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The child today, the ruling citizen of tomorrow **Barn í dag, ráðandi afl morgundagsins**

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This paper presents my experiences in relation to the CiCe network, its professional meaning for me, and how participation in the network has influenced my professional practice. I also present an assignment concerning democracy that I gave to my students, and its theoretical framework.

It is often stated that the work in the pre-school must be both rewarding and educational for the child. What does this mean in practice, and has it any connection to a notion of a person being an active participant in society? An Icelandic Act (78/1994) on pre-school education gives the purpose of early childhood programmes as to prepare young citizens to participate actively in their society. The national curriculum for pre-schools states that the future of our democratic society and its values depends on participation. It is emphasised that citizens of tomorrow have to learn how to participate today. So the aim of early childhood programmes is to maintain our society and to build its future. This emphasis on civilised society is mirrored in the Icelandic concept of education. To educate is to *mennta* (Finnbogason. 1994). The word has its roots in the word for man and it means to become a more of a man (meaning human), to become more human. It means to use all your abilities and competence to strive to become a good person. But how does one become more human? What is it to be human? How does this relate to the concept of citizenship? Is there a relation between being a human and being a citizen? Is one a condition of the other? It can be argued that one way to meet this goal is to live and participate in a democratic environment. If that is so, the creation and maintenance of such an environment is of great importance. How is this achieved? Who in our society has the ability to influence our children? I believe that the pre-school has an important place in achieving this purpose.

In 1997 I had just started as a lecturer at the University of Akureyri, working with students who had decided to spend their working lives with young children by becoming pre-school teachers. Previously I had worked as a leader of a big pre-school in Reykjavík. I looked forward to my new job with great enthusiasm, regarding it as an opportunity to affect our future citizens by influencing the first school the young child attends. My vision of the school was not just as an exemplar of values and culture, but as a change agent for our society. Earlier in the same year I began participating in writing a new national curriculum for the pre-school in Iceland (the year *after* the pre-school is mandated as the first stage in our educational system). In middle of all this I received an e-mail from Alistair Ross describing his vision of teachers collaborating in a widespread European network and asking me to participate. To begin with I did nothing, but Alistair was persuasive and kept on mailing. I read what the people already active in the network were writing in the discussion groups, and I discovered that it was interesting - I was hooked! In the network are people with ideas that I connect with, people who are concerned with the future of our society and our schools, concerned with the identity of our children. I was on threshold of new, or at least a very changed professional life. I was moulding my modules in a new faculty at the university, I was writing the national curriculum for the pre-schools, and I was on the policy board for the pre-school teachers' trade union. CiCe has influenced my teaching, my writing and my input in all these areas.

Of course I was concerned with the issues before, but the ideas which came from the network fitted with my pedagogical view. The network, and the discussion within it, it helped to focus my mind.

In the CiCe 0-7 years Age-Related Group we discussed and developed what we called the 'Me books'. I could not give my students that kind of task, but wanted to propose some form of assignment for them concerning democracy, so for the last three years I have let my students carry out participant observation in pre-schools. The assignment has its roots in discussion within the CiCe network about children's daily lives and how we as a society prepare them for participating in future society.

I ask my students to be in the pre-school for an hour and to observe. Before they carry out the observations the students read about children's culture, about self-regulation, about who has the right to define, and so on. Students are asked to use these perspectives in their observations. I have collected those observations, and my long-term goal is to use them to illuminate my future students' understanding of the concepts.

As already stated, I emphasise concepts which I consider to be related to being an active participant in a democratic society in my teaching: the main concepts are

children's culture
 play
 self-regulation and regulation by others
 the right to definition
 caring - education.

For me, these concepts have in common a concern with the way children build up their identities within a democratic situation. Dewey's pedagogical creed is also mine: I consider that how I define and understand such concepts shows and focuses my image of the child. A teacher's images of the child will govern how she organises her daily work in the pre-school. Paradoxically, I also believe in *the child* as a creator of her own world, and in the necessity for the child to be in a secure, organised and creative environment, in which people have knowledge of research and theory and can relate it to practice. I look on the environment as the third educator, after the children themselves as a group, and the teachers (see for example Jonstoj and Tolgraven, 2001), and I regard it as a responsibility of teachers to construct an environment that is rich, rewarding and educational in all senses.

There is ongoing debate on the definition of children's culture. James, Jenks and Prout (1998) argue that children's culture exists only in the space and time over which children have some power, in places where children are by themselves, away from the eyes of adults. Gullestrup (1992) suggests that culture is many things but is at the same time nothing you can put your finger on: you cannot dress in culture, and it cannot be moved and has no borders, but at the same time it is always moving and new borders are always in the making. It may also be argued that culture exists in context, and that the definition depends on that context. Children's culture has been divided to three categories,

- culture *made for children*, (books, movies),
- culture *children and adults make together* (e.g. themes and projects in the pre-school), and
- culture the *children create themselves* with other children.

In this last category there are rules and play that travel between generations, but which adults do not control and over which they have little influence. This is the culture that appears in the zone between the child as an individual and her environment (*Att evrövrá vörden*, 1997). Many believe that the roots of democracy lie here. Children participate in exchanging rules; they make rules collectively and go by rules the group has set. As Andersen and Kampmann (1997) remark, it is here that children create their own life, interacting with other children. The conclusion is that understanding the culture in the children's group can help us to understand children. In Icelandic pre-schools there has been tendency to over-organise, and we need to ask whether it is the clock that is running education or whether there is space for children to make their own rules and plays? If the children are largely in groups that have been organised by the staff, is there space for the children's own culture, and for them to develop their citizenship skills?

It is possible to define the concept of self-regulation in a different way. Espen Jerlang's (1998) says that to understand self-regulation you have to understand what it means to let others take responsibility for you. He calls that "other-regulation", and divides it into three categories:

1. the adult has the power to make all decisions for the child. For example, the pedagogical view and her images of the child influence the pre-school teacher's organisation of the daily schedule and her overall goals.
2. the child's inner 'compass', which has been created by following the rules, habits and values of society.
3. the law and order the society has implemented to control its citizens.

Jerlang's "self-regulation" means, on the other hand, to have self control. Here he means the needs that drive a person to be the active creator of her own life, who dares to take her own decisions, who has ideas about the direction her life is taking. Self regulation is the will to be independent, not to have to depend totally on other persons or on the environment. To strengthen self-regulation is to progress; when we work against self-regulation we regress.

In Iceland there has been much discussion about how to plan in the pre-school. There has been concern about how much we should structure the daily life of the child: it can seem that we are trying to get so much into the day that there will be no opportunity for children to get bored. This is done in the name of accomplishing the goals we have set for the children and for ourselves. It can be argued that we have been occupied by the second stage of children's culture and by Jerlang's first stage of other-regulation. By that definition it is we, the teachers, who have the power and knowledge of what is in the best interest of the child. The consequences are that the children have little time to create their own culture. But according to Andersen and Kampmann it is in play that children's own culture is most visible, as is self-regulation. The work in the pre-school is always run by choices: we choose something in name of a greater good and deny other things for the same reason. But if Andersen and Kampmann are correct, there is a great risk in over-organising - the risk of withholding from the child the opportunity to be an active and able participant in future society.

Who has the right to define the child's own experience for the child? The Icelandic national television news recently (April, 2002) showed a young reporter interviewing 5-year-old children about photographs they had taken of trees - all of which were Christmas trees. The reporter asked one child "Why a photo of a Christmas tree? Is it because it

reminds you of Christmas?" and asked another child "Why a Christmas tree? Is it because it is green?" The first child replied "Yes" immediately. The second child said "No, it is because they are so big". This little example is to show how adults tend to take away children's right to define their own experiences. The same is true in the pre-school, if the teacher asks questions with certain answers in mind (see Dahlberg, Moss and Pence, 1999).

Nodding (1990) defines what a caring institution looks like. She suggests it has to lie somewhere between home and an institution, where all people are recognised and everybody has their space: a caring space is a learning place. In such an institution there is open discussion concerned goals and means, and diverse aims are both allowed and desirable. Places where diversity exists are preferable. In such institutions caring is part of communication; people find that other people care about them. On this definition caring is both a connection between people and the quality of that connection.

There follow examples of a student's fieldwork from observation in two pre-schools in Iceland.

Example 1

Six girls and one boy are role playing homes. Two girls talk about building with unit blocks, while the other children go toward a shelf, on which are a variety of toys that could be used in role play. Two girls, Anna and Sigga, pick up the play mobile phones. Anna wants the one with a pink cover but Sigga has it. They quarrel, and Anna says; "I got it first, I want it". Sigga begins to cry. Elsa, a member of the staff, comes in and says to Sigga "Did you choose to be here, and now you cry?" Sigga goes away grudgingly.

The student commented that she knew that the staff member would interfere, and the student was disappointed, as she was interested to see how the girls would have solved the argument between them. Later on in the play Sigga puts on high-heel shoes and a blanket over her head. In a sing-song voice she says "I am an old lady, I am an old lady." At the same time she winds her blanket around her. Suddenly she stops and says, "I am a witch."

Anna: I am not scared of you.
 Sigga: Yes, you are afraid.
 (Jenna comes running around Sigga)
 Jenna: I am not afraid.
 Sigga: If not, why are you running?
 (Elsa, a staff member, arrives)
 Elsa: Have I not forbidden you to run inside?

The student raised the question of who had the right to define the play, and why Elsa did so without knowing what had happened. Her interference bore no relation to the play, did not build upon democratic values, and was not likely to help children to develop such values.

Example 2

The play takes place in a small room where there are eight children and one member of staff (Jona). Five of the children are role-playing. Jona is sitting by the wall hugging a doll. "I am babysitting," she says, "that is the way they like it" she adds, and glances toward the children. The student comments on how Jona respect the children's will by

taking an inactive role in the play. Later one of the boys looks at the clock, stops what he is doing and sits still for a few moments. He then starts clearing away the blocks he is playing with. My student looks at Jona, who tells her that these boys are five-years-old and they know the clock; they know that clear-up time is near.

It is important to look at what is happening in the pre-school with 'democratic glasses'. The question is what do democratic glasses look like? I would define the concept partly through the key-concepts mentioned above. These concepts help me focus, and help my students to look on the pre-school through the eyes of 'the other'. Most of the students remark on how going into pre-schools with democratic glasses changed their view and helped them focus on what they consider democracy to be, to think about democracy in the pre-school and the child's right to it.

Ultimately, to learn respect you have to feel respected. Children learn what they experience. The following has been translated to Icelandic, I think from English. I will do my best to convert them over to English again and hope they are somewhere close to the original.

Children living with blame learn to blame others;
 Children living with harshness, learn ferocity;
 Children living with scoffing, learn inferiority;
 Children living with security, learn courage;
 Children living with mercy, learn tolerance;
 Children living with stimulation, learn self-confidence;
 Children living with justice, learn fairness;
 Children living with heartiness and friendship learn to love.

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