Materiality in institutions influence on development of children’s spoken language and content in their play

*Benedicte Bernstorff*
University of Roskilde, Denmark

Background

Early childhood institutions in Denmark have become part of the educational system in a more direct way due to political decisions, carried out by new legislation and curriculums. Spoken language and school preparation get higher attention in kindergartens and the children’s competences are tested systematically targeting the future (e.g. Holm, 2009; 2017). Everyday life perspectives are now given lower priority. This focus can be a challenge to children in their daily life and in their social relations in kindergarten. This lead to the research question ‘How does the spoken language in child-child interactions contribute to participation in play communities in the self-organized play?’

Method

The research project has a phenomenological approach and is organized as a non-participant observational study of children aged 3-5 years in two kindergartens. The research is on-going. The theoretical approach is based on Gadamer’s understanding of play and Bourdieu’s understanding of field. According with these theories the project focuses on the spoken language’s substance and positions in interactions.

Preliminary results

Preliminary analysis shows a difference between the two kindergartens in the topics in children’s dialogues. This difference points to the significance of materiality in institutions and material cultures in everyday life. Different organization and furnishing seems to make different invitations to children’s use of the institutional frameworks (Rasmussen, 2004; 2009; 2015). In one kindergarten, furnishing is arranged with the focus of creating small places for undisturbed play, whereas in the other kindergarten furnishing doesn’t create those small places. Here the children create secluded spaces with their bodies, e.g. sitting near the walls or under a window sill with their backs towards the rest of the group. Preliminary analysis shows institutional frameworks seems to affect the kind of dialogues children have. When the dialogue is undisturbed, children talk about everyday life topics including more emotional topics, whereas open furnishing tent to invite to dialogues concerning rules and frames. In this way materiality in institutions seems to influence the development of children’s spoken language and content in their play.

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