

EDITORIAL

In their study “Development and Socialization in Childhood” published a decade ago, Corsaro and Fingerson (2006) noted four important trends in the theories of human development and childhood socialization. First, at that time these theories began regarding children as active agents influenced by and influencing others. Second, the fact that development is a lifelong process started to increasingly permeate psychological and sociological theories of human development. Third, greater and greater emphasis was placed on collective social processes in peer groups, which began to be regarded as an important factor influencing an individual’s development and socialization processes. Fourth, theoreticians acknowledged the importance of context for human development.

We will begin by providing an overview of the individual papers in this monothematic issue of *Studia paedagogica* and conclude with a detailed summary of current trends within the discipline.

This thematic issue contains nine texts, six of which are papers, two are works by emerging researchers, and one is a review. Two texts originate in a Norwegian context, one Italian, one Bangladeshi, and four Czech. The authors comprise nine women and three men. In addition to the topic of childhood, all of the texts share a reliance on qualitative research methodologies.

The issue opens with a text by our Norwegian colleague Kjersti Lien Holte, which deals with homework in primary education. The starting point for the research was the recurring finding that homework has had hardly any effect on children’s learning even though the number of hours pupils spend doing their homework has been increasing in many countries. The author also quotes Norwegian research suggesting that students who spend more time on their homework do not necessarily perform better. This is in contrast with the intuitive expectation that the more time students spend on their homework, the better they will perform at school. It is not, unfortunately, exceptional that such direct reasoning is proven incorrect by educational sciences. For instance, it is not true that the more hours students spend at school, the better their results are. Nor that the more money is invested into schools, the better the schools are.

The author decided to explore whether homework could impact a pupils indirectly, i.e., impact not the student's knowledge but her/his acquisition of good work habits. Through 37 interviews with teachers and an analysis of school curricula, Holte shows that the traditional practice of assigning all students the same homework is problematic because of the fact that pupils' parents are not the same. Critical, uncertain, or irresponsible parents cannot provide their children sufficient help, which is why children of these parents may spend a long time doing homework without this effort having the desired effect. Pupils may therefore fail to acquire good work habits, which can explain why homework may contribute to social reproduction rather than counteract it.

Holte not only challenges the classic didactic axiom but proposes that students should learn how to do their homework during school hours. They should first imitate the teacher or a classmate, then deal with a task in cooperation with others, and only then, in a third step that may take place at home, deal with the task entirely on their own.

The second paper was also written by Norwegian authors – Mette Bunting and Geir H. Moshuus. The text uses narrative interviews to trace the stories of four secondary school students at risk of dropout (two were in school, two on welfare). Dropout research has long been pursued by many researchers, but these Norwegian authors endeavored to view the problem from the students' perspective, exploring firsthand stories, addressing both the storyline and the discourse. Narrative research is often criticized for only recording stories without truly analyzing them or only dealing with their structure (see Riessman, 2008). Bunting and Moshuus managed to do more, namely show how the stories are created and what role they play in students' lives. Erik's story demonstrates that the impossibility for him to write his life story on his own, due to being bullied and finding no support from teachers, negatively affected his later view of school. The authors speak about silencing, prolonged situations where students' voices are silenced or not heard. A consequence of silencing is that without the voices of the participants themselves, the resulting story is simplified to the point of becoming untrue. The bullied student plays truant and comes to school late to avoid being bullied at school, an act to which the environment responds by telling the student to buy an alarm clock to come to school on time. In this case study, the school finally sends the student Anton to see a psychologist, but his voice is not heard there either.

This simplification may even result in complex relational, social, and contextual phenomena being trivialized into a simple label attached to the "trouble-making" student. The narrative approach to exploring students shows the possibility of going beyond the label and finding out that what is referred to as the issue with the student may be much more complex and

rooted in many various areas (school, family, peers). The authors also point out that silencing does not stop at school; on the contrary, silencing at school may spill over to other areas of life. Young people using negative frames to describe their experience at home and school are vulnerable to dropping out. Narrative research associated with longitudinal case studies thus brings insights into subjective perceptions of difficult life situations that have been assigned overly generalizing labels.

In “*Student Nonconformity at School*,” Kateřina Lojdová uses narrative research tools to explore the breach of social norms in childhood. If school plays a non-negligible role in social reproduction and is a place where the existing order is preserved and spread, and social inequality is even reproduced, then the question arises of how students intentionally breach social norms. This research focuses not on serious norm breaches, but on much subtler behavior representing partial defiance of norms and teachers. The paper does not devote attention to common minor examples of ignoring the school code such as smoking in the school courtyard or bathrooms, regarding student nonconformity as a specific social practice reflecting the fight between the old and new orders. The word “fight” should not, however, be regarded in the sense of student resistance or rebellion against school and its norms. Research shows that violation of school norms is often unintentional, or at least this is how students report it in their narratives. This is a view entirely different from that of their teachers and headteacher, who correct the students through public discipline. This latter act then retrospectively provides the students’ behavior with the label of norm violation.

The paper by the team of three Czech authors led by Jana M. Havigerová asks the question of whether there is a correlation between verbal and figural creativity in preschool children. Considering the fact that recent specialized literature has presented strong arguments in favor of identifying creative children with the goal of accelerating their education or providing them with special support, it is worth asking how gifted children can be recognized as early as preschool age and how the general level of their giftedness can be reliably identified. The authors observed behavioral characteristics, figural creativity, and storytelling skills in selected children. Their results indicate a close correlation between overall giftedness on the one hand and figural and verbal creativity on the other. It turns out that a gifted child does not conceive of an unfinished picture in a figural creativity test as a set of individual elements but instead tries to connect the elements into a meaningful whole. Contrary to expectations, gifted children are not able to use similar interrelations in storytelling. Instead of story complexity, the number of sentences used by the child to tell a story and the assignment of an original title to a picture can be regarded as indicators of giftedness. None of the children in the studied population created a true story in the real sense

of the word, which means that we cannot use analogy to hypothesize that a child able to interconnect elements in a drawing into a single whole will be able to do the same when devising a complex story. Simplifying the results to some degree, it appears that the well-known saying that one cannot see the forest for the trees does not apply to gifted children. The very opposite is true. Gifted children show an extraordinary ability to interconnect individual elements into a whole.

The authors have managed to show that contrary to general expectations, preschool children are not young adults and not even gifted children are routine storytellers. It continues to be true that drawing feeds into verbal expression, but it is not true that preschool children can create complex stories based on pictures.

The fifth paper is by Petr Gavora, who explores the long-standing family routine of reading bedtime stories and fairy tales to young children. The 21 parents included in the study narrated their perceptions of sharing bedtime stories with their preschool children. In accordance with the trend described by Corsaro and Fingerson, children are regarded as active participants influencing their reading routines in ways consistent with their enacting goals. The traditional image of this activity is rather different: a child lying passively in bed while the parent sits on the edge and reading aloud from a book. Gavora shows that children use six basic strategies to enact their interests: (1) they participate in choosing the book to read; (2) they turn pages, point to show where to read, and monitor the process of reading globally; (3) they comment on the story or a picture in the book based on their active listening; (4) they ask the parents about the meanings of new words or to clarify the story; (5) they extend the reading by coming up with alternative versions of the stories and situating themselves in the imagined stories; and (6) they negotiate, which, in contrast with the previous strategies, Gavora regards as a purely social activity. Children negotiate with their parents to prolong the time spent reading and put off the moment when they are to go to sleep. These six strategies are a telling illustration of how child listeners can intentionally influence the world around them.

The paper by Francesca Gobbo has been included in the special section called Best Practice as it focuses on describing educational practices in an exceptional day care center. The paper focuses on the La Giostra nursery school in Florence, which specializes in providing preschool child care for children from Chinese families. The nursery school offers three programs: a play center (four-hour stays), a half-day nursery school (8 a.m. to 2:30 p.m.), and a whole-day nursery school (10:30 a.m. to 6 p.m.). Gobbo describes all of the details involved in the educational institution, which initially had to deal with fears from Chinese parents that the language barrier might be stressful for their children as well as the parents' wish that their children

should not be only cared for but cared for and educated. The services the preschool currently provides are proof that it has succeeded in becoming an educational and cultural environment where children are socialized into the Italian community in Florence through participation in everyday activities. The paper has been included in the Best Practice section as it offers the reader a detailed view of how multicultural education can take place realistically and naturally beginning in preschool years. Gobbo invokes the observation by Barbora Rogoff that through active participation in everyday rituals, people transmit values and norms from one generation to the next. The paper lets us catch a glimpse of a preschool educational institution where education and culture are interconnected strongly and meaningfully.

The section Emerging Researchers includes two papers. The first is the result of an agreement between the European Educational Research Association (EERA) and the editors of *Studia paedagogica*. It is by the young postgraduate student Mahammad Abul Hasnat, who is studying in New Zealand and exploring parents' perceptions of their involvement in school activities in Bangladesh. The goal of the qualitatively oriented study was to explore how parents in rural areas with low literacy levels and low income rates perceive school and, most importantly, how they perceive their involvement in school activities in connection with their children's school attendance.

The results of the research show that the parents included in the study did not monitor how their children performed, i.e., did not read their record books. This was not, however, a result of their low income and the ensuing need to work many hours a day, which would prevent them from spending time with their children. Instead, the parents firstly believed that it was the teachers' duty to provide their children with a quality education and secondly viewed communication with the school as a sign of failure. Policymakers' expectations that parents would assume an active role in their children's education and the recurring finding in educational research that parental educational involvement affects student performance are in sharp contrast with parental beliefs. This conviction that parents should not interfere with their children's learning tacitly creates a barrier between families and school. The paper brings a valuable finding which may benefit future decisions concerning educational policy for rural areas in Bangladesh.

Doctoral student Jana Navrátilová devoted her paper to the transformation of social relationships when fourth-graders become fifth-graders. Data sources for the study include participant observation, essays analysis, and focus groups with students. The findings point to entirely different perceptions of the transition process from students and from teachers. While teachers address the curricular and organizational contexts of the transition, students deal with the transition of social relationships with great intensity. The difference

may be due mainly to the fact that the students are influenced by developmental changes, which, though not as visible in early adolescence as later, may nevertheless influence students' attitudes toward school and learning.

The last paper in the thematic issue is a book review, which is connected with the other contributions through not only the topic of childhood but also its narrative research methodology. Ingrid Čejková reviews *Narrative inquiry in early childhood and elementary school: Learning to teach, teaching well* by Sisk-Hilton and Meier (2017). The book consists of 15 intriguing stories from teachers and students. There are, for instance, stories from Stephanie, who tried to understand why her students behave in class as they do; Daniel, who reads stories to children and observes their language skills develop; Martha, who publishes posts about her students and their progress on the school website as well as articles in the school magazine; Gity, who spends time with children in nature; and Tiffany, who is interested in reflective stories concerning her teaching. This book offers practical strategies for incorporating narrative tool structures into the classroom and encouraging effective conceptual, pedagogical, and personal avenues for engaged teaching and learning across languages and cultures.

The cover of the "Childhood" thematic issue has an image of a honeycomb and a queen bee, suggesting an idealized memory of childhood full of caring and the individual's gradual growth from a baby to a mature person. Does this image reflect the traditional or contemporary view? Piaget's traditional view of child development regards adults as mature, rational, and competent while children are regarded as less human and incomplete (Piaget, 1997). It has been especially adult supremacy and Piaget's idea of an individual's universally valid stage-based development that have been exposed to a great deal of criticism (James et al., 1998). Vygotsky's social-cultural theory, on the other hand, claims that higher forms of cognition come from social interactions (1978). The ideas from this theory that gained popularity were later developed with an emphasis on the individual's involvement in social activities (Rogoff, 2003).

This development is later undoubtedly reflected in the defining feature of the new sociology of childhood in the 1980s and 1990s, which pictures children as active agents in their everyday world (Corsaro & Fingerson, 2006; Qvortrup, 1985). Quickly skimming through this thematic issue might lead us to say, "Yes, indeed, children are agents influencing their lives," and we might even feel inclined to change the title from *Childhood* to *Child Agents*.

We have two reservations, however, about the thesis that children are active agents who influence others. First, as this thematic issue shows, children cannot always influence what is happening around them in important ways, as their narratives demonstrate. For instance, the paper by Bunting and Moshuus demonstrates how "agents" can be silenced by school and how

they carry this experience with them to other areas. The text provides a counterpoint to the oft-repeated claim about children's activity, describing agents who are not agents and may not even want to be.

The second reservation is of a theoretical nature. Does the finding that children are active agents in their lives bring us essential knowledge? Does the thesis shift our theoretical understanding of the phenomenon more than the thesis that children are passive participants dependent on the private family (Mayall, 2002)? The paradigmatic thesis of childhood understood as a social construction does not bring many stimuli for theoretical reflection on this area, as some authors (Tisdall & Punch, 2012) critically remind us. It rather leads to recycling mantras about children as active agents and their valuable participation in a great majority of texts.

This thematic issue indicates a relatively radical turn in childhood research. Ethnography is no longer regarded as the most useful methodological approach to researching childhood and a radical turn toward narrative research is underway. If stories are of such great importance for children and children's learning to understand the world, then the best way to understand the world of children is narrative research. Methodological understanding is thus moved a bit forward, reflecting a shift in theoretical understanding. Nowadays, children are approached as active players in the socialization process and acknowledged as having a perspective other than that of adults. This leads to an increased reliance on narrative research, which enables a complete understanding of differences that are not categorized or hierarchized. Yet, emphasis is also placed on understanding childhood in its broad context.

Narrativity makes it possible to understand the complex subjective nature of many phenomena without taking them out of context. It is as if qualitative research drawing on narrativity has found its second wind, able not only to disentangle the complicated knots of stories but also to uncover explanations for many phenomena in the chain of causally connected phenomena (Bruner, 1986). Thanks to this, the simple conclusions many tend to expect from educational sciences are being challenged. The lay expectation that the more homework pupils do, the more they learn, is blown away. Narrative research thus can not only bring initial insight into an issue or give us a glimpse of a deeper mystery but also explain why simple things in human lives do not work as we would expect them to.

We are far from inclined to herald a change in paradigm, and yet we believe there are certain signs of this. On the one hand, there is the popularity of the socio-cultural theories from Vygotsky and Rogoff, emphasizing the social aspects of learning; on the other hand, there is the falling out of love with ethnographic research and the turn to narrative research leading researchers to carefully record stories by children and adolescents and also

explore complex phenomena in the chain of events linked by causality. Researchers are not only tellers of stories which happened to other people, as recording children's voices is not enough (James, 2007). Researchers are now challenging the simplicity of concepts in childhood studies and showing what may have influenced the sometimes radically different views.

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