that actively takes part in constructing human relations (e.g. Fox & Alldred 2017). Ethical questions are intertwined with each phase of the research, constantly challenging the researcher to reflect choices, interpretations and relations affecting the research process. We ask how different research tools and spaces affect and are being affected by the data collection, and what kind of ethical questions relate to this. We reflect these questions through our research data that has been collected during our PhD research (Alanko 2013; Juutinen, under review), and after. In our research, we have focused on children’s and young people’s belonging and participation. Research data has been collected through interviews, questionnaires and participatory observation during which we have used several research tools, such as tape recorders, video cameras, notebooks and laptops. Furthermore, we have conducted our interviews and participatory observation in early childhood settings as well as in comprehensive schools and in youth houses.

Research tools affect the data collection in multiple ways. Tape recorders and video cameras affect the relationships between researchers and children but also children themselves create relationships with research tools. For example, are children allowed to touch or even use the research tools or is it only the researcher who decides how the tools are being used? We also consider how mostly adult-constructed spaces affect the data collection. For example, how children perceive teachers’ lounge as an interview space that aims at creating an open atmosphere for discussion, when in fact, children are normally excluded from the space altogether. Moreover, what kind of knowledge is being constructed when data collection takes place in relations between researchers and children but also with research tools and spaces?

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