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General conclusions and discussion

Chapter 6





General conclusions and discussion

Framework and research questions

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 around 3-4 years old, 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 their educational needs and adjusting to them, in order to contribute to the children's development. This responsibility of establishing relationships with children is often related to teachers' responsiveness (David, 1996; Edwards, Gandini & Forman, 1998; Laevers & Depondt, 2004; van Oers & Janssen-Vos, 1995; Prout, 2003). 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. Moreover, it questions whether it is possible to determine what the personal views and opinions of young children really are.

Accordingly, questions are raised about the adults' role with regard to listening to children. One of these questions is about which activities and decisions influence children's (educational) lives, for instance (Graham & Fitzgerald, 2010). "Giving voice" and "listening" are closely related, positioning child and adult in a mutual and interdependent relationship. Children's voices are not fixed, but evolve in dialogues with adults and peers. The possibilities for children to develop their voices in dialogue depend for a great deal on adults' openness to question and share their own knowledge, values and assumptions, and prejudgments. It determines the process and the outcomes of the dialogue, as well as what adults select to report and act upon (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005; Graham & Fitzgerald, 2010).

Those who are involved in researching children's voices often promote phenomenological ethnographic research approaches. Such research approaches facilitate in-depth observations and long-term relationships between children and researchers. Besides, these approaches create opportunities for researchers to enter children's worlds (Komulainen, 2007). While the research is taking place, researchers must have a reflexive attitude on different aspects, such as: on the research methods, on ethics, on the researcher's role. Komulainen, in line with the notions of Graham and Fitzgerald (2010), acknowledges that communication is a complex, and a context-bound process, in which children's contribution is constructed and interpreted by adults to a great extent. In her research on the child's voice, it became clear that as a researcher she was not representing the children (and adults) in the research setting. In fact, it was impossible to disentangle her own voice as a researcher from the voices of the research subjects.

In our research project, we defined "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 this complexity of distinguishing a personal voice among voices and within

a voice a transparent model is needed, to analyze and interpret young children's voices within the school context. As we argued previously (see chapter 1), we regard the individual child's voice as essentially polyphonic, that is, a simultaneous sounding of different voices (Bakhtin, 1981). This polyphony of children's voices emerges at the boundary between the individual meaning (what is within the child himself⁹), and the social meaning: what is in culture outside (Hicks, 1996). To understand the way in which the child (re)constructs individual sense and social meaning, it is necessary to analyze children's expressions on several levels within the same contexts first, before interpreting those expressions *per se*. In our research we explored the first three levels defined by Hicks (1996). The first level is the one of shared contexts of meaning from the social-cultural and historical perspective. We label this level, the level of social representation (Moscovici, 1981, p.184): people acquire certain general understandings of concepts, statements or explanations in inter-individual communication, and on the other hand they communicate the knowledge that has already been acquired. Hicks's 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 attributes to his involvement in a range of activities. Hicks also defines a fourth level, focusing on how the child's reconstruction of social meaning changes over time (the ontogenic perspective). As our research consists of five case studies limited in time, this fourth level is beyond the scope of our research and not further addressed.

Our conceptual framework is focused on children's voices, or expressions, and attribution of meaning to their own school education. Children's perspectives and images originate partly from historically developed local contexts, like home, the classroom or the playground, in which, besides children, others are involved too. In interpreting children's expressions, this specific context needs to be taken into account (e.g. Christopher & Bickhard, 2007). In our research the context is the school context where, besides the child, peers and teachers are present, and the parents and siblings too (though virtually). In this specific context significant others, like parents or caregivers, are relevant as well. Children's opinions and the way children express them, are not only influenced by the ongoing context-related interactions at the time being. They are also influenced by children's experiences in other, intertwining, contexts, brought into the school context and vice versa (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Meadows, 2010).

Schematically, we summarized our conceptual framework as presented (see Figure 1).

In his school context the young child is expressing himself by acting, verbally as well as non-verbally. Besides the verbal and non-verbal aspects of voices or expressions, we also looked for the conative dimensions of expressions like thinking, feeling, and wanting. They are part of the personality of a subject and play their part in the acting person. González Rey (2008) refers to thinking and feeling as categories of the acting personality, uniting intellect and affect. So the child shows visibly and audibly (in the way he is acting), his attribution of meaning to activities in the school context. He does so, for example, by choosing or

9 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'.

refusing to perform a specific task, or by his way of responding to a question or request of his teacher. In our research, following a cultural-historical approach, the question was raised whether the expressions of the young child can reliably be interpreted as expressions or voice of this young child himself (the I). Or should they actually be attributed also to the voices, or expressions, of the others: his parents/caregivers, his teacher and/or his peers (the others)? Consequently, if we hear the voices of others in the voice of the young child as well, those other voices are, in their turn, also influenced by other voices as well.

Schoolcontext

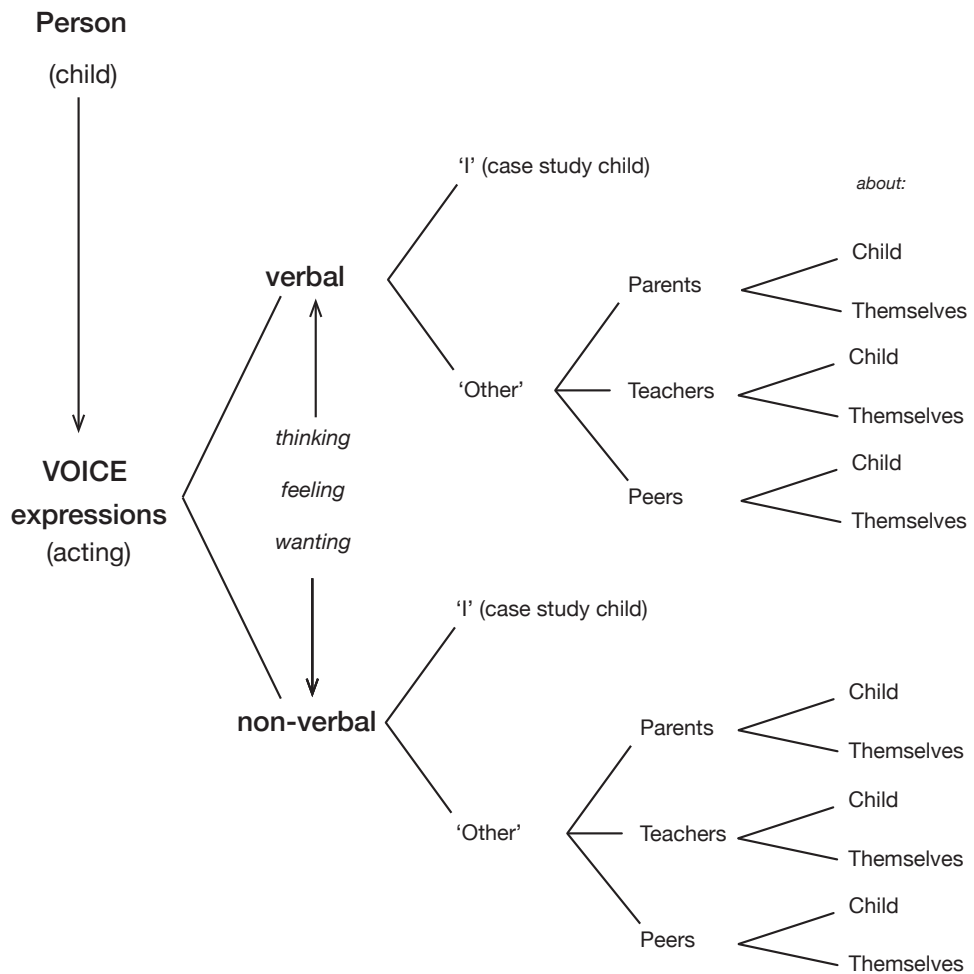


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework: Related Elements in the Construct of Voices and Attribution of Meaning

The ultimate aim of our study was 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. We raised the following research question: 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", concerning the meaning the young child attributes to the educational context in which he participates?

The study was conducted with five children, aged 5-6, 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. They are further referred to as "focal children".

Main results and answers to the research questions

The exploratory study, described in **chapter 2**, was carried out to do a first test of our methods for data collection, and to carry out a first data analysis on the 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; intending to gain something related to others. We started to build a theoretical framework for data collection and analysis, and formulated the first related elements within this framework (see Figure 1). We focused on the verbal and non-verbal expressions of the first young child in our study, Tom, within his school context. At the same time, we collected expressions of conation – thinking, feeling, wanting – as underlying dynamic elements of meaning (González Rey, 2008). We observed in three settings (daily school 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). The three main categories, used in a first process of coding, were 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. Looking at the collected data in this first study, we saw a variety in verbal and non-verbal expressions by Tom during daily observations. We saw a variety in expressions on (a) school activities during playing school in the play area and the semi-structured interview too. A smaller number of expressions was found in relation to (b) school organization and (c) teacher's roles. Elements of conation were mainly expressed in the interview, related to school activities and partly to teachers' roles.

In line with the grounded theory approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), we formulated subcategories and properties emerging from the collected data. 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 able to link these properties to indicators of voice content as well: sharing ideas about competences and needs (property: demonstrating); showing knowledge by pointing out, investigating, confirming, opposing (property: commenting); expressing feelings and choices (properties: choosing and preferring). It was the last step in our exploratory study.

In **chapter 3**, we described how we have dealt with the issues of validity and reliability of our research method. This was a necessary step to provide accessibility to and transparency of the research process too. We paid attention to ecological and construct validity, and to inter-coder reliability. Two independent external researchers analyzed videotaped observations in two case studies (the case studies of Lennart and Bernadette) with the help of our theory-based coding system (see Appendix C.1: Coding System 1) as well. We have chosen those case studies, which were rich in a variety of codes and which 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 have recoded 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. We recoded the play in the play area by Bernadette, talking about feelings by Lennart, and Lennart's involvement in the semi-structured interview. 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 coding.

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.

In chapter 4 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 sub-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? We have illustrated our findings with extracts of the coded data from the case studies in chapter 4 (see also Supplemental Materials: Tables 1–4). Extracts, which provided "rich data" with a variety of properties in different categories (see also Appendix C.4). We used these extracts from the case study of Bernadette, to illustrate what we concluded about the expressed meaning Bernadette ascribed to her school education on the three aspects of school: school activities, school organization, and teacher's roles:

a. School activities

Properties like *preferring* and *revealing*, especially in combination with *commenting*, and to more or less the same extent, *demonstrating*, could frequently be connected to Bernadette's expressions. As presented in Table 1 (see Supplemental Materials: Tables 1–4), 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. After a short period of time Bernadette presented the results to the teacher: "we have already finished, miss!" *Showing*, and less frequently, *collaborating*, and *postulating* were additional behavior properties. Bernadette underlined her verbal expressions with non-verbal behavior, as she and Elza were first making the frame of the jigsaw puzzle, after they had carried the large box together into the hallway. While making the frame of the puzzle Bernadette was telling Elza to make room. *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. In presenting a school program with

playing, sealing, and making words with the letter case, she took the leading role (Table 2). She did so, literally by sitting on the teacher's chair, where another child was sitting already in the role of the teacher (Table 4). Bernadette admitted to the researcher that she really liked playing the teacher in the play area and telling other children what to do (Table 3). These expressions were connected to the properties *preferring* and *revealing*. In these expressions the conative dimensions *feelings* (that things should be otherwise) and *wanting* (to be the teacher) can be recognized.

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, like showing the teacher the results of her work (Table 1), and accepting that the oldest were allowed to use the felt tips and the younger children were not (Table 4). 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. In these expressions the conative dimension *thinking* (that things can be otherwise) can be recognized.

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*. This was the case when Bernadette showed the teacher the results of her work and expressed that she and her school friend Elza had already finished the jigsaw puzzle. Though somewhat less frequently, the properties *obliging* and *adding* (the teacher as instructor), and the property *initiating* (the teacher as facilitator) 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 (Table 1). Bernadette acted likewise when she told – as a teacher – that the children in the play area had to start working “within a minute” (Table 4). For as a teacher you may tell children what they have to do, according to Bernadette (Table 3). In these expressions the conative dimension *thinking* was clearly manifested too.

It turned out again to be possible 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. This connection of our initial formal analysis with a substantial (content-based) analysis of children's expressions had been the last step in our exploratory study. We had to review this step in this phase of our research, as we had re-adjusted our coding system (see chapter 3). Hence, we illustrated these indicators of voice content on expressed meaning making, again with extracts from Bernadette's expressions:

1. *Expressing feelings and choices with examples of connected properties as preferring and revealing.* This was shown in Bernadette's expression that she liked playing the teacher (Table 3) and she and Elza were laughing while making the jigsaw puzzle (Table 1).
2. *Sharing ideas about competences and needs with examples of connected properties as demonstrating and collaborating.* Bernadette and Elza decided to carry the large box with the jigsaw puzzle together from the classroom to the hallway, and they acted together making the frame of the puzzle and then fitting pieces in (Table 1).
3. *Showing knowledge by pointing out, investigating, confirming, opposing with examples of connected properties as commenting and exchanging.* Bernadette and Elza expressed that the puzzle was finished and had to be shown to the teacher, while commenting: "we have already finished, miss!" (Table 1).
4. *Intending to gain something related to others with examples of connected properties as rejecting and assigning.* This was shown when Bernadette was playing school in the play area. In fact, she was not acting as the teacher, for Bernadette had agreed that her school friend Molly would be the teacher. Although, Bernadette was telling the other children what to do and how: to put their names on their work and put it in a file, and to sit at the table to start working (Table 2).

These theory-based indicators of voice, retrieved from research beyond our own research, turned out to be 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, contributed to the aim of theoretical or analytic generalization (Smaling, 2009; Yin, 2009).

The outcomes of the comparative analysis and interpretations of the expressions in the paradigm case of Bernadette showed that Bernadette's expressions corresponded in broad outlines with the outcomes in the other four case studies: 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 concluded that, in answering research question 1.1, we identified elements 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 the second sub-question (1.2): what meaning do the teachers and the parents/caregivers of the young children ascribe to (their) children's education?

We described the answers to the second sub-question in **chapter 5**. We started to formulate the answer to the second sub-question (1.2) by analyzing the narratives of the teachers and parents of the focal children in our research. 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 – which were rich in a variety of codes and which provided many research data –, to control for a possible researchers' bias. In answering the second part of the first research question (1.2), we concluded that the focal children's parents and teachers agreed to a large extent on 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 analyses between researcher and external researchers, we composed randomized lists of leading – returning and/or outspoken – expressions by teachers and parents, besides a randomized list of children's leading expressions. All of these expressions 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) had turned out to be the most outspoken indications for expressing voice and attribution of meaning (see also Appendix F). To compare the lists of leading expressions by teachers and parents with the children's expressions, we created a taxonomy for distinguishing and interpreting correspondences in expressions on four levels. The internal researcher and the external researchers compared the children's leading expressions with the leading expressions of teachers and parents. Correspondences between the children's and adults' expressions regarding education were found on all four levels (see also Supplemental Materials: Table 5):

- **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.* Examples of such level A corresponding expressions among children as well as teachers and parents were related to: how to perform school tasks (to work in a proper way and not to rush through activities), to act according to the school rules (not to go into the bushes or to call each other names), and to relevant issues brought in by teachers (the teacher asking an older child to assist a younger child). Both teachers and parents expected children to have a nice time at school; it was what the children themselves wished for as well.

Contents of expressions on this level appeared mainly related to children's social development (norms driven). The focus appeared to be the child as member of a social group in this research.

- **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.* Examples of such level B corresponding expressions among children as well as teachers and parents expressions were related to: the teacher as educator and to relevant school activities, meant to support children to move

to the next grade (educating and practicing initial reading and mathematics). Both teachers and parents considered these kinds of activities an educational assignment and the children considered these activities as important for later, and they were proud of showing their competences: “this is really grade 3!”.

Contents of expressions appeared mainly related to children’s cognitive development (educational assignment). The focus appeared to be the child as (future) learner in this research.

- **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.* Examples of such level C corresponding expressions among children as well as teachers and parents expressions were related to: school activities, school organization and teachers’ roles more in general. Some expressions of the teachers and parents referred to age differentiation and differentiated teaching, whereas the children specifically referred to age differentiation. In line with educational philosophies of their schools, some children underlined the importance of having different jigsaw puzzles for older and younger children, and that only the older children were allowed to use the felt tips.

Contents of expressions appeared mainly related to notions about differentiated instruction (children’s age and competences related). The focus appeared to be the needs of the individual child within specific age groups of children in this research.

- **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.* Examples of such level D corresponding expressions were related to teachers’ roles mainly, and more specifically to the teacher as an educator. Teachers and parents agreed upon the importance of children’s self-confidence. They both proclaimed that all children had the right to be and to stand up for themselves. In some corresponding children’s expressions, children show resistance to a certain extent, both towards peers and towards some compulsory activities presented by their teachers. The children discussed certain rules they had to keep to, or they discussed the relevance of the work or the number of worksheets they had to accomplish.

Contents of expressions appeared mainly related to children’s social-emotional development (values driven). The focus appeared to be the child as an individual person in this research.

In the focal 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. Issues that are obviously related to common

societal or institutional perspectives of adults in general. We interpreted these outcomes as indications of the focal children's access to social representations (Moscovici, 1981) about school, which they obviously share with adults, like teachers and parents.

We formulated an answer to the main research question too: are we able to identify, from what is voiced by the child, what belongs to "himself", concerning the meaning the young child attributes to the educational context in which he participates? We found that some focal children's expressions did not correspond to any of the teachers' and parents' expressions. Moreover, these expressions by the children 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, and to resist the intentions of the teachers or peers to a certain extent. These kinds of expressions were coded with properties like postulating, rejecting, assigning and opposing. These are properties which we have connected with the fourth indicator of voice and attribution of meaning: 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, occurring when a child is not able to do what he wants to do in line with his own intentions. We conclude that expressing conflicts is a strong indication for what belongs to the child himself, concerning the meaning he ascribes to the educational context in which he participates.

Conclusions and discussion

We conclude that it is possible to label certain non-corresponding expressions by the children as indications of children's voice. As we have noted before, this connection between our findings and the theory-based indicators of voice contributed to theory-based generalizations in our research (Smaling, 2009).

At the same time, we are not implying to make empirical generalizations from our data of all children's voices. In our research, we focus on children within their own natural school contexts, in which these individual focal children are listened to and heard.

Consequently, the 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. The aim in our research is to present a method for constructing an accurate description of each individual child, methodologically consistent and comprehensible, and doing justice to each child involved. These case studies are carefully selected. Two pairs of cases with the same school contexts (Irfan and Margareta, and Lennart and Bernadette) were selected to create possibilities for comparable outcomes, as a form of practical replication. On the other hand, we 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). In that sense, our research contributes to the research on young children's voices by providing a heuristic, a procedure for researching children's voices in a systematic way. Our focus as researchers is on researching ways to construct 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.

As mentioned before, analyzing and interpreting narratives from case study research raises questions about the validation in research. In using several settings and research instruments in the research with the focal children, we tried to increase the comparability, and therefore the credibility, among the gathered data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Analysis and interpretation of children's, teacher's and parents' narratives is carried out by two external researchers, besides the internal researcher. Doing so, we intended to make this process as transparent and convincing as possible (Kohler Riessman, 2002). Kohler Riessman refers also to the criterion of coherence. Coherence must be as "thick" as possible by including notions about the attribution of meaning of the actors in the light of their beliefs and goals, the particular structures of the narratives, and paying attention to the recurrent themes and topics within the narratives.

On the one hand, lists of leading – returning and/or outspoken – expressions, by children and the adults, were available for the researchers. These lists of leading expressions are 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. An inventory of the focal children's expressions corresponding with the expressions of teachers and parents is presented in Table 5 (see Supplemental Materials). It provides an overview of found correspondences between the expressions of the focal children and the adults. This concerns correspondences which are attributed by the internal researcher, as well as by the external researchers, to the same levels of the taxonomy. Looking at the different numbers of found correspondences in the four cells of Table 5, we see a larger number of found correspondences in the cells B and D (teachers and parents), than in cells A and C (teachers and parents). The use of synonyms (B and D), instead of literally used words within the content of expressions (A and C), contributes obviously to a larger number of found correspondences, than the comparison of contexts in which these expressions are made. Looking at the numbers of found correspondences in both cells C (parents and teachers), and comparing those numbers of the teachers' cell and the parents' cell, we see a difference in numbers in favor of the teachers. Teachers and children are literally present within the same school context, which probably contributes to a larger number of found correspondences between the children and teachers, than between children and parents on level C. In that sense, most parents probably have more second hand information, acquired through their children and their children's teachers. Sometimes, they may even refer to their own, comparable, school experiences.

The number of found correspondences, by internal and external researchers, on the same levels, between children's and teachers' expressions, is 88. Out of these 88 corresponding expressions, 40 expressions (45%) are attributed to the children's own teachers, according to the researchers. So 55% of the found correspondences is attributed to teachers unknown to the focal children. It concerns all the focal children. The number of found correspondences, by internal and external researchers on the same levels, between children's and parents' expressions, is 69. Out of these 69 corresponding expressions, 25 expressions (36%) are attributed to the children's own parents, according to the researchers. So 64% of the found correspondences is attributed to parents of the other focal children. This concerns all the focal children. In Table 6 (Supplemental Materials) the numbers of found corresponding expressions between children and teachers and parents, who are not their own teachers and parents, are presented.

We use the interpretative model by Hicks (1996) - see also the first section of this chapter - to look into the nature of these expressions and the found correspondences. Exploring lists of expressions with found correspondences among these expressions, with the aid of the levels of Hick's interpretative model, enables us to look into these correspondences in

a systematic way. We have been looking for important and frequently expressed themes in all the narratives, but also among the narratives.

We illustrated our findings with children's expressions, which are found corresponding to expressions by teachers and parents, being not their own teachers and/or parents. At the same time these children's expressions are also found corresponding to expressions by their own teachers and parents. In Table 7 (see Supplemental Materials) we present such illustrations of children's expressions, which are found corresponding to expressions by both teachers' and parents', who are not their own teachers and parents. In the illustrations presented in Table 7, we see children in school, who are addressing peers to live up to school rules. Margareta is instructing a peer not to use the skeelers on the patch of grass, and not to put the computer on the internet. Lennart and Tom are instructing peers to accomplish identified school activities (folding and sticking, and fetching materials in the block play area) of the daily school program according to some school routines, while they both are playing school in the play area. These kinds of expressions are recognized, and underlined or appreciated by several teachers and parents in general, as is shown in Table 7. Here we see children participating in comparable micro systems within the same western culture, and having access to the same social representations (Moscovici, 1981). Comparable findings are shown in Table 8, with illustrations of found correspondences between children's expressions and expressions by teachers or adults, who are, again, not their own teachers or parents. At the same time we see the focal children, while playing school, imitating teachers in expressing classroom rules, and in particular by telling other children what to do. By imitation, children also learn to master certain aspects of life, and to bring discipline into their inner experiences. Children are interested in issues and activities they are already familiar with on the one hand, and are able to bring in new elements, on the other hand. In line with Vygotsky (1997), we see that children, whilst playing, imitate adult's activities and expressions deliberately. According to Vygotsky, children learn about relationships and development and prepare themselves for future activities by imitating adults. Our conclusion is that in children's voices these expressions, and acquired knowledge about relationships and development resound, as well as the perspectives of the adults and peers, within the school context. The found correspondences between children's and adults' expressions in our research (sub-question 1.2.a) could be interpreted as the resounding of adults' perspectives in a child's voice. It is a plausible explanation for the found correspondences between or similarities in children's and adults expressions, when the children refer to living up to school rules and routines. The children refer to school and behavioral rules they have to keep to, such as not to go into the bushes and to do your weekly task. Teachers and parents acknowledge the importance of school rules. Although some parents doubt certain rules, they all stipulate that children should keep to the teacher's rules, even when those rules differ from rules at home. In chapter 5 (see the discussion section) we described what parents and teachers agree upon considering the importance of school education: the importance of acquiring academic skills to be able to move to the next grade in school, keeping to the school rules and routines, offering children an agreeable school time with lots of possibilities to

play with peers, and supporting children to become self-confident and to stand up for themselves. Here we see again that acquiring academic skills and keeping to school rules and routines is considered important by parents and teachers in general. The expressions shown in the Tables 7 and 8 refer to some shared contexts of meaning among teachers and parents about the contribution of education to children's development from a, western, socio-cultural and historical perspective (Hicks, 1996). The focal children refer to these contexts of meaning from time to time as well, explaining what school is about and how to act accordingly. It strengthens our view that these issues (see Table 7 and 8) are obviously related to common societal or institutional perspectives of adults in general: perspectives which resound in children's voices in which they have been socialized in their community since birth. We label them as interpretations of expressions on level 1 (Hicks, 1996). In those voices some elements of attribution of meaning are shown as well. Children reveal their feelings towards specific school rules ("I think it is sad not to be allowed to go into the bushes"), they risk correcting (answering "yes" instead of "yes, miss"), or they demonstrate their competences, in front of a peer, who is quite younger ("how much is 3×10 ? It makes 30."). Our conclusion is, that in these expressions indicators of voice-content are recognizable: showing feelings and preferences (indicator 1), intending to gain something: coded as correcting as well as opposing (indicator 4), showing ideas about competences and needs: coded as demonstrating (indicator 2) as well as postulating (indicator 4).

Hicks' second level of interpretation is directed to the discursive construction of meaning by the child through conversations with peers and teachers within his own specific school context. We provide two illustrations of this level of children's meaning making from our data:

Irfan sees three children on the ground playing a game of memory. Irfan: "Can I join in?" One of the three children wins the game. Irfan: "Are we going to play again, yes? I like this one. Yes?" The peer wins again. Irfan: "This time I'll start first and then I am going to win. Yes?"

Some of the youngest children would like to play in the play corner. Bernadette: "But it was only meant for the older children, wasn't it?" Teacher: "Yesterday, yes. Today, the play area is open to the youngest as well." Bernadette: "But it is going to be really crowded, then!"

In these illustrations above children voice their intentions: I intend to win a game of memory myself instead of a peer (indicator 4, property: postulating), or comment on a possibly overcrowded play area against a teacher's decision (indicator 3, property: commenting). These children's expressions refer to a specific context in which children and adults are involved in discourse and construct meaning together about school activities and school structures. The children are involved in daily school activities together with peers and the teacher, like practicing the game of memory or playing in the play area. On the other hand, some of these children are also discussing activities or looking for boundaries in acting, while being involved in these activities. We see that children act according to the school rules most of the time. This does not mean, though, that they are quite satisfied with all these rules. The children may deal with these situations in showing

some resistance, but not openly, and eventually they go along with the daily practices, and with the teacher's decisions. Acting according to the rules can also be based on a negative interest, for instance aimed at avoiding problems, according to Vygotsky (1997, p. 83). As expected, we see that the teacher is part of the environment and mediates between children and environment at the same time (Vygotsky, 1997, chapter 4). The teachers offer the children time and space to reveal their feelings, preferences and intentions to a certain extent in response. The discussions children have with peers and teachers could be interpreted as examples of Hicks' interpretation of children's expressions on the level of discursive construction of meaning within the specific school setting of the child involved, with its own structures of activities.

The third level of interpretation in Hicks' model refers to what the child himself contributes to his involvement in a range of activities. Here we see also a relation with elements of the authentic voice of the child and an answer to our main research question. Is it possible to identify, from what is voiced by the child, what belongs to "himself", concerning the meaning the young child attributes to the educational context in which he participates?

In chapter 5 we illustrated these elements of voice, expressed during daily activities in school among children, teachers, and peers. Expressions in which resistance is often shown (openly), and which are found non-corresponding to teachers' and parents' expressions by internal and external researchers. It concerns statements, which are also often expressed during the semi-structured interviews with the children about their ideal school:

Lennart: "I would like... to move around... to play.... I would like to have my own cat at school. I would let him climb. And I would like to have a little spider monkey. They are very good climbers. They hang in lamps. That is what they like. (...) I would love to play in such a school and you could throw all the teachers in the ditch. And we could swing around."

Margareta: "If I could think about my own school, I want to go to the sheep school."

Irfan, laughing: "The sheep school!"

Margareta: "And I would climb a tree."

Irfan, pointing at a poster of a tree on the wall: "All day. I would do it with Tarzan. I want to have a fight with Tarzan."

Margareta: "I would climb to the top of the tree."

In the illustrations above, as well as in the illustrations shown in chapter 5, the children in our research sometimes try to achieve a personal goal, even contrary to teachers' or parents' beliefs and goals. We conclude that trying to achieve a personal goal is a strong indicator for the focal children's authentic voice (indicator 4, children's expressions coded with properties like postulating and opposing).

Besides conclusions on the content of the focal children's voices, we also provide some conclusions about the conditions for researching children's voices in line with our research.

Based on the outcomes of our research, we state that it is important that schools support

children in expressing their notions, by offering them time, space, and tools appropriate for children, on a regular basis. The focal children showed their views on the school contexts by showing power to diverge from the conventional ways of acting. Sometimes they even resisted 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.

In strictly *child-centered schools* with a strong emphasis on self-expression, self-socialization and self-regulation, children are mainly followed in their development. Such schools generally proclaim to provide children every opportunity to develop their own voice and to avoid the children's adaptation of adult's perspectives as much as possible (Baraldi, 2008). On the other hand, there are *curriculum-centered schools* which proclaim a strictly planned, goal-directed and intentional curriculum, in which children mainly have to follow the teachers and the school program. 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, by expressing their feelings and preferences, and sharing ideas about competences and needs, may lead to children's strict adaptation of educational perspectives too. Taking our research findings into account, we conclude that it is in children's best interest to attend schools in which they are stimulated to have discussions and in which children are offered the opportunities to "criticize" in a constructive way what is going on in school. The schools of the focal children had different educational philosophies, and not all the focal children were used to voice their views and notions to the same extent within the school context. At the same time, all the focal children's schools had an open mind towards the children's involvement in the research, and were willing to offer the children the opportunities to participate in several research activities. They considered what the children voiced as worthwhile. The teachers (and the parents too) agreed that school education may benefit from the children's shared views and notions, as well as the way in which they were expressed. Some of the teachers were charmed by the play area to play school and the use of a disposable camera to make photos of what children considered important in school. They noticed the children's enthusiasm, the ways the children were actively involved in the activities, and what they expressed. The teachers confided their intention to continue with these kinds of activities in school in interaction with the children. Our research, intending to provide a method for listening to young children voices, contributed - on a small scale - in that sense to a possible expansion of the teacher's repertoire to listen to children's voices too.

In our research we started out from the theoretical assumption that children's narratives are polyphonic, not always straightforward, often inconsistent, opaque, sometimes even "messy" with irrelevant details from an adult's point of view, though highly informative about their lived experiences (Engel, 2005; Grover, 2004; Spyrou, 2011). This polyphony of voices requires a multi-method approach for researching children's voice, in order to

obtain a deeper insight in their voices about their educational contexts. Special attention has to be paid to what is not said or done, as the absence of children's verbal and even non-verbal behavior may sometimes provide relevant information about children's views as well (Jackson & Mazzei, 2009; Spyrou, 2011). Making sense of children's voices requires not only space for children to express their views over a longer period of time, but also a multi-method approach, as argued before (Clark, 2007, 2010; Einarsdóttir, 2007). Our interpretation of Clark's Mosaic approach, including the proposal of organizing different settings in research such as observations, propositions, photographs, play, and interviews, made the exploration of a large data collection possible. Issues, brought in by children as well as by the researcher, explored in different settings provided rich, different and complementary information. It contributed to a fuller understanding of what the focal children intended to express, verbally as well as non-verbally. At the same time, the focal children had every right to keep views to themselves (Jackson & Mazzei, 2009).

With respect to ethics our research led us to important conclusions too. In our research we abided by codified ethical guidelines (Ethical Code, 2014). We invited children to share their views with us and we needed the children's permission for this exchange of views. One of the conditions for children to reveal their voices, is their trust in the researcher, certainly when the researcher is a stranger to them. Another important condition is the opportunity for children to act on their own initiative in confiding to the researcher. 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. The children preferred to stay in the interview setting, and started talking about topics like tattoos and the consequences of a burned arm. Most focal children approached the researcher during the research at their own initiative by asking whether they could participate again. Playing school in the play area and taking photographs were popular activities among the focal children. Peers of the focal children approached the researcher by asking what she was writing down, or they were making suggestions about what they considered important and so had to be written down as well, according to the children. At the same time, we are aware, in line with Holland, Renold, Ross & Hillman (2010, p. 367), that the focal children's as well as their peers' cooperation could also be reinforced by "desires to please, have fun and enable others to understand some aspects of their lives." Our conclusion is, that spending a longer, unbroken, period of time with the children in research, may increase the children's confidence in the researcher. The researcher had the time to become more familiar and the children's potential desirability to please the researcher could decrease. At the same time, a set of data which is obtained during a longer period of time, may show more coherence and consistence in findings. Using a set of different research tools over a longer, unbroken, period of time, might provide us with a complementarity in findings within the case studies (Yin, 2009). It made it possible for the researchers to get a deeper insight in what the children in the case studies wished to express.

In line with Einarsdóttir (2007) and Formosinho and Araújo (2006), we underline the

importance of research activities in small groups of children. Children in small groups may feel more safe and comfortable in the presence of a researcher, who is often a stranger to the children. Children who are individually interviewed may be under the impression that they have to perform, like in an examination setting with “right” answers and with an adult, who knows the answers already (David, Edwards & Allred, 2001). The first child in the case studies, is interviewed alone, although surrounded by peers and teachers. He admitted that he felt a bit on his own now, while we were discussing views about and feelings towards school. All the other focal children are interviewed in a group of three children. They discussed their choices, views and wishes in dialogue with peers and the researcher.

In our research, the researcher was referred to as an adult, a teacher, but a different teacher than their own teacher. In one of the interviews, Lennart responded to the researcher’s question whether his teachers would approve of a school with pets, friends, neighbors around, and lots of opportunities to play and climb trees: “Nothing! Yóu would, but miss Cecile (his teacher) wouldn’t. She would say: get off! In school you have to work, though I haven’t done always what teachers tell you to do. Not at all.” The focal children all were well aware of the researcher as an adult, though they sometimes confided information, which was not meant for their teachers or parents. It questions the possible roles of the researcher too. Besides paying attention to confidentiality, the researcher also needs to be flexible and responsive, and to offer children space and time to decide what the role of the researcher can and will be. The researcher has to accept that the dynamics of power are at stake in all relationships with children (Holland et al., 2010). The children, though they may trust the researcher and are willing to share their views and notions quite openly, confirm this differences of power as they consider and approach the researcher as an adult. Our tentative conclusion, on the basis of our own experiences in research with children, is that the choice of the researcher to act as another peer, or as a friend (Corsaro, 2011), is probably more a researcher’s attitude and pursuit than a child’s wish. The researcher as the least adult (Warming, 2011) or even as a marginal observer (Komulainen, 2007; Lewis & Lindsay, 2000; Rainio, 2010), is mainly a researcher’s endeavor from an adult’s point of view, sometimes granted by the children and sometimes not. In line with Komulainen (2007), we state that a researcher has to accept that he has many roles. He should be able to fulfill all these different roles and strategies in research with children and reflect upon them (Spyrou, 2011). Moreover, the researcher is part of the context in which the research takes place and therefore researchers and participants are inseparable to a certain extent (Holland et al., 2010). For us, collecting data from teachers and parents, by interviewing them, was a necessary intervention in the research on comparing views. It made it possible to decrease the inseparability between researcher and focal children within the school context, and to gain more insight into children’s voice. Inviting external researchers to analyze and interpret the research data on several occasions during the research process contributed to the decrease of this inseparability between researcher and focal children too, as well as to decrease researchers’ bias in reflecting on children’s voices. Our conclusion is, that repeated, systematic interpretations of children’s as well as

adults' narratives by the external researchers, contributed to reconsiderations of possible assumptions on the side of the researcher (Christensen & James, 2008; Formosinho & Araújo, 2006; Hohti & Karlsson, 2014).

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

Limitations and suggestions for further research

First of all, the conclusions in our research are based on what the case study children have voluntarily expressed or voiced in their narratives. Their individual expressions are not representing children's universal expressions or voices (Holland et al., 2010; Rainio, 2010), as we have stated before (see also chapter 1). 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 these considerations, 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 directives 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 model: how children's reconstruction of social meaning changes over time, depending on their developmental levels. A larger study also contributes to the criterion of coherence in research on young children's voice in general, in what all the participating individuals are expressing in their narratives. Important, returning themes in those narratives may be revealed. It enables researchers to review their hypotheses about beliefs and goals over and over again, and to discuss their experiences and conclusions with peer researchers. This process of reviewing and discussing contributes to the validation of the interpretations of narrative analyses (Kohler Riessman, 2002).

Another suggestion points to 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 may 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. Komulainen (2007) points at the communication difficulties which may occur in involving children in research, who are not verbally well equipped, and at the possible misunderstandings of peers, teachers and researchers about shared information. Moreover, the pitfall of misunderstanding is always present, when working with children who are more or less privileged. All voices are in fact constructed with others. They are

interpreted by adults with their own perceptions and beliefs. Reflexivity by the researcher on interpreting children's expressions, his own possible attributions in interpreting, and on his choice for different roles in conducting research, always need to be taken into account as well (Formosinho & Araújo, 2006).

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. The focal children were asked for their consent both at the start and on different occasions during the research. In case we had wanted to state empirical generalizing claims, this would have been endangered by selection bias. From the beginning we stuck to the ambition of exploring the complex phenomenon of voice and producing a method of figuring out the details of voices. Evidently, the way children are selected for research is on debate among researchers in early childhood. Selecting children to participate in research may give children the impression that participation is essentially not on a voluntary basis and it may lead to social desirable responses. On the other hand, inviting children to participate may lead to volunteer effects (Grover, 2004), and a reason to "wave the red flag" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). 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. Some children, after being selected, may withdraw from a large research at the start or during the research. Researchers have to reflect on these decisions children make, but the effects of their possible withdrawing will probably have a minor impact on the outcomes in the research in general.

In involving the focal children in our case studies, we created possibilities for peers to participate as well, but only on a small scale. Peers were, of course, involved in the daily practices in school together with the focal children, and their interactions were observed as well. A small number of peers was also engaged in the organized activities, like playing school in the play area and in the activities with propositions, taking and discussing photographs, and in the semi-structured interviews. Researching children's expressions and interactions is fundamental in a research about revealing elements of a child's own voice from the perspective of multi-voicedness. In such a research, peers belong, besides teachers and family members, to the proximal others of the focal children, and peers' contributions are highly relevant in researching voice compositions. In our research we have defined the family members as the parents of the focal children, which is in fact a restriction of the concept of family. It is one of the reasons why we note again that the individual expressions of the participants in our case studies are not representing universal expressions or voices at this age. 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 a child's own voice in relation to multi-voicedness, also demands a broader scope of research on the voices of all the participants involved. Peers' voices are

also multi-voiced and peers have relationships with (other) peers and family members (see also Figure 1). Besides, family members, like siblings and parents or caregivers, have many relationships too. For that matter, 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. These last suggestions question the possible range and feasibility of such a research on young children's voice too.

A last suggestion is made in relation to the phenomenological nature of our research and the limited empirical generalizability of findings. Again, 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. Our choice to conduct such a research with young children about elements of authentic voice in and about their own school context is argued before, and also in this chapter. The 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, besides 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). A larger, longitudinal in-depth research with many participants in a diversity of contexts and an accompanying complexity of relationships may benefit from an additional quantitative method of analyzing and interpreting research data, in what Schoonenboom mentions a mixed method approach. Quantified qualitative data may reveal information beyond the individual level of the participants involved, for instance at a group level. Or it may reveal patterns (Miles & Huberman, 1984; Yin, 2009) as well as critical incidents within the collected data of an individual participant and among the collected data of more or all participants (Terwel, Rodrigues & van Koot-Dees, 2011). A mixed method approach may support the process of listening to all and hearing them: the privileged and the less privileged, the powerful and the less powerful participants, the positive and the negative contributions, the considered important or less important shared contents of information (Schoonenboom, in press). A larger, longitudinal in-depth research with a mixed method approach may contribute to a larger extent to the complementarities in and empirical generalizability of findings in research on children's voice.

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. We contribute to the theoretical development of research on young children's voices by providing a heuristic for exploring their voices, as we have stated before. In line with our theoretical framework, we developed a strategy for research on children's voice in context. The results showed that this strategy was appropriate. A strategy, consisting 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 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.

We started out our research with a literature study on children's voices to identify general elements of children's expressions and attribution of meaning in their narratives about their own childhood. We used these elements to formulate indicators of children's voice contents. These indicators were meant to be a theory-based frame for exploring young children's voices in every day contexts. At the same time (see also chapter 1), our intention was to enter children's worlds and communicate with them about their own experiences in our case study research in context, without having their experiences transformed beforehand by a researcher and by former research. Based on the grounded theory approach we developed a coding system with properties as descriptions of the case study children's own actual acting and speaking. In fact, we explored young children's voice from both a theoretical and an empirical perspective. It turned out to be possible to use the empirical notions from our research, labeled as properties, to fill the theory-based frame of indicators of children's voice and attribution of meaning.

The theory-based frame was strengthened by adding empirical notions to it and the empirical notions were strengthened by confronting them to theory-based notions. The indicators are based on several resources in research and proved to be useful in our research and beyond. Future research will probably benefit from the usefulness of the formulated indicators, which provide a more or less "universal" frame for testing empirical notions in research on young children's voices and attribution of meaning. It is possible, though, that new insights from new research may lead to adaptations in these theory-based indicators. The properties we defined (see Appendices C.1 and C.4) are based on the real life acting and speaking of the case-study children. We have been exploring children's expressions and have formulated properties until saturation occurred in defining properties. We have created an appropriate body of properties, that will probably be useful in future research on children's voices and attribution of meaning. Still, it is very well possible that in future research with different children in different contexts, in which the grounded theory approach is used for coding children's expressions too, other properties may turn up, besides the properties we have found.

As a consequence, from our cultural-historical perspective, individual voices have their limits (Bakhtin, 1981; Komulainen, 2007; Spyrou, 2011; Wertsch, 1991). A voice, every voice, is considered to be a social construct, which reflects certain interests, beliefs, assumptions, and values from the contexts in which these 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, the concept of autonomy, as we have noted before (see also Chapter 1), 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 circumstances and practices (Rainio, 2010), should be handled with care too. Other voices shape individual voices and agency depends on these others voices too (Maybin, 2013). Agency is a social and shared process (Rainio, 2010), dialogical by nature. For that matter, agency turns out to be a form of bounded agency. While an individual child tries to control his school life to some extent, he always has to deal with the (anticipated) 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). In line with our conceptual research framework, based on Hedegaard (2008), we also see a relation between the child's agency and his participation in the school context. The school context, where he encounters and is encouraged to integrate the individual, the societal and the institutional meta-situational perspectives, with its own cultures, traditions and value positions between school and family practices (see also chapter 5). We conclude that the concept of children's agency has to be considered from a social-cultural (Maybin, 2013) and a developmental perspective (Christopher & Bickhard, 2007; McAdams, 2011).

What we hear children voicing in and about their school context has relations with theories on child development, as we noted before in our theoretical framework. Our research approach is in line with other researchers who follow Bakhtin's theoretical insights (Komulainen, 2007; Mazzei & Jackson, 2009; Spyrou, 2011). A voice is not only a personally generated construct, but co-constructed in an interactional context. Concepts as polyphony and multi-voicedness are merely directives for the interpretation of voices. It underlines and provides explanations about what children express and how they interact within their specific school contexts. Environments have different influences on people, via the prism of their personal interests and emotions ('perezhivanie', Vygotsky, 1994, p. 339). This influence is not only related to objects and subjects here and now. It is also related to current ideologies, rooted in cultural-historical development in nowadays society in general, and more particularly in the educational philosophies children encounter in their own school settings (Vygotsky, 1997), as noted before.

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 (Aldred, 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). This process of being shaped, and shaping and reshaping is dialogical by nature (Graham & Fitzgerald, 2010; Grover, 2004; Hicks, 1996).

Teachers have to interpret the expressions in which children's views are voiced, while taking into account the dynamics in relationships within these different systems the children participate in, the contradictions in dynamics between these systems, and the possible tensions children may experience (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 provided 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.

Understanding the development of children's voices in that sense, is possible in schools with teachers who go into children's attributions in a critical and culturally justified manner, and stimulate their development within a meaningful context. These contexts are always related to the spaces in which school education is organized. Spaces which are designed, furnished, filled with materials, which represent certain norms and values (Kjørholt, 2005). These spaces, nor the acting, feeling and thinking of children or adults, are value-neutral or culture-free (Christopher & Bickhard, 2007).

The possibilities for children to develop their voices in dialogue depend also for a great deal on adults' openness to share and question their own knowledge, values and assumptions, and prejudgments, as we have noted before (see also: Dahlberg & Moss, 2005; Graham & Fitzgerald, 2010). 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. This is possible with teachers who keep their distance to some extent, but who also share their agenda with the children, and who confine their intentions to children. Teachers who offer children opportunities to participate in discourses, and who respect children's rejection to participate or their withdrawing, without being indifferent about children's choices on participation (Tertoolen, 2010). Teachers' competence to communicate with children

about their views in a dialogical way is not self-evident. Hohti and Karlsson (2014) refer to research about teachers who often still use a controlling style of interacting, although this style is questioned more and more, also in the light of its lacking pedagogical efficiency.

Maybin (2013) notes that teachers should be able to take up what children bring forward, rephrase their words with respect to what children intend to share, and shift the rephrased words into an educational and/or other genre(s). In such acts of revoicing (O'Connor & Michaels, 1996), children have the opportunity to reorder their teachers expressions in line with their own words and reuse their own words in a process of “echoing, borrowing and appropriating of voices” (Maybin, 2013, p. 386). This is a way of how educational dialogue between teachers and children may assist children to get a deeper insight into learning, understanding and expanding perspectives. 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. By this approach, teachers use productive talk moves. They intentionally invite children to add new information to a discussed topic, stimulate other children to revoice what is said in their own words, challenge them to reason about what children bring into the conversations, and to build on each other's new ideas. Finally, teachers support talk about talk, encouraging children to reflect on their performances. In this research the intervention of these productive talk moves showed a significant moderate to large effect on children's development of their oral communicational competence. At the same time, children's age and their dominant home language have effects on the development of children's communicational competence too. However, 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, to stimulate children's involvement and contributions in discourses, supporting them to dialogically develop their own voice.

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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