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Summary



Summary



Exploring young children's voices

Framework and research questions

Many researchers and practitioners are engaged in researching children's voices. Listening to what children have to say about their own everyday life has become increasingly relevant for the profound understanding of children and to contribute to their development in the best possible ways.

The way in which children perceive and interpret the world around them differs from the way adults view the world. At the same time, children's perceptions of the world are often interpreted by adults, and so from an adult's point of view (Engel, 2005). According to Komulainen (2007, p. 13), adults have the tendency to see young children on the one hand as "dependent, vulnerable receivers of care and education, and [on the other hand as] 'agentic' subjects with distinct 'voices'". This dilemma causes fundamental ambiguities in research on understanding communication with children. Spyrou (2011) clarifies the opposition between adult's and children's points of view and the interpretation of views, by stipulating that in the discourses between adults and children the interests, assumptions, and values of both adults and children are at stake, as well as issues of power. Ebrahim (2011) acknowledges that it is complex to determine to which extent children's perspectives are their own personal perspectives, as children develop perspectives through the values and beliefs they receive from birth onward (Vygotsky, 1994, 1997).

Children grow into society by participating in different cultural settings or microsystems, like family and education, in which they encounter different demands to which they have to relate (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Hedegaard, 2008; Meadows, 2010). Influenced by the perspectives of significant others, it is probably more likely that children partly reproduce those perspectives of others, as well as the social context in which they are expressed (see also Bourdieu & Passeron, 1998). The culture in which an individual participates and meets other people, is crucial for a person's actions. In that sense, acting is a form of cultural acting in cooperation with others (Komulainen, 2007; van Oers, 2009).

Research indicates that meaning acquired by someone mostly has traces of cultural content, and personal senses acquired by others at the same time (Christopher & Bickhard, 2007). Opinions or perspectives acquired by children thus have a personal dimension, connected with their interests and their own life history, and a collective dimension built on the intergenerational structures of childhood (Warming, 2011; Wertsch 2002). Attribution of meaning and the acquisition of opinions occur in interaction with others, in a dialogical process, in which the voices of others resound as well (Bakhtin, 1981; Spyrou, 2011; Wertsch, 2002). To define the construct of voice, we follow Bakhtin (1981), who states that any word uttered by an individual is essentially inter-individual. An utterance can never be attributed to a single speaker, as there is always a real or virtual listener involved, whose anticipated answers may be integrated in the speaker's utterances.

Despite the diversity in notions on how children perceive, interpret, and contribute

to the world they live in, researchers and practitioners find each other in the conviction that more research on listening to children is still necessary. Firstly, the main aim of this thesis on exploring young children's voices is to gain more insight in the contents of a child's voice by providing a method for listening to and analyzing young children's voices on educational matters. In children's life school education has a major impact on their development. Children spend a great deal of their time in school, starting at the age of 3-4, during which they meet and relate to peers and adults, like teachers. It is the teacher's main responsibility to establish relationships with the children, by determining and adjusting to their educational needs, in order to contribute to the children's development. This responsibility in establishing relationships with children is often related to teachers' responsiveness. To be responsive includes, for instance, giving children a voice, that is, the right to express their own perceptions and actions (Hallet & Prout, 2003). At the same time, it raises questions about how children should be given a voice and under which conditions, and whether it is possible to determine what the personal views and opinions of young children really are. Children's voices are not fixed, but evolve in dialogues with adults and peers.

Secondly, we aim to contribute to future research and theoretical development on exploring young children's voices by providing a heuristic for researching their voices. In this study we focus on children aged 5-6, who are familiar with primary school in the Netherlands already for a period of about two years.

In our research project we define "voice" as a psychological function that can only be known through an individual's personal (verbal and non-verbal) expressions. We argue that in line with the complexity to disentangle a personal voice among voices and within a voice on the basis of expressions, a transparent model, to analyze and interpret young children's voices within the school context, is needed. Considering the genesis of a child's voice in a social and diverse context, we regard the individual child's voice as essentially polyphonic, that is, a simultaneous sounding of different voices (Bakhtin, 1981).

In our research project we wanted to explore the content of young children's voices with a focus on the meaning young children themselves attribute to the educational contexts in which they participate. We formulated the research question for this project: *Is it possible to identify the content of young children's own, personal, voices in relation to their own school contexts?* As we proclaimed that all voices are essentially polyphonic, we first had to raise the research question whether it was possible to identify which correspondences could be found between expressed meaning making by young children in school and those which are closely related to these children, that is, their teachers, their parents and their peers.

We formulated this first research question with two sub-questions:

1. Is it possible to identify which correspondences could be found between expressed meaning making by young children in school and those who are closely related to these children: their teachers, their parents and their peers?
 - 1.1 What meaning do young children ascribe to their education with regard to:
 - a. The different (kinds) of activities they encounter in school?

- b. The ways these activities are organized?
 - c. The roles of the teacher?
- 1.2 What meaning do the teachers and the parents/caregivers of the young children ascribe to (their) children's education (the activities, the way they are organized and the roles of the teacher)?
- a. What are the similarities among children, their teachers and parents/caregivers with regard to ascribing meaning to education?
 - b. What are the differences among children, their teachers and parents/caregivers with regard to ascribing meaning to education?
- After answering the previous research questions, we addressed our main research question:
2. Is it possible to identify, from what is voiced by the child, what belongs to "himself"¹⁰, concerning the meaning the young child contributes to the educational context in which he participates?

The research was conducted in five case studies with children, in relation to their peers in the classrooms, their teachers, and their parents, in three different primary schools in the Netherlands. All children attended a mixed-age class, called grade 1-2. These case study children (Tom, Irfan, Margareta, Bernadette and Lennart) are further referred to as "focal" children.

Chapter 1 provides a brief overview of research and the research conditions on listening to young children on educational matters, the theoretical framework, and the outline of our study, and the societal relevance.

In the chapters 2–5, we report on the steps we have taken to gain a deeper insight in the contents of young children's voices, by providing a method for listening to and analyzing young children's voices. We focus on research on communicating with young children in and about their educational context and the research settings in which the research took place.

Overall conclusions from our research project are drawn and discussed, and theoretical and practical implications are described, in chapter 6.

Data collection and analysis

The first study, described in chapter 2, was conducted to test our methods for data collection and to establish a first version of data analysis on researching attribution of meaning by young children in school.

Based on a literature study, we formulated four possible indicators of voice: expressing feelings and choices; sharing ideas about competences and needs; showing knowledge by pointing out, investigating, confirming, opposing; and intending to gain something related to others.

¹⁰ With the child 'himself' or every time the child is referred to as 'he', is also meant the child 'herself' or the child as 'she'.

We started to build a theoretical framework, grounded in the cultural-historical tradition, for data collection and analysis. We focused on the verbal and non-verbal expressions of the first focal child in our study, Tom, within his school context. At the same time, we collected expressions of conation – thinking, feeling, wanting – as underlying elements of meaning (González Rey, 2008). We observed in three settings (daily practices, an arranged setting as “playing school” in a play area, and a semi-structured interview) in line with the methodological arguments for using multiple settings in research with young children (Clark, 2007, 2010). In the following four case studies we added another two research settings: talking about feelings towards school and taking photographs in school and outside with a disposable camera.

The three main categories, used in a first process of coding, are derived from our sub-questions of the first research question: the meaning young children ascribe to (a) the activities in their school, (b) the ways these activities are organized, and (c) teachers’ roles.

The grounded theory-approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) is used to enter children’s worlds and to communicate about their experiences, without having their experiences transformed by the researcher beforehand, or their meanings altered in any significant matter (Grover, 2004; Hedegaard, 2008; Komulainen, 2007). The contribution to the theoretical knowledge about the phenomenon of children’s voice is grounded in the data, which were systematically gathered and analyzed throughout the research process. We followed the grounded theory approach, in which the characteristics (“properties”) as well as the subcategories emerged from the collected data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The data collection was followed by a process of interpretation, which was carried out for the purpose of discovering and organizing concepts, and relationships among the data. This in turn contributed to a theoretical framework for exploring children’s voices (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

The found expressions were mostly related to the first category, (a) school activities, and some are related to the other two categories: (b) the school organization and (c) the roles of the teacher. We found four properties, related to (a) school activities, with the most variety (verbal, non-verbal, conation) of expressions by Tom: commenting, demonstrating, choosing, and preferring. We were also able to link these properties to indicators of voice content: sharing ideas about competences and needs (property demonstrating), showing knowledge by pointing out, investigating, confirming, opposing (property commenting), and expressing feelings and choices (properties choosing and preferring). It was the last step in our first case study.

Validity and reliability

In chapter 3 we described how we have dealt with the issues of validity and reliability of our research method. This was also a necessary step to provide accessibility to and transparency of the research process.

Two independent external researchers also analyzed videotaped observations in two

case studies (with the focal children Lennart and Bernadette) with the help of our theory-based coding system. We have chosen those case studies, as they were rich in a variety of codes, and provided many research data. Comparing the results of the coding processes among the external researchers and the (internal) researcher, we saw that we did not meet our standard of a 70% of overall agreement (Miles & Huberman, 1984, p. 63). Based on this outcome we reconsidered and improved our coding system on the levels of defined subcategories and properties (see Appendix C.1, Coding System 2). We re-coded three units from the videotaped observations in the case studies of Lennart and Bernadette, which showed the lowest agreement percentages in the first coding process. The results of this second process of coding showed that we met our formulated standard of an overall 80% inter-coder reliability (Miles & Huberman, 1984, p. 63) on all three units of recoding.

After we had carried out the five case studies, we were able, with the aid of our validated and reliable coding system, to start the description of expressed contents in a child's voice.

Results

Expressed contents in a child's voice

In chapter 4 we described how we derived elements of a child's voice from the case study of Bernadette, which was presented as a paradigm case. Based on the analyses of the children's expressions in each case study and the cross-analysis among the expressions of the focal children, we were able to answer the first part of our first research question (1.1). What meanings do our focal children ascribe to their education with regard to (a) the activities in their schools, (b) the school organization, and (c) their teachers' roles?

From the findings in the paradigm case, we concluded that Bernadette expressed meaning with regard to her school education about:

a. School activities

Properties like *preferring* and *revealing*, especially in combination with *commenting*, and to more or less the same extent, *demonstrating*, were frequently connected to Bernadette's expressions. On one occasion, Bernadette and her school friend Elza had decided to make a jigsaw puzzle. They were laughing while looking for the right pieces to fit in and after a short period of time Bernadette presented the results to the teacher: "we have already finished, miss!" *Postulating* and *assigning* were often connected to Bernadette's expressions at the same time, certainly during play in the play area. In the play area Bernadette was telling the other children explicitly what to do and how. Bernadette admitted to the researcher that she really liked playing the teacher in the play area and telling other children what to do. These expressions were connected to the properties *preferring* and *revealing*.

b. School organization

Most of Bernadette's expressions were connected to properties in the subcategory: the adoption of rules and routines, especially to the properties *following*, and somewhat less, to *accepting*. Bernadette mostly followed the school rules. The property *imposing* was sometimes connected to expressions, mainly when Bernadette was playing the teacher in the play area (see also a. School activities). Expressions connected to properties in the subcategory: modification of school rules, were shown less frequently and concerned mainly *adjusting* the rules. *Neglecting* rules or *opposing* to rules occurred only a few times, during daily activities.

c. Teacher's roles

The property *attending* (the teacher as educator) was frequently connected to Bernadette's expressions, in combination with the properties *commenting* and *demonstrating*, as well as in combination with the properties *revealing* and *showing*. Though somewhat less frequently, the property *initiating* (the teacher as facilitator) and the properties *adding* and *obliging* (the teacher as instructor) were also connected to Bernadette's expressions on teacher's roles. This was the case when the teacher was telling Bernadette to take another jigsaw puzzle from the classroom, after she had finished the first one. Bernadette acted likewise when she told – as a teacher – that the children in the play area had to start

working “within a minute”. For as a teacher you may tell children what they have to do, according to Bernadette.

Again, we were able to connect certain formal codes of our coding system (properties) to the four indicators of voice content, in relation to children’s attribution of meaning (see also Appendix C): expressing feelings and choices (properties as preferring and revealing), sharing ideas about competences and needs (properties as demonstrating and collaborating), showing knowledge by pointing out, investigating, confirming, opposing (properties as commenting and exchanging), and intending to gain something related to others (properties as rejecting and assigning).

The outcomes of the analysis and interpretations of the expressions in the paradigm case study of Bernadette corresponded in broad outlines with the outcomes in the other four case studies of Tom, Irfan, Margareta, and Lennart. Bernadette’s key message was in line with the key messages of the other focal children as well: “a teacher tells you what to do”. It turned out to be possible to characterize children’s expressions concerning school at that moment in a reliable way. We conclude that, in answering research question 1.1, we identified characteristics of the voice about school issues of the focal children as described above. At the same time, when children express that education is considered important, they probably express notions they have acquired in their own cultural contexts. This possible resounding of voices within a person’s voice led us to sub research question 1.2. What meaning do the teachers and the parents/caregivers of the young children ascribe to (their) children’s education?

Comparing the narratives of teachers and parents with children’s expressions

We described the answers to the second part of our previous research question in chapter 5. We started to formulate the answer to sub research question 1.2 by analyzing the narratives of the teachers and parents of the focal children about the meaning they ascribe to (their) children’s education. Our coding system, developed for the formal classification and analysis of children’s expressions, was also used to analyze the expressions of their teachers and parents. Two independent external researchers were invited to analyze a sample of four interviews, to control for a possible researchers’ bias. In answering the second part of the first research question (1.2) we conclude that the focal children’s parents and teachers agreed to a large extent upon the importance of acquiring academic skills, and that children keep to the school rules and routines. Besides, children have to be offered an agreeable time at school with many opportunities for play, and children have to be supported to become self-confident and to stand up for themselves.

Based on the comparison of the analyses of researcher and external researchers, we composed randomized lists of leading – returning and/or outspoken – expressions of teachers and parents, besides a randomized list of children’s leading expressions. All of the children’s expressions in the randomized list had attributed codes, which are related to the third and fourth indicator of voice content, that is, expressed meaning making. The third

indicator (children showing knowledge in several ways) and the fourth indicator (children intending to gain something) provided the most outspoken indications for expressing voice and attribution of meaning. To compare the lists of leading expressions of teachers and parents with the children's expressions, we created a taxonomy for distinguishing and interpreting correspondences in expressions on four levels:

- **Level A.** Child and adult use literally the same words or word combinations for the expression of their voice on school related matters. The situations and/or context child and adult refer to, are highly identical.
- **Level B.** Child and adult use words or word combinations which look alike, but are not identical (synonyms). The situations and/or context child and adult refer to, are highly identical.
- **Level C.** Child and adult use literally the same words or word combinations for the expression of their voice on school related matters. The situations child and adult refer to differ; the contexts are different.
- **Level D.** Child and adult use words or word combinations which look alike, but are not identical (synonyms). The situations child and adult refer to differ; the contexts are different.

The researcher and the external observers, have compared the children's leading expressions with the leading expressions of teachers and parents (see also Appendix E.2). Correspondences between the children's and adults' expressions regarding education were found on all four levels.

We used the interpretative model by Hicks (1996) to look into the nature of these expressions and the found correspondences. Hicks defines four levels of interpretation. The first level is the one of shared contexts of meaning from the social-cultural and historical perspective. The second level refers to the discursive construction of meaning within the specific school setting of the child involved, with its own structures of activities. The third level is the child himself; what he himself contributes to his involvement in a range of activities. Looking at this third level we see also a relation with characteristics of the authentic voice of the child, consisting of expressions in which (openly) resistance is shown, and which are found non-corresponding to teachers' and parents' expressions by internal and external researchers. The fourth level focuses on how the child's reconstruction of social meaning changes over time. As our research consists of five case studies limited in time, the fourth level is beyond the scope of our research.

In children's voices the rules and routines in school resounded, as well the perspectives of their teachers and parents, concerning the importance of doing well in school and to be educated in school subjects. Such issues are obviously related to common societal or institutional perspectives of adults in general. We interpreted these outcomes as indications of young children's access to social representations (Moscovici, 1981) about school, which they obviously share with adults, like teachers and parents.

What belongs to the child himself?

We formulated an answer to our main research question. Are we able to identify, from what is voiced by the child, what belongs really to himself, concerning the meaning the young child contributes to the educational context in which he participates?

We found that some of the children's expressions did not correspond to any of the expressions of teachers and parents. Such expressions did not correspond to the expressions of their own teachers and parents, nor to the expressions of the teachers and parents of the other children in our case studies. Looking into the content of these non-corresponding expressions, we saw that many of them were related to situations in which the children tried to achieve a personal goal, resisting the intentions of the teachers or peers to a certain extent. These kinds of expressions were coded with properties such as postulating, rejecting, assigning and opposing. Properties which we connected with the fourth indicator of voice: intending to gain something related to others. Many of these children's expressions referred to situations in which resistance was shown openly by the children. Hedegaard (2008) refers to this kind of outspoken resistance as an expressed conflict, when a child is not able to do what he wants to do in line with his own intentions. Expressing conflicts could be interpreted as a strong indication for what belongs to the child himself, concerning the meaning he ascribes to the educational context in which he participates (see also Rainio, 2010).

Conclusions and discussion

We conclude that it is possible to label certain non-corresponding expressions by the children as indications of their personal (authentic) voice. The theory-based indicators of voice, retrieved from research beyond our own research, were applicable for the voice contents of all the children in our case studies too. We conclude that the results of our analysis of children's voice in relation to the theory-based description of voice indicators, turned out to be a form of theoretical or analytic generalization in our research (Smaling, 2009; Yin, 2009).

At the same time, we are not implying to make empirical generalizations about all children's voices. In our research, in collaboration with the focal children within their own natural school contexts, these individual focal children are listened to and heard. Conclusions in our research are based on what these children have expressed, and their individual expressions are not representing children's universal expressions or voices at this age or developmental level. At the same time, these case studies are carefully selected. Two pairs of cases with the same school contexts (Irfan and Margareta, next to Lennart and Bernadette) were selected to create possibilities for comparable, outcomes, as a form of practical replication. On the other hand, we have selected three different school contexts (Tom – Irfan and Margareta – Lennart and Bernadette) for searching different patterns of outcomes, as a form of theoretical replication of our research steps too (Yin, 2009). Comparability and replication, besides validation, transparency, and reliability are criterions in the entire research process (Ruzzene, 2012; Yin, 2009).

Our research is phenomenological by nature and as phenomenological researchers we try to understand, not to predict, what is going on within the context of the research. We imply to share our notions with others in a dialogical process (Grover, 2004). Our focus as researchers is on researching ways to identify children's voices, by analyzing and interpreting their narratives and those of proximal others, in context. We were looking for correspondences among voices and we are not assuming causal relations between children's expressions and the expressions of proximal others.

Analyzing and interpreting narratives from case study research raises questions about the validation in research. In using several settings and research instruments within the research with the focal children, we tried to increase the comparability, and therefore the credibility, among the gathered data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The process of narrative analysis and interpretation is also carried out by two external researchers, besides the internal researcher. Doing so, we intended to make this process as reasonable and convincing as possible. On the one hand, lists of leading – returning and/or outspoken – expressions by children and the adults, were available for the researchers, based on the overall narrative analysis and interpretation of the internal researcher and external researchers. On the other hand, we have introduced a tentative taxonomy for interpreting manifest corresponding expressions between children and adults. The internal researcher and the external researchers used this taxonomy with four levels, which takes account

of the nature and content of all the expressions and their context. Both measurements contribute to criteria of transparency and reliability.

Exploring lists of expressions with found correspondences among these expressions with the aid of the first three levels of Hick's interpretative model, enabled us to look into these correspondences in a systematic way. The focal children show their views on the school contexts by showing power to diverge from the conventional ways of acting. Sometimes they even resist the rules, making personal and controversial choices regarding what and how to act. This process of diverging is possible in a context in which children have a wide range of opportunities for acting. On the one hand, the children copy actions and expressions of proximal others like their teachers, parents and peers. By imitating, children learn to prepare themselves for future-activities, contributing to their development. On the other hand, children need the opportunity to express their own perceptions and actions. It questions the teachers' roles in this process of children's development and, at an overarching level, questions schools' educational philosophies as well. At schools with a strong focus on self-realization, children may endorse the social reproduction of a culture they are engaged in rather (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1998), than to develop their own voices by discussing, being in conflict, or showing resistance to presented structures and activities, and how to be stimulated to deal with these situations. Schools with a very strict goal-oriented and intentional curriculum with no room left for the children to develop their own views themselves, to express their feelings and preferences, and share ideas about competences and needs, may lead to children's strict adaptation of educational perspectives too. It turns out to be important in school to stimulate children's development by offering them space, place and time, to develop their own voices in a constructive dialogue with teachers and peers (Harcourt, Perry & Waller, 2011).

Suggestions for further research

Though we have set steps into developing strategies in and a methodological approach of revealing children's voices, we are confronted with limitations in our research too.

Taking into account all the ethical, theoretical and practical implications to create the best possible conditions for research with children and doing them justice, research with children takes time. Despite this consideration, a broad and in-depth longitudinal - ethnographical - research with a substantial number of participating children, in line with the study we conducted, is one of the suggestions for further research on children's voice. A study over a longer period of time may also provide insights in the interpretation of young children voices on what Hicks (1996) calls the fourth level of her interpretative model: how children's reconstruction of social meaning changes over time, depending on their developmental levels.

Another suggestion focuses on the specific participants in a broader scope of research. Our research was limited to young children's participation under quite favorable circumstances. Children who were doing well in school, who are verbally competent, easily interacting with peers and adults, and with stable family and peer relationships. We reasoned that if we were unable to conduct our research under these favorable circumstances, we would not be able to gain insight in aspects of young children's voices at all. Certainly, when the aim of research on young children's voices is on how children view their own school context and attribute meaning to school, children who are less privileged should be heard as well, or at least be offered the opportunities to express themselves in appropriate ways on these issues.

Researchers, as well as any other adult, have to follow the ethical guidelines in interaction with children (Ethical Code, 2014). The focal children collaborated in our research out of free will and decided what they wanted to share or not. They were asked to participate on several occasions during the research and had every right to say no. It happened only once, when two children said they wished to end the interview about their "ideal school", and wished to change subjects. A consequence of the way our focal children were selected is that the children were more or less "assigned" to the research by their teachers with consent from their parents beforehand. A larger study, in which children are randomly selected to participate, obviously decreases the effects of social desirability and volunteering. Still, the ethical guidelines have to be followed, and children's consent has to be obtained.

In involving the focal children in our case studies, we created possibilities for peers to participate as well, but only on a small scale. A larger study on young children's voice, in line with our study, would benefit from a more substantial participation of peers and a wider range of family members, as siblings, grandparents, or other proximal relatives, depending on the family circumstances and situations of the focal children involved (Maybin, 2013). At the same time, a consequence of involving more proximal others in a longitudinal in-depth research on elements of "own voice" in relation to polyphony or multi-voicedness,

also demands a broader scope of research on the voices of all the participants involved. However, looking for possible correspondences among children's voices and the voices of proximal others will be an even more complex process of analyses and interpretation, concerning all those possible participants involved in research.

A last suggestion is made in relation to the phenomenological nature of our research and the limited empirical generalizability of findings. Our research is merely focused on developing systematic ways to understand children's expressions in a small number of case studies, and not to predict how children are "'supposed' to feel or how they are 'expected' to interpret [an] experience" (Grover, 2004, p 87). It does not mean that, besides using qualitative methods for researching children's voice and attribution of meaning, the use of quantitative methods is out of the question or inconceivable. The use of quantitative methods, in addition to qualitative methods, may contribute to a fuller, richer understanding of a studied phenomenon, built up on many collected data, and looked upon from different perspectives (Schoonenboom, in press).

Theoretical and practical recommendations

In our research we aimed to provide a method for listening to and analyzing young children's voices on school matters. Our research focus was on finding ways of retrieving voices of five focal children, aged 5-6. In line with our theoretical framework, grounded in the cultural-historical tradition, we developed an appropriate strategy for research in context. This strategy consists of a systematic approach to analyze and interpret elements of children's voice within and about their school contexts, and in relation to the voices of proximal others (see also Appendix F). On the basis of interactions with others, children create their own personal meanings of activities and learning in school, and consequently develop personal voices about school.

Voice is considered to be a social construct, which reflects certain interests, beliefs, assumptions, and values from the contexts in which voices are situated. For every researcher it is necessary to reflect on his own beliefs and assumptions, as well as to become familiar with the discourses in which the children in research are involved, and how their experiences are influenced (Spyrou, 2011). In that light, concepts like autonomy in relation to young children's voices should be used with caution. The concept of autonomy is often related to the concept of agency in this context. Agency, attributed to children's situated acting, and defined in terms as to have impact, to transform, and even to resist against circumstances and practices (Rainio, 2010), should be handled with care too. Agency is a social and shared process (Rainio, 2010), dialogical by nature. While an individual child tries to control his school life to some extent, he always has to deal with the demands and the attitudes of others within the school context, with the school program and the school system (Eteläpelto, Vähäsantanen, Hökkä & Paloniemi, 2013). At the same time, we have seen that resistance, as an indicator of voice content, sometimes is expressed by the children in our case studies. Showing resistance is an element of showing agency (Rainio, 2010). In showing resistance we see how a child is (re)constructing individual sense and social meaning within a specific situation like the school context (Hicks, 1996). What we hear children voicing in and about their school context has relations with theories on child development. A voice is not only a construct, but co-constructed in an interactional context. Concepts as polyphony and multi-voicedness are merely directives for the interpretation of voices, in relation to young children voices.

School and family are important educational practices in which children's identities and voices are shaped and reshaped, as children are on their way to an adult future life within in the public and the private domains (Allred, Davids & Edwards, 2002). Children are not passive participants, but they are actively involved in this process of shaping and reshaping, intertwining influences and attributions from and in both systems of school and family. To act in children's best interest, teachers in early childhood education have to understand how children's voices shape and are shaped within the educational contexts. From a socio-cultural perspective, teachers have to understand how children's socio-cultural contexts, in which children participate, influence their development. And secondly,

they have to understand how they can contribute to children's participation within these contexts of different systems, in supporting them to make sense of these contexts (Edwards, 2004). It is important that teachers possess and develop tools to contribute to children's involvement in discourses in an open and a systematic way, on an individual level, as well as on a group level. Providing a strategy for researching children's voices is not only meant to contribute to early childhood research. It may contribute to teachers' understanding of how children's perspectives are expressed, and enable teachers to look into the content of their voices too. Certainly the indicators we have formulated, as a frame for interpreting children's expressions, as well as the tools we used in our research (see Appendix B.1), may be helpful in communication between teachers and children about children's perspectives and their attribution of meaning about school.

Teachers have to be aware of their own perspectives and the ways they express those views explicitly and implicitly, while interacting with children. They should pay attention to the ways children incorporate teachers' perspectives into their voices (Maybin, 2013; Hohti & Karlsson, 2014). Children have to be challenged in order to develop and change their views and voice them through dialogue. Van der Veen, de Mey, van Kruistum, and van Oers (in press) have studied the effects of dialogically organized classroom talk. Such organized talks intend to stimulate children to listen to each other and to think, reason, negotiate, and voice new ideas in collaboration, supported by their teacher. Children's age and their dominant home language have effects on the development of children's communicational competence too, but the results of this research contribute to the notion that it is important that teachers have to be well educated in guiding dialogical communication with young children. Looking at the results of our own research on exploring young children's voices, we underline the importance of well-educated teachers, who support and stimulate children in dialogically developing their own voice.

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