How children act through materiality across age thresholds in daycare

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This paper aims at exploring how children act through materiality across age thresholds in daycare and how the professionals promote or hinder the children’s transformative engagements in connection hereto.

The daycare is analysed as socio-material arrangements that constitute how children participate as well as the children’s participation constitute the socio-material arrangements.

The theoretical point of departure is an understanding of children as active agents with intentions and engagements in their everyday institutional lives. The analytical approach is informed by the theoretical framework by the German-Danish version of critical psychology and approaches from the cultural historical tradition.

Within this context I will analyse how children pursues social activities through materiality and thereby how the children conduct their institutional life. I am working with an understanding of the child as someone that is adapting to and changing the world at the same time, through participation in socio-material contexts.

By drawing on two empirical examples, this paper illuminates how the professionals arrange care for the children by negotiating the children’s engagements in the playground and by motivating the children to re-direct their attentions and engagements. Care seems to be an ambiguous effort where the professionals explore the children’s preferences as well as interrupt the children’s engagements when these engagements transcend socio-material age thresholds.

Thereby the professionals seem to have standards for ‘age appropriate engagements’ which guide what the children are supposed to be engaged or disengaged in and with whom.

Hence the daycare is understood as an arrangement of care with different kinds of age-graded demands on children’s participation in the daily practice. This implies that children must shape their conduct of institutional life according to everyday activities, transitions and breaks structured as institutional trajectories with embedded age-graded differences. The institutional trajectories come into existence in material ways, demanding the children to direct and prioritize their pursuits of personal concern. However, the children modify these institutional trajectories by breaking rules and challenging demands and standards. Thereby the children participate in rearranging and changing the socio-material arrangements of the daycare.

Keywords: Children’s age appropriate engagements, Socio-material arrangements in daycare, Ambiguous care practices