Children's play in peer cultures

Icelandic preschool children's views on play, rules in play, and the role of educators in their play

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Dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of a Ph.D.-degree

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Abstract

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Children's play in preschools is a complicated phenomenon studied extensively from different perspectives and paradigms. This study draws on the work of William Corsaro, to develop a study that used the sociology of childhood perspective, with particular focus on understanding children's knowledge and experiences. The aim of the study is to gain a better understanding of how children explain their activities in their preschool settings, how they experience rules in their play activities, and how they see the role of educators in their play. The purpose is to better understand children's play by seeking their views on their participation in peer cultures.

This thesis reports on a multiple-case study inspired by ethnographic approaches. The study was conducted with two groups of children in two preschools in Reykjavík, Iceland, with children aged 3-6. Video-recordings from the ethnographic approach were used to support children's conversations about their participation in the preschool activities. These conversations were captured through video-simulated accounts.

The main findings indicate that most children explained that their preferred activities were those in which they could take on various roles and make decisions about how to use the material as play. The children's explanations are related to how make-believe play has been defined. In other words, the children described themselves as playing when they created an imaginary situation, took on roles, and followed the rules relevant for the play. The children used different strategies to challenge adult-initiated rules, which often were related to who could play, and who could not, in the activity. The children's status and power in their peer culture influenced how they saw the educator's role in their play. They agreed that the educators seldom took part in their play; their role was often to be close to the children, observe and react when the children needed help or when something went wrong.

A major implication of the study is a better understanding of children's play in peer cultures from the children's perspectives. The study highlights the importance of listening to children's views of activities that concern

them. The findings are valuable for early childhood educators to support understandings of how children explain their activities in their preschool settings, including the different strategies they use to include some and not others in their play, and how educators might reconsider their participation in children's play by observing their status and power in the peer culture.

Ágrip

Leikur barna í leikskólum: Viðhorf íslenskra leikskólabarna til leiks, reglna í leik og hlutverks leikskólakennara í leik þeirra

Leikur barna í leikskólum er flókið fyrirbæri sem hefur verið rannsakað út frá mismunandi sjónarhornum og kenningum. Rannsókn þessi byggir á hugtökum William Corsaro um félagsfræði bernskunnar þar sem leitast er við að læra af þekkingu barna og reynslu. Markmiðið er að öðlast frekari skilning á því hvernig börn útskýra leik og aðrar athafnir í leikskólanum, hvernig þau upplifa reglur leikskólans og hvernig þau útskýra hlutverk fullorðinna í leik þeirra. Tilgangurinn er að auka skilning fullorðinna á leik barna með því að fá fram sjónarmið barnanna sjálfra á athafnir sínar í hópi jafningja í leikskólanum.

Notað var blandað rannsóknarsnið við gagnaöflun, aðferðir tilviksrannsókna og etnógrafíu. Þátttakendur í rannsókninni voru börn þriggja til sex ára, í tveimur leikskólum í Reykjavík, einni deild í hvorum skóla. Myndbandsupptökur voru notaðar sem kveikja að umræðu um athafnir barnanna í leikskólunum. Athafnir barnanna voru teknar upp á myndband, börnin horfðu á það og útskýrðu það sem fram fór á upptökunum.

Helstu niðurstöður sýna að börnin útskýrðu athafnir sínar sem leik þegar þau gátu tekið sér hlutverk og ákveðið hvernig þau notuðu þann efnivið sem þau höfðu aðgang að. Þær útskýringar má tengja við það hvernig hlutverka- eða ímyndunarleikur barna hefur verið skilgreindur. Í leik notuðu börnin fjölbreyttar leiðir til þess að takast á við þær reglur sem fullorðnir settu, oft í þeim tilgangi að ákveða hvaða börn mættu vera með í leik og hver ekki. Staða barnanna í jafningjahópnum hafði áhrif á hvernig þau litu á hlutverk fullorðinna í leik. Börnin voru sammála um að hinir fullorðnu tækju sjaldan eða aldrei þátt í leik þeirra; hlutverk þeirra væri að vera nálægt börnunum á meðan þau léku, fylgjast með þeim og bregðast við þegar þau þurftu á aðstoð að halda eða þegar eitthvað fór úrskeiðis.

Rannsóknin gefur glögga mynd af leik barna í leikskólum út frá þeirra eigin sjónarhorni og sýnir hversu mikilvægt er að hlusta á börn, reynslu þeirra og þekkingu á því samfélagi sem þau eru þátttakendur í. Niðurstöðurnar geta verið gagnlegar fyrir starfsfólk leikskóla og aukið

skilning þess á því; hvernig börn útskýra athafnir sínar í leikskólanum þ.e. hvaða athafnir eru leikur í þeirra augum, hvaða leiðir börn nota til þess að bjóða sumum börnum til leiks en útiloka önnur, og hvernig fullorðnir geta endurskoðað hlutverk sitt í leik barna með því að fylgjast með stöðu barnanna í jafningjahópnum.

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Ever since commencing doctoral study in the fall of 2013, I have been on a fascinating, challenging journey. At the beginning, although I did not realise where the journey would take me, I was confident that my passion and curiosity, as well as the encouragement of people around me, would guide me at every step. Along the way, supported by a doctoral grant from the University of Iceland for which I am deeply grateful, I have learned much and met many people who have influenced me, especially during national and international collaborative research. In my studies, I have been fortunate enough to travel around the world and, during that time, to realise that the experience of a journey matters more than the destination, even if the destination—in my case, completing this thesis—matters a great deal. Now, five years later, the journey has come to an end. Before embarking on another, I would like to thank everyone who has helped me in any way during my doctoral study, even if space constraints prevent me from thanking everyone by name.

Above all, I want to thank the participants of my research: the children who made conducting my research possible. They welcomed me, taught me many new things and provided me with valuable experience and knowledge about their activities at preschool. I also thank the educators who work with the children at their preschools, all of whom welcomed and assisted me.

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1 Introduction

1.1 Purpose and aim of the study

In the last two decades, the quantity of research with, rather than 'on', children has increased. Children are being offered more opportunities to be active participants in research processes and have their multiple voices included. Even though we can learn about children's activities through the narratives of others, including parents and teachers, we can deepen our knowledge of childhood by including children in the research process. It is with this intention in my doctoral study that I have chosen to include the voices of children and to bring forth their views and ideas about their play activities in their peer cultures. The aim of this study is to gain a better understanding of how children explain their activities in their preschool settings, how they experience rules in their play activities and how they see the role of educators in their play.

The topic for this study came from my supervisor, Jóhanna Einarsdóttir, Professor at the University of Iceland, and my second supervisor, Susan Danby, Professor at the Queensland University of Technology. Their research interests include researching with children and children's play. These topics are important in early childhood education which leads to the necessary of doing research with children to find out their views on play activities. This cross-country study involving Australia and Iceland has the additional aim of building a range of understandings of children's perspectives of play. In Australia, Professor Susan Danby and her colleague Doctor Maryanne Theobald conducted a similar research that involved educators constructing the data in a similar way to the approach of this study.

1.2 Value of the subject/ necessity of the research

Research on children's views on play has indicated that children do not define their activities in a same way as adults (Dockett, 2008; Theobald, et al., 2015). While preschool teachers might value children's learning through play, the children might think differently and say that they only play a short amount of time during the day. Because of this possible variation it is important to gain a better understanding on how children explain their activities in preschool. Children's play activities include several rules made

by educators and the children themselves. These rules often are taken for granted, with little attention as to whether some children may benefit and others do not (Thornberg, 2009). For this reason, this study also focuses on how children experience rules within their peer cultures. Additionally, while the role of educators is important in children's play (Pramling Samuelsson & Asplund Carlsson, 2008), there is a fine line between educators participating in children's play, and them controlling it. If educators take control over children's activities, then children tend to think that their activities are not play (Einarsdóttir, 2014a; Pramling Samuelsson & Asplund Carlsson, 2008). These findings suggest why it is critical to investigate children's perspectives regarding the role of educators in their play activities.

The Icelandic National Curriculum Guide for Preschools (2011) is based on preschool regulations and is a guide for preschool educators to build their curriculum and pedagogic practices. The curriculum guidelines suggest that it is through play that children best learn, and therefore play should be at the core of all preschool practice. Play is defined, in the Guide, as a voluntary and spontaneous activity where children participate in on their own terms, providing opportunities for children to communicate their ideas, experiences and feelings, learn to understand the environment, and develop social relations with other children. The curriculum guidelines point out that educators need to support children's learning through play in different ways such as: to create environments with different materials that give children opportunities to investigate, solve problems and be creative; offer children ample and uninterrupted time for play; and notice children's interests to support their play (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2011).

A rationale for including children as research partners draws from *The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* (1989) and the sociology of childhood theoretical framework that underpin this study. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) accepts all children as active participants in society and proposes that children should have a say in matters that affect their lives in some way. Within a sociology of childhood perspective, children are influenced by and learn from their social and physical environments; at the same time, these environments are influenced by children (Corsaro, 2015). Children are seen as competent and active participants in their own lives and capable to express their opinions, intentions, and perspectives (Einarsdóttir, 2012; Qvortrup, 1994). The study builds on the perspective that children have a right to be heard and to express their views. In every step of the research process, children's needs,

strengths, and differences are taken into consideration and with a researcher emphasis on learning from the children's knowledge and experiences.

1.3   The researcher's background

I have been a preschool teacher since 2003; on completion of my B.Ed., I worked with different responsibilities in four different preschools. In 2011, I decided to undertake my Master of Education degree because many questions had arisen in my practice that I found important to answer. In addition, I found it important to enhance my skills in critical discussion about my practice; why I did things in the way I did. In my tasks, I discussed different topics and found answers about early childhood education, which helped me make arguments in my work, for example why I prioritised children's play in the preschool. Many of those questions arose because of pressure, from the primary school teachers with whom I collaborated and the children's parents, to conform to a formal teaching approach rather than an approach that emphasised children's learning through play. I experienced different views of what children should be able to do when starting primary school. To combat this pressure, I used diverse strategies, including pedagogical documentations, to assess children's activities in the preschool and show the primary school educators and parents how and what children learned through play. My experience and these documentations led to an increased interest in gaining a better understanding of children's play from the children's own perspectives.

When studying for Master's degree, I was invited to take part in a collaborative action research project in The Center for Research in Early Childhood Education at the University of Iceland. My role was to assist educators to identify a problem connected to one of the fundamental pillars, Health and Wellbeing, in the Icelandic National Curriculum for preschools. The aim was to implement the pillar in preschool practice and the purpose was to promote children's wellbeing in the preschool. The educators who took part in the study recognised that children's active participation in daily routines had a positive influence on their wellbeing. Therefore, they reviewed their practices with regard to children's participation in daily routines and how much this could have an effect on their activities in the preschool. My Master's study investigated how the schedule in the preschool influenced the children's wellbeing. My findings suggested that it was critical for the children to have a choice regarding their participation in activities, and choice of materials and playmates, and

that it was important for the children to have ample time for uninterrupted play.

The participation in the action research project and the findings of my Masters' study increased my interest in undertaking more research in early childhood education. I was now interested in understanding more about children's activities in the preschool and I wanted to include their voices in the research process. Therefore, I applied for a position as a doctoral student at the School of Education in the University of Iceland. This position was approved in October 2013. The process of this study has been a great learning journey.

1.4   The structure of the thesis

The thesis includes seven chapters. The first chapter has introduced the purpose and value of the study and the researcher's background. The second chapter explains the concepts of the sociology of childhood, the theoretical framework of the study, including interpretive reproduction, children's peer cultures, primary and secondary adjustment. The third chapter describes previous research about children's play activities in preschools, how the concept of play and the role of educators in children's play has been reviewed. Chapter four discusses the methodology and methods chosen, that is, research with children using multiple-case study inspired by ethnographic approaches. Also, the chapter presents the participants in the study and the preschool contexts. Chapter five explains ethical matters in research with children and how the researcher dealt with various ethical challenges of this study. Chapter six reports on the findings from the study, that is, the three articles that were published discussing the children's explanation of; their play activities in the preschool setting, the rules in the preschool setting and their way of challenging these rules, and the role of educators in their play. In chapter seven the findings are discussed in an overall conclusion about the study.

2   The theoretical framework

The theoretical framework of this study was chosen to reflect my views of children. Underpinning the study are views of children as competent and active participants in co-constructing their social worlds (Corsaro, 2005; Danby & Baker, 1998b; Danby & Farrell, 2004; Einarsdóttir, 2008). These views are connected to childhood studies that emphasise children as active in shaping and constructing their own culture through their experiences, knowledge, and collective actions to produce and reproduce their peer culture (Corsaro, 2015). This study is informed by *The Convention on the Rights of the Child* (United Nations, 1989), that children have a right to express themselves in matters that affect their lives and that they are active participants in society. In this chapter I discuss views of children and how they influence children's opportunities to be active participants in shaping the preschool community. In addition, I will explain the theoretical concepts underpinning Corsaro's Sociology of childhood (2015), the theoretical approach of this study.

2.1 Views of children and childhood

A number of theoretical perspectives have informed understandings of children over centuries. Views of children and childhood have changed considerably over the last decades as new knowledge and foci emerge in early childhood education (Einarsdóttir, 2008). Constructions of children and childhood are informed by the specific conceptual frameworks. Visions of children are thus framed conceptually based on one's world views, and these constructions are both historically informed and theoretically informed, and somewhat contested within different fields. In this study, children's social and cultural contexts are considered as important in children's play and learning in preschools. That is, children are influenced by the society in which they participate, and at the same time, they are active participants who have influences in their everyday lives and in society more broadly.

The perspective informed by the sociology of childhood emphasise that children are competent and active participants in society. Children have different strengths, experiences and knowledge and take active part in creating new knowledge and shaping their culture (Corsaro, 2015). At the same time, children may be vulnerable and in need of protection and/or

guidance (Einarsdóttir, 2008). Children's vulnerability is often related to power differentials between children and adults; adults are usually in a more powerful position than children (Birbeck & Drummond, 2015). Einarsdóttir (2008) points out that adults' views of children can vary within a person; the same individual can have different views over time, and between people where different people have different views. Views of children affect how children are treated and whether their voices are heard or not.

In this study children are seen as competent and active participants in society. Their views can vary because of different experiences and knowledge, which is favoured and respected. According to Tertoolen, Geldens, van Oers, and Popeijus (2017), children's voices are essentially 'polyphonic', meaning that children's perspectives are multi-voiced. As children participate in local child-child and adult-child cultures, they construct their social worlds within these contexts. However, rather than passively accepting a socialisation process, they are active participants in constructing it (Prout & James, 2015). These views are connected to Corsaro's 'sociology of childhood' perspective (Corsaro, 2015) that recognises that children are competent and bring agency to their actions, thus taking an active part in society.

Sociology of childhood studies understand childhood as social construction, 'constructed and reconstructed both for children and by children' (Prout and James, 2015, p. 6). Childhood is recognised as an important period of children's lives, where they are active participants in the society and have a say in matters that affect their lives. Emphasis is not only on preparing children for the future but rather on the 'here and now' (Einarsdóttir, 2008; Prout & James, 2015). Danby and Farrell (2004) suggest that childhood is a universal experience that is constructed within specific places, times and contexts. Further, Corsaro (2015) argues that childhood is not a static stage, rather it is a social construction that is dependent on the context, society, values, expectations, and belief of childhood. Children learn from other people and the environment and not least, the children also influence others and shape the environment.

Children's play and learning are studied from different perspectives and paradigms, including psychological, philosophical and sociological approaches (Lillemyr, 2009). These different paradigms have developed different ways of approaching studies of children and constructed different images of children and childhood, and these images are often in tension with each other (Kehily, 2004). For example, Cromdal (2006) shows how

socialisation provides different perspectives to childhood studies. On one hand, psychological perspectives recognise childhood as a period where children become members of society through guidance from adults. On the other hand, sociological perspectives recognise children as social agents, capable of constructing their own social world.

Psychological studies have given important evidence that play is a process that promotes children's learning and development (Rogoff, Dahl, & Callanan, 2018; Wood & Hedges, 2016). However, the sociological perspective can provide a broader understanding of play, both in theory and practice by including the historical and cultural context (Wood, 2013). The focus is on children's participation in everyday settings and that their learning takes place in interaction with other, children and adults (Corsaro, 2015). Though, it is important to be critical on the theoretical level and not producing to many empirical accounts of children's everyday lives, as childhood studies have been criticised for (Tisdall & Punch, 2012).

This study focuses on how children understand and discuss their play experiences in educational settings. Play most often occurs in interaction with others, including peers and educators, and is influenced by cultural values and experiences. As Wood (2013) points out, 'play does not take place in a vacuum: everything that children play at, or play with, is influenced by wider social, historical and cultural factors, so that understanding what play is and learning how to play are culturally and contextually situated processes' (p. 8). Therefore, sociological theory was chosen as a foundation for the study, focusing on children's play activities in their preschool settings, their experiences of adult-initiated rules and rules in their play and the role of educators in their play.

How children are viewed within the research process has an effect on how researchers interact with them. For example, Danby and Farrell (2004) work from a paradigm that values children's participation in the research process This perspective is the one underpinning this study.

2.2 The Sociology of Childhood

The theoretical framework chosen for this study is Corsaro's theory of the sociology of childhood. William A. Corsaro is currently Professor Emeritus at the Department of Sociology at Indiana University in Bloomington, USA. He conducted research with children in USA and Italy where he emphasised the interactions of children in preschools and children's peer cultures. His main theoretical orientation is to what he calls *interpretive reproduction,* and he refers to children's participation in the *peer cultures* that they create

by appropriating information from adults (Corsaro, 2015). Children do not only appropriate adult content, they also challenge and circumvent adult rules for the purposes of constructing their own peer culture (Danby & Baker, 1998a). Corsaro (2015) also developed the concepts of primary and secondary adjustment, which refer to authority and rules in peer cultures. In this study, these concepts are used as a lens to understand children's perspectives regarding their activities in their preschool community.

2.2.1 Interpretive reproduction

Interpretive reproduction is a term that refers to children's participation in society, and the cultures that they create by appropriating information from the adult world (Corsaro, 2015). Corsaro uses the concept *interpretive* to describe the creative and innovative aspects of children's participation in society. *Reproduction* captures the idea that children actively contribute to cultural production and change. That is, children are affected by society and cultures and they are also active participants in shaping and creating their society and cultures. Corsaro (2001) has used the concept of interpretive reproduction instead of 'socialisation.' He defines socialisation as a 'process in which children, in interaction with others, produce their own peer cultures and eventually come to reproduce and become members of the adult world' (Corsaro, 2001, p. 24). This view proposes that socialisation is not an individualistic and forward-looking connotation that is related to the idea of preparing and training children for the future. Rather, Corsaro suggests that children themselves are active in the process of socialisation; it is not something that just happens to them. Rather, it is achieved by the everyday, creative activities of children.

Children download, interpret and reproduce the society and culture that surrounds them in order to make it intelligible and manageable (Löfdahl, 2014). Löfdahl (2014) builds on Corsaro's theories and suggests that, in play, children appropriate what adults say and do and recreate it in their own play activities. Power relations are a central feature of children's experiences and they experiment in play with these relations by trying out more or less forbidden actions such as 'being mean'. Also, they experiment with approved roles, such as being obedient. Additionally, Löfdahl points out 'that reproduction and production are key terms for describing how children's peer cultures are initiated and maintained and how their actions and interactions are related to the local context and the common history of the group' (p. 343). That is, children use their experiences and knowledge often learned from adults to create their own preschool society.

Furthermore, Corsaro (2012) argues that, in their play, children do not just imitate adult behaviour. Rather, children elaborate and embellish adult behaviour in order to cope with their own primary concerns around status, power and control. Children have desires to express power in play that they seldom experience in real life situations. They can feel empowered when they take on adult roles and play a person with power authority; for example, the teacher. When playing roles children get an opportunity to consider how people relate to each other and act in social situations. That is, they try on 'future roles' when they believe they will be in control of themselves and others. Corsaro (1992) suggests that play routines shift back and forth from adult to peer culture. Further, it is worth noting that children are not only trying on future roles, as Corsaro suggests, but sometimes they are in the present taking on roles that they are dealing with here and now, such as being the big sister because 'you are a big sister in real life.'

In his studies, Corsaro (1992; 2015) added to the understanding of children's play in peer cultures by developing the term *interpretive reproduction*. He used the term to capture the idea that children have influence on and are also influenced by the preschool community. In this study, the term interpretive reproduction is used in a similar way as Corsaro (1992: 2015) did in his studies. However, in this study the focus is mainly on the children's competences and social agency, thus, having their own opinions, experiences and knowledge.

2.2.2 Children's peer cultures

This study investigates the peer cultures of children aged 3-6 years who spend periods of time together in two preschool settings in Reykjavík, Iceland. In peer cultures children are likely to share norms, attitudes and values that they express in their play and other activities (Corsaro, 1992). Corsaro (1992) defines peer culture 'as a stable set of activities or routines, artifacts, values, and concerns that children produce and share in interaction with peers' (p. 162). Children produce and participate in peer cultures that they shape when interacting with others through their lives and that peer cultures arise and develop as a result of children's attempts to make sense of the adult world (Corsaro, 1992). Similarly, Löfdahl (2014) specifies peers as children who spend time together in preschools on a daily basis and over longer periods of time. Within a peer culture, culture is 'both as the context within which the child develops and the context into which the child develops' (Rogers*,* 2010, p. 153). Peer cultures are contexts for

children, where they change and grow understandings of the community by using their experiences, meanings and actions to contribute to the society, both here and now and also in the future (Löfdahl, 2014). In each preschool the children were seen by the researcher as active participants in shaping and sharing their values, concerns, artefacts and routines. In order to do this, they used the experiences and knowledge they gained from family and home, and their own preschool contexts, to create their own peer culture.

Children starting preschool form relationships with other children, outside their family, who often become important members of their lives. In preschools children create their own peer cultures by using the experience and knowledge they have gained at home to participate in social events with peers (Corsaro, 2001). Preschool settings are usually constructed and regulated by adults, but within these regulations children create their own rules and social order within the setting (Cobb-Moore, Danby & Farrell, 2007). Children's creation of social order is complex and often happens outside the audible of educators (Danby & Baker, 1998b). This study aims to add to the understanding of the complexity of how children work within the structures of adults regulations and, simultaniously, make their own rules.

Language and cultural routines are important aspects of peer cultures. Language provides children with a symbolic system that they use to shape a shared understanding and that enable a sense of belonging to a specific group. Cultural routines are a kind of framework that children use to display and interpret a wide range of socio-cultural knowledge (Löfdahl, 2014; Theobald & Danby, 2017). That is, children use language to display their knowledge about the world, form relationships with friends and build a general peer group identity (Rizzo & Corsaro, 1995). It is in relationships with peers that children's social status determines; the influence they are able to have on others, their position within the group, and the affect they can have on educator's rules (Wood, 2014). Theobald and Danby (2017) suggest children use their cultural knowledge to negotiate teacher and child social orders at play in their interactions and that knowledge is best understood by the members of that local culture.

In children's peer cultures, *social participation* and *protection of interactive* space are two concerns (Rizzo & Corsaro, 1995). *Social participation* means that children seldom play alone but, when they find themselves alone, they repeatedly attempt to gain entry into an ongoing peer activity. *Protection of interactive space* indicates that children who are already involved in an activity resist the access attempts of other children.

In their research, Corsaro and Rizzo (1995) found peer interaction fragile; children could be participating in play one minute, and the next they could be excluded with no or little warning. When children found themselves alone they usually tried to gain access to another activity with peers instead of choosing solitary play. Social participation and protection of interactive space are important concepts in this study because they are used to look closer into children's participation in play in peer cultures. Thus, they provide an analytic approach to explore more deeply how children are included and sometimes excluded from play with peers in preschool settings. Furthermore, the concepts of primary and secondary adjustment, that will be discussed in the next section, are applied to problematise and give a deeper understanding of children's exclusion from play even though rules about inclusion are often clear in preschool settings (Löfdahl, 2010).

2.2.3 Primary adjustment and secondary adjustment

The concepts of primary and secondary adjustment explain how peer culture can emerge (Corsaro, 2015). *Primary adjustment* means that adults have the role of controlling children's behaviour. In this view, children are told what to do, for example, to obey the adult and adjust behaviour accordingly. In this study, the concept of primary adjustment is used as a lens to explore how children adjust to and follow educator authority and rules in their peer culture. *Secondary adjustment*, however, is related to how children seem be under control of adults by adjusting and following their rules, but actually they are undertaking a collective form of resistance. This is seen often in preschools; when children ignore or exclude other children from play even though the rule says that everybody should be included (Löfdahl, 2010). In this study, the concept of secondary adjustment is used to shed light on how children respond to or resist adult authority in their play activities in peer cultures. In the research process, these concepts were helpful in considering my role in the study, my relationship with the children, and my participation in the children's peer cultures

When studying children's play in peer cultures, Löfdahl (2010) adds one more adjustment to Corsaro's theory. She uses the concept *third adjustment* to suggest that children show adjustment in their own peer culture, where they develop strategies for resisting their own rules and norms. The participating children communicated a shared system of social knowledge where certain values and peer positioning were constructed towards other children in the peer group, often in relation to social inclusion and exclusion in the peer activities. The children's

interdependence in the peer group allowed them to change the social structures in the preschool, for example by judging or complimenting art work of peers. Similarly, van Oers (2014) suggests that children can feel excitement when solving tensions between rules and freedom; in play they have an opportunity to explore these tensions.

Children both follow and challenge educators' authority and rules in their preschool settings (Corsaro, 2015). According to Corsaro (2001), the emergence of peer cultures in preschools usually depends on the educator's maintenance of boundary. Children deal with the authority of educators by resisting or challenging their rules to gain control of their lives. Preschools usually have more than one educator in a setting; there may be several authority figures, suggesting that adult power and control may vary across individuals and social situations. This study will look further into how children challenge educators' power and control, that is, how they either resist or challenge their rules in play.

It takes time for children to consider themselves as members of a shared peer culture (Corsaro, 2001). According to Corsaro (2001), children gradually feel a sense of belonging when they repeatedly take part in everyday routines in preschools. Through secondary adjustment they come to see themselves as a part of a group. At this moment, they experience 'how being a member of a group affects both themselves as individuals and how they are to relate to others' (p. 24). Löfdahl (2010) argues that, in preschools, children construct conditions for participation in different activities through their peer culture. When children construct social order in their peer group, social differences matter. Individual difference and the cultural and social knowledge that one brings to a play situation influences how the interactions play out.

3   Status of existing knowledge about children's play

Play has been studied for years from different perspectives and paradigms providing important information about the phenomenon. In the last decades, when children are included in the research process and their voices have been taken into account, they have provided different point of view to understanding play, from their own perspectives. We cannot assume that children's views are the same as adults and therefore we cannot expect that children explain their play activities in the same way as adults (Dockett, 2008). Research that has included children's perspectives on their activities in the preschool has shown that children have strong views on the issue (Rogers & Evans, 2008) and that various aspects need to be in place for children to explaining their activities as play (Einarsdóttir, 2014a; Pramling Samuelsson & Asplund Carlsson, 2008). Adults seem to define children's activities more often as play than the children themselves do (Theobald et al., 2015). In this chapter I discuss how the concept of play has been defined and understood, and how the study presented here contributes to new understandings of children's play and its role in early childhood education.

3.1   The concept of play

The activity of play is a concept that has been known about and studied for a long time. In 1693, John Locke, an English philosopher, suggested that play was an enjoyable activity that children could learn from. Rousseau, a Genevan philosopher, agreed with him in 1762 (Bergen, 2014). Today, we are still seeking to understand children's play. The definition of children's play has often been controversial (Wong, Wang & Cheng, 2011) and there remains no consensus about the definition or activities of play, or even its worth (Dockett, Lillemyr & Perry, 2013). Reifel (2014) points out that play can be defined from different levels of meanings, such as: 'play as a cultural phenomenon, a very broad set of activities, states of mind, and as particular activities that each person has participated in over the course of time (p. 159).' To this day, definitions of children's play remain unclear and need further exploration.

Play is a mode of human activity that can be characterised on the basis of it being an 'activity format'. The activity format refers to three parameters: rules, involvement, and degrees of freedom. These parameters

can be used to distinguish between play and non-play activities (van Oers, 2013, 2014). Building his research on the Cultural-Historical Activity theory, van Oers (2013), defined children's activities as play when they set the rules themselves, are highly involved, and have considerably freedom. When children's activities involved, however, strict tasks and specific rules without freedom are defined as work. Other researchers (e.g., Bergen, 2014; Rogers, 2010) have come to similar findings and suggest that children need to have some control over their activity: what they are doing; where; why; and how. They have defined play as an activity that is spontaneous, child led, and intrinsically motivated.

Some characteristics associated with play seem to have been accepted, almost without questioning. For example, researchers have challenged the notion that play is natural, normal, innocent and fun (Grieshaber & McArdle, 2010). Grieshaber and McArdle suggest that the relations of power that operate in children's play are often neglected or are invisible to the viewer; for example, that children can use their power to marginalise other children from play. Children in a powerful position can be further enabled, and those in less powerful positions and possible already marginalised can be further compromised. For many children, playing with others comes easily to them. For others, entering or maintaining play activities is not so easy and they may need assistance in learning to play (Pramling Samuelsson & Pramling, 2014). According to Grieshaber and McArdle (2010), these long-held beliefs about play can be conflicting and need to be added to the discussion of play.

Play does not always provide the kind of fun often described in early childhood discourse and literature because of conflicts and power relations which are involved in children's interactions with each other and with adults (Danby & Baker, 1998b; Grieshaber & McArdle, 2010). Children's social order influences how they can participate in play activities with peers. The children's social order in their peer group depends on factors such as, their knowledge, gender, age and size (Danby, 1996). Wood (2010) indicates that 'power may be exercised in pro-social or anti-social ways, such as including or excluding peers on the basis of perceived differences' (p. 16). She claims that educators need to be aware of issues of power and control between children, and among children and adults. Some children's use of power and control could be exercised and others marginalised. In this study, the problem of marginalisation in children's peer culture will be investigated and contributes to understandings of how and why children include some children and exclude other children from their play activities, sometimes unnoticed by the educators.

Attempts have been made to define play as 'free'. Wood (2010; 2014) defined play as free and suggests that free play is an open-ended and unpredictable activity that is controlled and directed by the players. Additionally, she argues that, through free play children learn, for example, to make decisions, exercise agency, expressing their interests and managing materials, self and other. Van Oers (2014), on the other hand, suggests that it is better to talk about 'degrees' of freedom because play can never be completely free. The limitations of freedom in children's play depend upon the rules that regulate the play. Part of the excitement of play for children is to the possibility of solving or exploiting tensions between rules and freedom and exploration of their actions in their own ways within the limits of their activities.

Play, in preschools, is always influenced by the culture, rules and practices in the preschools (Wood, 2014). These aspects reflect the pedagogical beliefs of the educators, the materials, spatial resources, and time available for freely chosen play. Educator beliefs and understanding of pedagogy affect how the environment is organised and which strategies are used to support the process of teaching and learning (Rogers, 2010). Wood (2014) suggests that it is usually the educator's role to decide which choices are available and what degrees of freedom are allowed; that is, defining what rules and boundaries need to be placed on free play and free choice. Children's play can, for example, disturb social conventions, rules, manners and routines and therefore make it difficult for educators to control and regulate.

A key feature of children's play is that it often involves make-believe play (Bodrova, 2008; Bodrova & Leong, 2015). Bodrova (2008) builds her studies of children's play on Vygotskyan theory and suggests that children are playing when they take on and act out roles, create an imaginary situation, and follow rules relavant for the play and the role (Bodrova & Leong, 2015). van Oers (2014) describes the imaginary situation in children's play as stimulated through play: 'What a child sees in the situation depends on his or her personal relationship with this situation, his or her background knowledge about the situation, and the help the child gets from others in interpreting the meaning of the situation' (p. 61). Social pretend play lays the foundation for crucial life skills such as problem solving, creativity, empathy and innovation (Rogers, 2011). For children, play is primarily about connecting with others, forming relationships with peers and exploring multiple identities through pretend roles.

Building on previous research on play and my experiences as a preschool teacher, I proposed play as an activity in which children have control, set the rules and have some degree of freedom. Play is an activity that connects children's prior experience and knowledge to their imagination; children experience and learn from their environment and use their imagination to form their activities. Definitions of play, however, arise mostly from adult perspectives with little understanding of how children might explain their activities in preschools. It is important, therefore, to explore research where children's perspectives on their play activities have been taken into consideration.

3.2   Play from children's point of view

Children's play and learning have inseparable dimensions in preschool practice. That is, children learn through play, and both play and learning include dimensions such as control, creativity and creation of meaning (Pramling Samuelsson and Johansson, 2006). In research where children's perspectives are taken into account, children have been found to distinguish between play and learning (Einarsdóttir, 2014a). Einarsdóttir (2014a) reviewed literature of children's perspectives on play in preschools. One of her findings was that children saw themselves as playing when they were in control of their activities. When the activity was controlled by adults and when specific outcomes were expected by the adults, however, children defined it as learning.

In Australia, Breathnach, Danby and O´Gorman (2017) conducted research with children aged five years, in a Preparatory classroom. They asked the children about their perspectives on play and other classroom activities. When defining their activities, the children's responses often drew on an adult-constructed agenda of how the classroom was managed; for example, 'on Mondays we do inside play and on Wednesdays we do work'. The children proposed that they were playing when they engaged in freely chosen activities and when they could assert their agency. They did not draw on the characteristic of the activity, the presence of adults, or the space in which the activity occured. Similarly, Pramling Samuelsson and Asplund Carlsson (2008) point out in their Swedish study that children define their activities as play when they take the initiative in the activity; when the initiative is taken by the educator, children define that activity as learning.

Children have used various concepts to explain the phenomenon of play, including that play is an activity that is self-initiated, intrinsically motivated,

enjoyable, and creative, and often involving social-interaction (Wong et al., 2011). Similarly, children have defined informal, creative and enjoyable activities in which they use their imagination, take roles, and are in control as play (Howard, Jenvey, & Hill, 2006; Einarsdóttir, 2014a).

Children have explained that they are playing when they can quit an activity, when they do not have to finish it and when it does not require a specific result or outcome (Einarsdóttir's, 2014a). Grieshaber and McArdle (2010) reached a similar conclusion and suggest that children usually define activities as non-play or work when it has a certain purpose. From the children's point of view, activities that take place outside the preschool setting are more often defined as play than activities that occur inside the setting. Wong et al. (2011) found that the children in their study saw non-play as learning or working activities which were serious, concentrative, unhappy and sometimes boring. Further, the children described activities with the presence of a teacher as non-play.

Children often connect play to a social activity because they find it is important to have someone to play with (Howard et al., 2006; Einarsdóttir, 2014a). In their research with children, Rogers and Evans (2006) found that friendship was important to the children where one purpose of their play was to be with their friends. The children who took part in the study of Kragh-Müller and Isbell (2011) suggested that the worst thing about the preschool was not having a friend to play with. Children who did not have positive relationships often had a more difficult time in the preschool. Play can be frustrating for children when other children use power to exclude them from the play (Einarsdóttir, 2014a; Grieshaber & McArdle, 2010; Kragh-Müller & Isbell, 2011; Löfdahl & Hägglund, 2006; Rogers & Evans, 2006).

Where children's perspectives are taken into account, children define play as an enjoyable activity (Einarsdóttir, 2014a; Wong et al., 2011), particularly when they have opportunities to have influence on what they are doing in the preschool, including having a choice of where to play, what materials to play with and with whom to play (Kragh-Müller & Isbell, 2011; Rogers & Evans, 2006). Children therefore need to have a choice of different materials, places and playmates to define play as fun. The children who took part in Hreinsdóttir's (2008) study shared some common views of what is fun about play and what is not. Their view was that they liked to be able to move around and have some freedom.

Play is an important part of children's lives and young children learn through play (Corsaro, 1985; Grieshaber & McArdle, 2010; Löfdahl, 2010).

However, the concept of play has been difficult to define and definitions often varies with regard to theoretical perspectives (Theobald & Danby, 2014). To gain a better awareness of play, children's voices must be included, if we are to understand play from a child's world.

This study will add to the understanding of children's play where the children themselves explain their activities in the preschool context. Built upon the perspective that children's play and learning in preschools is socially constructed by the children and adults (Corsaro, 2015), this study takes the study into the educational arena. As van Oers (2013) suggests, educators' participation in children's play activities are cultural decisions that depend on the pedagogical aims they want to achieve. Educators, when organising and managing children's activities, work to pedagogic agendas that it is important to listen to children's ideas and notice their interests and feelings (Kragh-Müller & Isbell, 2011; Rogers & Evans, 2006). This study will explore the educator's role in children's play because the decisions they make influence everyday children's activities and participation.

3.3   The role of educators in children's play

Educators' roles are important in children's play in early childhood settings. There are various ways to support children's participation and learning through play. The educator's role is to support children's play, provide challenges, motivate children to keep the play going and help children to understand the environment (Johnson, 2014; Pramling Samuelsson & Asplund Carlsson, 2008). In other words, the educator's role is to observe support and scaffold children's play. According to Johnson (2014), this can be done, for example, when educators: play parallel to encouraged children to play; co-play with the children to provide more structure; and offer hints to advance play plots. Sometimes educators might tutor play by directing play episodes; for example, give children ideas of words to use in play. However, explanations from children about the role and involvement of the educator might give a deeper understanding of when children need support or control by educators.

Children's views on the role of educators in their play indicate that they often connect play with the absence of adults (Wong et al., 2011). The children who took part in Einarsdóttir's (2014b) study observed that the educators seldom participated in their play; usually the educators stood in the background, and observed, supported and helped the children when they needed it. Similarly, Löfdahl (2014) found that children reported that

educators often stood in the background rather than actively engaging with them in their play activities. Even though children connect play to the absence of educators, they also want them to be nearby for assistance (Einarsdóttir, 2012; Kragh-Müller & Isbell, 2011; Löfdahl & Hägglund, 2006). Children do invite educators to participate in their activities when they need help, when someone breaks the rules and when the children want to be acknowledged as competent persons (Pramling Samuelsson & Johansson, 2009). This study can add a deeper understanding of the educator's role in children's play by discussing not only when but also how the children want the educators to take part in their play.

In preschools, children interact with other children, create their own peer cultures and produce their own shared worlds, often without direct dependence on educators. The children gain more autonomy, which leads to other children becoming just as important as educators in the preschool (Corsaro, 1992). Einarsdóttir (2014b) found that, in preschool, children focus more on other children's activities than they do on what the educators are doing. She concluded that peers seemed more important to the children than the educators. Pramling Samuelsson and Johansson (2009) suggest that children solve many conflicts by themselves and try to help each other out instead of contacting the educators. In their research, the children rarely contacted the educators when they were engaged in play.

Educators have different views towards how much they should control children's play. Some educators see value in protecting children from each other by controlling the children's play, but others, believe that they should not interfere in children's play because important socialisation occurs within the play group (Gaskins, 2014). When play is referred to as free, it is often meaning to be free from adult control, interference and over-supervision. However, adults often decide how much time, space and resources are provided and these decisions send messages to children about how they can explore their own ideas and be active and playful (Grieshaber & McArdle, 2010). The amount of control depends, among other things, on educator beliefs, values and the different meanings they attribute to play (Wood, 2014). While educator values and beliefs have influence on children's play, children's perspectives and opinions also need to be taken into account in the discussion of their play activities in educational settings.

When educators decide to intervene or support children in their play, it is important for them to understand the content of their play (Pálmadóttir

& Einarsdóttir, 2015). In their study, Pálmadóttir and Einarsdóttir (2015) found that, if the educators did not observe the children's play before intervening, the educators' reactions were often in contrast with the children's intentions. The educators sometimes showed emotional distance, that is, they pointed out to the children where to play and with what material and did not notice that the children's play had developed where material was used in a different way than it was 'supposed' to; for example, the children used the railway tracks as lollypops. Additionally, they concluded that the educators' emotional closeness to the children's subjective world was critical for their happiness, for example, when they shared their joy of play. Pramling Samuelsson & Johansson (2009) refer to the Nordic traditions and argue that, when the educator has a lot of control in children's activities, the children do not have many opportunities for influencing the direction or content of the play and the amount of playfulness. They noticed that children's playfulness was often ignored by educators and suggested that it did not fit with the educator's wishes.

The boundary between child-initiated and adult directed play is sometimes not clear where the control exerted by educators can be open-ended (Wood E. , 2014). Pramling Samuelsson and Pramling (2014) argue that children both need freedom and support to be creative, active, communicative, imaginative, and participatory in their preschool. They suggest that educator's perspectives on their own roles in children's play are important because they affect children's opportunities to learn through play. Educators who care for children's play can hear their voices and allow their views to shape educator's decisions (Edmiston & Taylor, 2010). They share power more equitably with the children by talking to them and playing with them. When educators listen to children and built their practices on their views, they create respectful spaces where everyone takes part in the preschool activities.

3.4   Relationship between play, peer culture and rules

Play is a cultural phenomenon. According to Wood (2014), 'play in early childhood education and care settings is always influenced by the cultures, rules and practices which reflect the pedagogical beliefs of the practitioners, the material and spatial resources and the time that is available for freely chosen play' (p. 147). That is, how educators think about and discuss play is dependent on their cultural values and these values affect their views of children's play and learning in preschools. In his studies, van Oers (2013; 2014) presented play as a cultural problem, based

on the value-laden decisions of educators regarding what play is, and how, where and when it should be implemented. He suggests that educator views of play influence how much freedom children have, how they can participate, which rules are presented and how they should be followed. Cobb-Moore et al. (2009) have described rules as 'cultural resources to which members orient in order to make sense of their social worlds' (p. 1478). The purpose of making rules is often to guide the member of a culture towards appropriate behaviour.

Play, culture and rule cannot be separated. Wood's (2014) and van Oers' (2013; 2014) studies show that preschool culture, constructed by adults and children, affect the rules that the children should follow and the children's opportunities to participate in play. According to Corsaro (2015), interpretive reproduction is important to consider in terms of the knowledge and experiences that the children bring into their preschool settings. This study, with its focus on how children build and maintain their preschool cultures, is interested to investigate how children explain what play and non-play activities are, how adult-initiated rules influence the activities of the preschools, how children challenge rules in their play in their peer cultures, and the educators' role in their play.

3.5   Contribution of the study and research questions

Play is more often used as a tool to study other topics, such as literacy and numeracy, rather than a focus on the topic of play itself (Cheng & Johnson, 2010). Cheng and Johnson (2010) found that research investigating school-related early childhood topics increased much more than did research about children's play. They wondered if early literacy standards were becoming more important than play in preschools. Studies on play where parents and educator's views have been taken into consideration give important information about children's activities. Research about children's play in preschools, where their own voices are included, is limited (Breathnach et al., 2017). Findings from those studies indicate that play is an informal, creative and often enjoyable activity in which children are in control, take on roles and use their imagination (Einarsdóttir, 2014a; Wong et al., 2011). Children relate play to the absence of educators but, at the same time, children want them to be more involved in their play (Kragh-Müller & Isbell, 2011; Löfdahl & Hägglund, 2006). For that reason, it is important to find out how educators can participate in children's play without intervening too much. In that respect, rules in preschools setting are critical so children and educators can function together (Thornberg,

2009); however, the influence of these rules on children's play activities often have been taken for granted. Children need to be more involved in research about their play activities in preschools so that they can influence and shape the pedagogical practices in settings where they are participants (Einarsdóttir 2014a).

Exploring children's play in educational settings, for an extended period of time, through the lenses of sociological theories and children's perspectives makes possible deeper understandings of the phenomenon of play, the complexity of rules and social interactions in children's play in peer cultures and educator's roles in children's play. The findings from this study provide evidence to how educators can support children's play and learning in preschools where play is proposed as the children's core way of learning according to the Icelandic National Curriculum Guidelines (2011). With few studies conducted in Iceland on children's explanation of play in educational settings, this study will extend the research of children's play, both in Iceland and internationally.

The contribution of this study is for a better understanding of children's play activities in preschools from the children's own point of views. The children explained their activities in their peer cultures, according to if they thought they were playing or not. The children also shared how they experienced adult-initiated rules in their preschool settings and how they challenged these rules in their play activities. Additionally, the study investigates how the children viewed the role of educators in their play activities. The findings of the study are valuable for the research field and for educators working with young children. Corsaro's (2015) concepts of interpretive reproduction, peer cultures, primary- and secondary adjustment, provide a focusing lens to explore the following research questions:

- What characterises activities in preschool that the children consider play and non-play?
- How do the children experience adult-initiated rules in their preschool settings and how do they challenge these rules in their play activities?
- How do the children view the role of the educators in their play activities?

4 Study methodology and methods

The methodology of the study is aligned with the sociology of childhood theoretical approach. This approach informs the study and my view as a researcher (Dockett, Einarsdottir & Perry, 2011). This theoretical approach was chosen because of the perspective that children are capable participants in society with rights to express themselves and that they are experts on their own lives (United Nations, 1989; Einarsdóttir, 2012). Seeing children as competent and active participants in their preschool culture, having rights and being capable of participating in research underpins this theoretical approach. Children influence each other and their peer and family cultures simultaneously as they are influenced by their society (Corsaro, 2015). In this study, I emphasise learning from the children by aiming to understand their activities in their preschool settings and how the children are influenced by the preschool social orders in which they participate. The focus is on children's views on their play activities in preschools, their experiences of adult-initiated rules in these settings and in their play, and the educators' roles in children's play activities.

4.1 Research with children

During the past two decades, the amount of research where children are active participants in the studies has increased. Prior to these studies, it was more usual to conduct research on children by researchers who observed and tested the children's development and competencies (Einarsdóttir, 2012; Mayall, 2000). The development towards engaging children more in research in recent years has been influenced by *The Convention on the Rights of the Child* (United Nations, 1989), views of children as competent and active participants in their preschool society (Corsaro, 2015; Einarsdóttir, 2008) and changing paradigms of the study of childhood as embodied in the sociology of childhood (Corsaro, 2015). These aspects are further discussed below.

The United Nations *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (1989) has influenced world views on listening to children's opinions and views (Einarsdóttir, 2012). This Convention marked a turning point in the fight for children's rights and the acceptance of children as active citizens needing care and protection. The Convention was signed in Iceland in 1990, and became a part of the Icelandic law in 2013.

The Convention reflected a new view on the role and status of children in society. It includes 54 articles of children's rights. It applies to all children, regardless of where they are from, the language they speak, and whether they have a disability or not (article 2). While the Convention does not mention research involving children as collaborators as a human right, however it is law in Iceland and therefore this study builds on the Convention with special emphasis on article 3, 12, 13 and 31. According to article 3, the children's best interests must always be the primary concern when making decisions that may affect them in any way. Article 12 suggest that children's opinions needs to be taken into account when making decisions that can affect them, that is, children should be involved in making decisions and being listened to. Article 13 discusses children's freedom of expression. Children have a right to share information in different ways of their own choice, such as, by talking, drawing, or writing. In addition, article 31 underlines the importance of play, the main content of this study, by indicating that children have the right to engage in play (United Nations, 1989).

Consulting with children offers opportunities for children to provide important information from their perspective, information that adults might not have thought to provide. Children's perspectives are multi-voiced (Tertoolen, et al., 2017); that is, children do not speak from a unified position. Rather, children bring a diversity of perspectives that have been infomed through diverse experiences, including through their cultures, physical and geographic locations, and socio-economic status. Further, they do not have the same experiences and perspectives as adults. Children's voices can help adults learn about children and childhood (Dockett, 2008; Gallacher & Gallagher, 2008). Thus, it is important for researchers to emphasis listening to all children because there is always a risk that some children's voices are favoured more than others (Warming, 2011). According to Harcourt (2011), it is not a matter of which voice is more important; it is about making different voices equal when the researcher listens to children and uses her researcher power to make visible their different voices.

Children can be empowered when participating in research and having an opportunity to have some influence on the data collection, analysis, and the interpretation (Theobald, 2012). However, the researcher also needs to be aware that research with children can also exacerbate power inequalities between children and adults (Horgan, 2017). Researchers often chose to take a 'least adult' role when researching with children to make power relations more equal and to gain access to areas of their world which

would not be possible otherwise (Warming, 2011). However, that role can be confusing for children because the researcher's role is unlike that of other adults in the setting; for example, the researcher does not have the same responsibilities for children as other adults do, such as parents and educators.

Childhood studies and views of children as competent and active participants in society are another reason for increased interest in listening to children's voices. However, children can be vulnerable and might need protection and guidance (Corsaro, 2015; Einarsdóttir, 2008), and researchers have an ehtical responsibility to ensure the wellbeing of children during the research process. Researchers deal with many challenges when conducting research with children, for example there is a tension between adults regulating children and giving voice to children's protective rights (Danby & Farrell, 2004). According to Danby, Ewing and Thorpe (2011) it is important to be aware of these challenges by preparing the study well, building a familiar context for children and researcher and assume that the study plan can change and lead to different ways from what was expected.

4.2 Multiple-case study inspired by ethnographic approaches

This is a multiple-case study informed by ethnographic approaches. A case study involves a detailed study of a case or cases that can be bound in some way, such as an investigation of a single case such as a classroom or an investigation of a phenomenon, such as play. An ethnographic study emphasises understanding about a culture where the researcher becomes a member and participates in the cultural activities of the community (Lichtman, 2010). A multiple-case study drawing on an ethnographic approach was used in this study investigating the phenomenon of play in two preschool settings. Having more than one case may bring additional information about the phenomenon of study than one case alone (Lichtman, 2010). A combination of these approaches were used to study the phenomena of play in children's peer culture because of the importance for the researcher to learn about and understand the culture of the settings and create a trusting relationship with the participants.

Case studies are often explanatory in that they focus on contemporary events using 'how' and 'why' questions. 'What' questions also are used in case studies and they usually are exploratory and aim to develop propositions for further inquiry (Yin, 2014). In this study the first research question is a 'what' question: What characterises activities in preschool that

the children consider play and non-play? The findings of this research question were foundational for addressing the second and third research questions. The second question is two folded: How do the children experience adult-initiated rules in their preschool settings and how do they challenge these rules in their play activities? The third question is: How do the children view the role of the educators in their play activities.

Ethnographic approaches are valuable when seeking the views of others (Lichtman, 2010). Ethnographic methods are based on long term field-work in particular settings and build on the idea that field-work, for an extended period, offers opportunities to understand the activity of culture in a particular setting. The researcher becomes a member of the cultural experiences involving the participants and their social events (Silverman, 2013). Mukherji and Albon (2010) suggest that a researcher, who uses ethnographic approaches, aims to become a member of the environment and create a trusting relationship with participants. However, as Danby (1997) points out, the researcher always influences the environment of study, that is, the researcher is a part of the environment and can never be discounted from it.

In multiple-case studies and ethnographic studies, the researcher uses multiple methods when constructing data (Delamont, 2008; Lichtman, 2010). The researcher investigates the activities being studied from different points of view by combining multiple sources of data, such as interviews, observations and relevant documents (Ary, Jacobs & Sorensen, 2010). Walford (2008) compares ethnographic methods with how children use diverse approaches to learn and understand the world; for example, they listen, watch, ask and try things out using all their senses. In other words, they are ethnographers of their own lives. Dockett, Einarsdóttir and Perry (2011) suggest that when doing research with children it is important to use a wide range of methods because children communicate in different ways. Methods that have been most commonly used when doing research with children are: observations, interviews and children's drawings. According to Sørensen (2014), video-recordings are increasingly used as a research method in educational settings (e.g. Danby, 2017; Pálmadóttir & Einarsdóttir, 2016; Theobald, 2012).

The methods used in this study were video-stimulated accounts, which involved video-recordings of the children's everyday activities, and video-recorded interviews with the children, and field-notes. Video-stimulated accounts involve a sequence of research: First, children's activities are video-recorded and second, the children watch the video-recorded

activities and explain what they observe happening in the recordings. The discussions with the children about their activities are also video-recorded (Theobald, 2012; 2017a). Video-stimulated accounts were chosen because the recordings could capture children's activities, the children could watch the recordings and explain their activities, and interpret the actions of other children and educators. The field-notes were selected to capture important aspects that the video-camera and conversations could not e.g. details about the organisation and resources of the setting. The combination of these methods and the research process deepened my understanding of how the children experienced their activities in their peer cultures.

Ethnographic approaches often have been used in research with children. It can be challenging, however, because of power relationships and adult conception of children's activities and abilities (Corsaro, 1985). Corsaro (1985) suggests that it is important that the researcher enters the children's culture both as an observer and participant with the purpose of being freed from an adult conception of the world. One way to overcome an adult stance is for the researcher to become a participant in the children's activities, and in that way gain insight into what matters to children in their everyday interactions in their peer culture. To gain insight into children's perception, Corsaro tried to reduce his power by never attempting to initiate children's activities, repair disrupted activities, settle disputes or direct children's activities. Rather, he tried to become a member of the children's activities without controlling or affecting the flow of their play episodes.

In the participating preschools, the children were used to having preschool teachers and parents present but not researchers. It was important, therefore, to explain my role to the children, and the children were also curious and asked questions about me. I emphasised that, as a student, I was curious about the children's activities and wanting to learn from them. Every time I entered the preschool settings, I had my school bag with me, which was symbolic for being a student who was there to learn. I could only access the children´s peer culture as an adult, not as a child. Therefore, I emphasised that I wanted to participate in the children's activities on their own terms. For example, I was either invited by the children to take part in one of their play activities, or I asked the children if I could be involved in their play activities. The children usually decided what role I could play. My role was different from other adult roles in the setting, and the children sometimes speculated what my role was. This is similar to what Danby (1997) observed in her studies. Once when I entered one of the preschool settings, a boy who was playing outside called: 'There comes the

scientist.' The children also asked questions such as: Who are you? Are you a mom? Are you a teacher? Are you a big child?

In the present study, I acted in a similar way as Corsaro did in his study (1985). I emphasised minimising my authority by participating in the children's different activities on their terms. I showed interest in the children's activities, had discussions with them about their interests and answered the children's questions about me. I learned the rules of the setting from the children and often I sought their advice about what to do and when. I never directed the children on what they could or could not do. My role was to be a student that was learning from the children, and with the children, in their peer culture. By behaving in this way, I hypothesed that it was more likely that the children understood that the purpose of my presence was to learn from them, and not the other way around.

At the beginning of the research field work, I recognised the children's interest of showing me their preschool environment and explaining to me how things worked there. The children's interests in teaching me about their preschool environment and activities continued throughout the research process and was evident when they explained to me their perspectives on play and non-play activities, their rules in their preschool setting and in their play, and the educator's role in their play.

4.3 Participants and context

This study was conducted with children who were aged 3-6 years, in two preschools in Reykjavík, Iceland. One criterion for choosing these preschools was that the settings included at least one certified preschool teacher on the staff because they were seen as having theoretical knowledge of children's play. Being a certified preschool teacher meant that the staff had a Bachelor degree in early childhood education, although, today the staff needs to have a Master degree in early childhood education to be a certified preschool teacher. A second criterion was that the preschool setting had to emphasise children's learning through play, as reported in the Icelandic National Curriculum Guidelines for Preschools (Ministry of Education, Science, and Culture, 2011). In Iceland, 30% of the staff in preschools are certified and the preschools should work according to a play-based curriculum, therefore, it was not difficult to meet the criteria for identifying the preschools. I browsed through the preschools websites and sent emails to the two schools after gaining access from gatekeepers (see chapter 5.1 about ethical issues and challenges of the study).

On identifying the participating preschools, I spent approximately four to five months in each preschool setting, usually three days a week, four to five hours each visit: Preschool setting 1 (Ravenswood): January 2015 - June 2015, Preschool Setting 2 (Butterfly): September 2015 - January 2016.

In Preschool 1, Ravenswood, 18 of 20 children and four educators participated. The preschool setting had one certified preschool teacher on the staff. When I entered the setting, I spent the entire day there with the purpose of getting to know the children and their educators, observe the culture of the setting and the day schedule and how it is operated. In total I spent approximately one month in this observational role. After observing the day schedule and the children's activities, I decided to further observe and record in the mornings when the children had time for freely chosen activities. Every morning after the children had eaten breakfast, they had approximately one hour for play and freely chosen activities. The children could select a range of different materials, places and peers for their play activities. These were the activities that became the focus for this study.

The Ravenswood setting was divided into two rooms. One room had two large tables, a sofa, a corner with a carpet and some shelves with play materials, such as puzzles and board games. The other room was smaller and had a large table and some shelves with play material, such as dolls and Lego. The shelves were in reach of the children who had access to most of the material; however, they needed permission from the educators to use some of the material. The children called it 'fancy toys' (i. spari dót). The children's freely chosen activities often took place sitting at tables because there was not a lot of available space on the floor. Activities often observed in the setting involved puzzles, drawing, building with Lego, and playing board games. Sometimes the children, often four at a time, had access to hollow blocks in a different room in the preschool that they shared with children from other settings.

In Preschool 2, the Butterfly preschool, 28 of 32 children and five educators participated. The preschool setting had two certified preschool teachers on the staff. When the I entered the setting, I spent time in getting to know the children and the educators, and learned about the day schedule and the culture of the setting. The children in Butterfly preschool had more time than the children in Ravenswood preschools for freely chosen activities and play. In the morning, after circle time and group activities, there were often two to three hours remaining for freely chosen activities. I selected these play activities as I wanted to learn more about,

and gain a better understanding, of how the children participated in their freely chosen play activities.

The Butterfly preschool was spacious and divided into four rooms, two big rooms and two small rooms. One of the smaller rooms had one table with chairs around and was usually used for arts, painting and drawing. The other room was used for play activities but sometimes it was closed and used for children that needed special education. The two bigger rooms had shelves with blocks and boxes with different materials that the children could access, and similar to the Ravenswood preschool, the children needed special permission to use some of the material, such as dolls. There were no tables in the bigger rooms and, therefore, the children's activities took place on the floor. In this setting, the children's choice of activities often involved unit blocks, hollow blocks, clothing/dressing, household equipment, plastic animals and drawing.

In both settings, when the children had time for freely chosen activities, the educators were close by and observed the children, but they usually did not take an active part in the children's activities. I only focused on the activities that took place inside the preschool building because the outside playground area included children who were not participants in the study. Most of the children who participated in the study had attended preschool since the age of two and were there for seven to nine hours each weekday. Therefore, the children were quite familiar with each other, the educators, and the setting.

4.4 Methods

Research with children requires the use of methods that build on trust and understanding between the researcher and the children, as well as recognise the children's competences (Groundwater-Smith, Dockett & Bottrell, 2015). The methods used in this study were chosen with regard to the children's age and their experiences. The social and cultural context of the setting was also taken into account (Christensen & Prout, 2002) through a process where I visited the preschools settings for a period of time before the formal data collection began. The purpose of the visits was to get to know the children, educators, and the culture of the settings as well as to gain trust from the participants as they became more used to having me around. In addition, these field visits provided opportunities to understand my role as a researcher, one of taking on a 'least adult role' (Warming, 2011, p. 42–43). Also, the children had opportunities to satisfy their curiosity about the technology and having it around. They had

opportunities to look, touch and trying it out, as undertaken by Sørensen (2014). I wrote field notes about my observations and reflections when visiting the preschool settings. These notes were useful to consider as I reviewed the research process. This note writing also allowed the children and educators to become familiar with data collection procedures. After a month of observation, data collection began.

My role as a researcher was similar to the role that Corsaro (1985) undertook, when he undertook research with Italian children. In this study, he minimised his authority and participated in their activities on their own terms. Also, he video-recorded the children's activities. One major difference between Corsaro's approach and mine was that my study added an additional method. As I was interested in the children's own explanations of their activities, I added video-stimulated conversations to the research process.

4.4.1 Video stimulated accounts

A video-stimulated account is an approach that emphasizes children as active participants in the research process when they watch and talk about their activities and interactions. They are provided an opportunity to reflect and interpret their thoughts, feelings, reactions, and concerns about the topic under discussion. This approach supports the researcher to gain a better understanding of the children's social worlds and recognises children as competent and reliable informants about their lives (Mason & Danby, 2011; Theobald, 2012, 2017a). The children provide information about their interactions and explain their activities in preschools. Video-stimulated accounts involve, first, the researcher making a *video-recording* of a specific event involving the children in the setting. Next, the participants who are involved in the recording watch extracts from the video, and they have a *conversation* about their participation in that event (Theobald, 2008). This conversation with the children is also video-recorded and these recordings were used for further analysis.

4.4.2 Video-recordings

Video recordings have been used in research in early childhood settings since technology made it possible (Danby, 1997). Video-recordings are a complex method for collecting data, as they are able to capture children's activities and their interactions between children, children and educators, and between children and materials. Additionally, they can capture children's feelings such as joy and sadness (Fleer, 2014; Li, 2014). The video-recorder can capture moments that otherwise might be overlooked by the

researcher (Pennay, 2014). Video-recordings allow the researcher to watch activities again and again (Silverman, 2013) and to discuss together. Pálmadóttir and Einarsdóttir (2016) suggest that video-recordings can offer important insights into children's life-worlds in preschool, leading to better and deeper understandings of children's activities in their preschool settings.

It can be difficult to grasp what is going on in children's activities, such as play, because of the complexity and speed of the activity. A video-recorder is an appropriate tool to capture that complexity (Corsaro, 2015). Nonetheless, it can only capture the range permitted by the camera lens, which is much more limited than the human eye (Li, 2014). Li (2014) argues that it is important for the researcher to be conscious of the limitations of the video-recorded data. The researcher must keep in mind the research questions to be answered to determine the focus, and where, and at whom, to point the camera. One strategy is to set the camera in one place (perhaps on a tripod), and to record for a certain period of time. Another strategy is to focus video recorded observations on one focus child for a period of time. Both strategies were used in this study. A camera/mobile phone was used to record the children's activities. The focus was on children's diverse activities, using different materials, and their interactions with other children and educators. Table 1 shows the number and length of the children's recorded activities and the time range of recorded activities.

Table 1. Number and length of recorded activities

Preschool	Number of activity recordings	Total length of activity recordings	Range of recorded activities
Ravenswood	16	2 hours 12 min	2 min 18 sec – 17 min 7 sec
Butterfly	20	5 hours 23 min	4 min 58 sec - 33 min 10 sec

The recordings of the children's activities were used to stimulate the children's conversations, that is, with the purpose of giving the children opportunities to explain how they interpreted their activities in the preschool, how they experienced rules in and around play, and how they viewed the role of educators in their play. Before discussing the recordings with the children, I watched them and prepared conversations with the children. The preparation was in the manner of writing down ideas about questions that I might ask.

4.4.3 Interviewing children

The purpose of interviewing children in research is often to understand their experiences and feelings. When adults interview children, informal rather than formal approaches are recommended. The interview should be more like a conversation (Silverman 2013). The reason for recommending informality in interviews with children is that an imbalance of power relations may occur. According to Groundwater-Smith et al. (2015), power is relational and often complicated. Power can be explained as a form of action that is exercised by all participants in multiple ways, such as, in form of resistance, disobedience and subversion.

The video-stimulated experience should be one where children engage purposefully with the researcher and feel free to express their own experiences, views, and ideas (Folque, 2010). Cameron (2015) suggests that the researcher needs to offer children opportunities to bring their viewpoint and opinions, which can be done by interviewing them, but emphasis must be on children's comfort and safety. Asking open-ended questions to which the researcher does not know the answers is recommended. A question has a right or wrong answer might increase the power imbalance between the adult and children, and they could become uncomfortable. As Folque (2010) suggests, the children might answer questions in a way they think adults want to hear. Therefore, creating a trusting relationship with the children with the intention of learning from their knowledge and experiences is at the core of this approach.

Children can have creative imaginations, so the researcher has to be able to distinguish between children's real experiences and what they might be imagining, without underestimating what they have to say (Einarsdóttir, 2007). Birbeck and Drummond (2015) discuss the concern that children might lie when interviewing them and suggest the reason could be because of some discussions about sensitive subjects that could cause shame or fear. The children might say what they think the researcher wants to hear or seek to make an impression. These are important reasons for why interviewing children: should be more like a conversation; take place in a nurturing environment where the child feels safe; and allow the researcher to get to know the children and build a trusting relationship before interviewing them.

Children can be involved in the research conversations individually or in groups. Children in early years settings are used to being in groups and they create knowledge and form their opinions through communication or interaction with other children. In groups, children have opportunities to

discuss questions, help each other out answering them and remind each other on details. Children can feel more powerful and relaxed in groups with their friends instead of being alone with an adult (Einarsdóttir, 2007). According to Groundwater-Smith et al. (2015) how interviews are conducted depends, among other, on the preferences of the participants and the topic being explored.

In this study the interviews with the children were undertaken informally, that is, more like a conversation. The children who were observed in the video-recordings were invited to watch them on a laptop and talk about their activities. The conversations with the children took place later the same week that the recordings were made. The children watched themselves and the other children and were asked about what they saw. They had opportunities to explain what they were doing and to interpret what the other children and educators were doing. The children were asked open ended questions to encourage deeper conversations.

The children's conversations about their activities took place in their preschool settings where they were familiar with the environment and in small groups, with one exception. In one instance, a child was captured alone in a video-recording and she chose to have an individual conversation with me. That conversation took place in an open space where educators and other children were near.

The length of the conversations with the children varied from 10 minutes to 35 minutes per interview. The conversations were video-recorded and transcribed for further analysis. Table 2 shows the number and length of the recorded conversations with the children, and the time range of the recorded conversations.

Table 2. Number and length of recorded conversations

Preschool	Number of recorded conversations	Total length of recorded conversations	Range of recorded conversations
Ravenswood	13	2 hours 16 min	4 min 40 sec - 18 min 57 sec
Butterfly	16	4 hours 56 min	6 min 28 sec - 33 min 10 sec

Between each centre, there was variation in both the number and length of the recordings of the children's activities, and the conversations with the children (see Table 1 and Table 2). As there were more children at the Butterfly centre, there were more recordings taken at that centre. Further, those conversations that took place when children were at tables were of a shorter length than those that took place on the floor where children had the opportunity to move around.

All the children who wanted to participate in the study were video-recorded and invited to have a conversation about their recorded activity. All recorded activities were used to support children's conversations and I did not stop data gathering until I found I had answers to the research questions, and when I considered that the children were beginning to share the same information. For example, in the first setting, a girl said to me: 'You are always asking the same questions'. This convinced me that, from the children's viewpoint also, the conversational topics had been saturated.

4.4.4 Field-notes

Field-notes produce written information about what the researcher considers relevant to the research; for example, records of observations and conversations from the field (O´Reilly, 2012; Silverman, 2013). Similar to video-recordings and interviews, field-notes become another form of important data as the video-recorder can only capture a limited amount of data at any one time (Li, 2014), and the researcher is not recording all the time while in the field. It is not possible to write everything down and this means that the researcher must be selective about what to write about in terms of what she sees, hears and notices (Lichtman, 2010: O'Reilly, 2012).

Field notes support the researcher's memory of events, and detailed notes provide background information about who said what and when (Lichtman, 2010; O'Reilly, 2012). Detailed field notes can increase the trustworthiness of the study (Mukjerji & Albon, 2010). O'Reilly (2012) points out that the researcher must be careful not to write field notes constantly as the participants do not want to be reminded constantly that they are being researched. Additionally, participants could be cautious when seeing the researcher writing notes. Thus, in this study, I was aware of taking a careful approach in that I wrote only some of my field notes in the preschool settings, and wrote the remainder of my field notes immediately following my preschool visit, or when something important came up between visits to the preschools.

Field notes were written on a regular basis during the research process. During the first month in each preschool, the field-notes helped me to reflect on the children's and educator's interactions and, no less importantly, my interactions with the children. The field-notes were useful in reviewing and reflecting on the research process.

4.5   Analysis of the data

In ethnographic research, the phases of data collection and analysis are interlinked (O'Reilly, 2012). O'Reilly (2012) points out that it is difficult to talk about an analysis phase because analysis is so tangled up with every stage of the research process. She points out that the process is spiral in that the idea is to move 'forward from idea to theory to design to data collection to findings, analysis and back to theory, but each step forward may involve one or two steps back' (p. 181). The analysis of the data began as soon as the data process began, and analysis continued throughout the entire research process. The data from both preschools were analysed using thematic analyses.

Even though the data collection and data analysis phases were interlinked, and I reflected on the data throughout the research process, there was also a formal analysis phase, as O´Reilly (2012) points out. The formal analysis phase involved transcribing the recorded conversations with the children, familiarising myself with the written data, coding the dataset and identifying themes and patterns that could answer the research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006). According to Braun and Clarke (2013), qualitative analysis is interpretative, that is, it aims to go further than descriptive analysis. The researcher strives to gain a deeper understanding of the data by identifying what is going on and tries to make sense of the conversations. In this study, thematic analysis was used to make sense of the data in order to answer the research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006; 2013). The aim was to deepen my understanding of the children's activities in their peer culture, for example, which activities they explained as play.

 I transcribed the conversations with the children, word for word, and physical expressions were registered as well, such as when children nodded instead of saying yes or showed some kind of feeling like sadness. I transcribed the conversations myself and did that soon after each conversation. In that way I could familiarise myself with the data during the transcription process and learn from each conversation. As Braun and Clarke (2013) point out, the aim of familiarisation of the dataset is to read it

critically, notice things of relevance and interest and start to think about what the data mean.

After transcribing and familiarising myself with the conversations with the children I started coding the dataset. The coding process involves the researcher undertaking a process where aspects of the data are identified and related back to the questions of study (Braun & Clarke, 2013). According to Braun and Clarke (2013), there are two main approaches to coding. First, selective coding means that the researcher gathers a collection of a certain type of data. Second, complete coding aims to identify anything within the entire dataset that is interesting or can answer the research questions. The coding in this analysis process was complete, that is, I identified words or brief phrases that captured the usefulness of particular bit of data. When I coded the data constructed in Ravenswood preschool, I found that that the children seldom explained their activities as play in the setting. Examples of codes that were identified were: play as pretending, play as having a role, play as choices, play as an activity that needed preparation. Non-play activities included building, drawing and painting. The second preschool, the Butterfly centre, was chosen as a counterpoint to the data and practices at Ravenswood. In the Butterfly centre, the children´s explanations of their activities and the role of educators focused much more on children's pretend play.

Codes that are identified in datasets can be either data-derived or researcher-derived. Data-derived codes provide a summary of the content of the data. Researcher-derived codes refer to when the researcher´s theoretical framework is used to identify the meanings of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2013). In this study, two research questions, answered in article one and three, were formed beforehand and did not change during the research process. The codes that could address these questions were identified; that is, the coding was data-derived. However, the research questions that were answered in the second article were created during the analysis process. The codes were identified through the theoretical lenses, that is, the concepts of primary adjustment and secondary adjustment led to the identification of codes and these shaped the research questions of that article.

When the coding was completed, I conducted deeper analysis by capturing themes and patterns; the unique or narrow codes were combined and used to create broader themes and patterns (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Braun and Clarke (2013) point out that the researcher needs to review the codes and look for topics or issues to which several codes relate. Themes

and patterns were identified and categorised into sections in each of the three articles that were published from the study. The extracts were analysed to explicate particular analytic points within the conversations with the children. In collaboration with the co-authors of the three articles, themes and extracts were analysed and interpreted in relation to the sociology of childhood theoretical framework and concepts. The sections in each article aimed to address the research questions.

4.6   Trustworthiness of the research

Trustworthiness in qualitative research refers to how believable the findings are for the reader. The concept of trustworthiness includes understanding how the researcher establishes confidence in the findings based on the research design, participants and context (Ary et al., 2010). According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), trustworthiness refers to the quality of the findings. They use four terms to consider criteria about the trustworthiness of social studies, that is; *credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability.* Credibility is about ensuring that the researcher has used good practice and presented the findings to the participants of the social world. Transferability means that the researcher produces sufficient detailed description of the research and discusses possible knowledge transfer of the findings to other contexts. Dependability is concerned with the assurance that the entire research process is documented in detail. Finally, the trustworthiness of the study can be built of there is a community of researchers who can read, analyse and interpret the data set that provides sufficient data for some commonality in terms of supporting the analytic conclusions. Confirmability means that the researcher has dealt honestly with the research topic, being aware of how personal values can control the construction of the research and the interpretation of the findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

To increase the trustworthiness of the research, the research process should be explained in detail to the reader; both the way data were constructed and how they were analysed (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; O´Reilly, 2012; Siraj-Blatchford, 2010). The reader should be able to follow the researcher's footsteps and assess arguments in every step of the research process. Silverman (2013) argues that the aim of ethnographic research is not to generalise from the findings but to try to understand the activities of the participants and/or their culture. However, a detailed description offers readers the opportunity to make judgments about the analysis and findings, and consider these in light of their own contexts, and that approach

possibly can be transferable in terms of the types of research questions asked and explored (Ary et al., 2010; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

In the study discussed here, the findings were presented to the participating children, the educators and their parents. All had opportunities to make comments about the findings. Even though the analysis and choices of extracts were mainly undertaken by me, the interpretations of the extracts were considered with co-authors of the three articles that were published. Thus, the aim of this study was not to search for an absolute truth (Lincoln and Guba, 1985); however, it was to deepen understanding of the children's play activities in their preschool settings by learning from them and their cultures.

5 Ethical issues and challenges of the study

Ethical issues were considered in every level of the research process, including the preparation of the research, collection of data, analysing the data and the interpretation of the data. This chapter focuses on how informed consent was gained from gatekeepers and how the children were informed about the study and gave their informed assent. The section also discusses the different ethical challenges that I faced in the research process; for example, how the children reported their assent or dissent in various ways and how they sometimes learned about the technology on the way.

5.1 Informed consent and assent

When doing research with children, access to the preschool settings may be difficult. The researcher seeks informed consent from the adults before gaining informed assent from the children (Dockett, Einarsdóttir & Perry, 2011; Einarsdóttir, 2012; Gallacher & Gallegher, 2008; Mukherji & Albon, 2010). Cameron (2015) explains the difference between informed consent and assent. Informed consent means that the parents or gatekeepers provide permission for a child to participate in research. Informed assent means that the child agrees to be involved in research. Einarsdóttir (2012) argues that informed consent/assent means that the participants are knowledgeable about the research and agree to take part in the study with an understanding about possible risks that may arise from the participation. Danby (2017) suggests that children's participation in research is an ongoing enterprise. For example, they may choose not to be video-recorded at particular times.

This study was reported to the Icelandic Data protection authorities. No comments were made on their behalf (see attachment A). Then the municipality, where the research was conducted in was contacted to gain access to two preschools which were then approved for the research (see attachment B). The head teachers of the two preschools were asked for approval by phone calls and emails, after they had been provided with detailed information about the research. The head teachers were asked to pass to the children's parents' written information about the study, and I visited the setting to provide more information, answer questions and seek

the parents' informed consent (see attachment C). I met the educators and sought their informed consent (see attachment D). All parents gave their consent and the educators also agreed to participate in the study.

After gaining consent from the children's parents, I visited the centres with the specific purpose to meet and get to know the children. At first, when entering the Ravenswood setting, I walked around, observed the children and sat on a sofa that was placed in the middle of one of the rooms. Some children were curious about me and asked why I was in their setting, discussing these matters with me on my first day. Other children took more time to interact with me. After a few days, I went to communicate with the children with whom I had not interacted. I showed interest in what they were doing, for example, by asking them about their activities. When the children became more familiar with my presence and felt comfortable having me around, I told them that I was a researcher and informed them about the study.

The children were informed about the research in a child-friendly way so that they would know what was expected of them. At first, I asked the children what they thought research was and I documented how they explained it. The children, for example, indicated that scientists do research, experiment and know many things. The children also suggested that research was about looking very closely into something and that you could use a magnifier. They argued that research was about finding out things, searching, describing and tell stories. Following the completion of the study, I shared my understandings to the children about their experiences and their explanations.

I told the children that I was a scientist and a student who was very curious about the children's activities in the preschool and that I wanted to look closely into what they were doing. Instead of using a magnifier to find out, I would use a video-recorder; they could watch the video recordings and describe what they were doing in the recordings. The expectations of the children were explained in a way that they would be asked if their activities in the preschool setting could be recorded and then they would be invited to watch it with me and have a discussion about the recordings. At the end of the research I would provide to the children a short summary of their findings. In addition, I emphasised that the children had the right to choose whether they wanted to participate or not. The children who decided to participate in the study gave their written informed assent (see attachment E). This process of informing the children about the study was repeated in a similar way in both preschools.

The children's informed assent was ongoingly sought throughout the entire research process. Every time I turned on the video-camera the children were notified, and they were asked if they would like to watch the recordings and talk about it with me and the other children. I was aware of children's different ways of communicating; children can show their intentions to be involved or not by expressing themselves either verbally or physically (Einarsdóttir, 2012). Pálmadóttir and Einarsdóttir (2016) argue that children show assent/dissent in a variety of ways, such as in words and bodily expression. They found it challenging to interpret the children's expressions. In this study, I emphasised being alert and recognising children's different ways of communicating their assent or dissent during the research process. I did not video-record in spaces where children did not give their assent or demonstrably showed or said that they did not want to be recorded. Most of the children decided to take part in the entire research process, whereas other children took part in some aspects of the study. There was usually an ongoing negotiation, as evident in Danby's (2017) study; that is, sometimes the children did not want to miss out of participating in activities, such as outdoor play, to take part in the study. When that was the case, I invited them to take part at a later time if they chose to do so. The children usually accepted that invitation and their different ways of participating in the study did not affect the trustworthiness of the data. The participating children chose pseudonyms for their preschools and themselves.

5.2   The children's different ways of giving their assent

After explaining the study to the children, most gave their written assent right away. Some children needed more time to consider their decision and still other children chose not to participate in the research. In the Ravenswood preschool, a boy named Elias did not give his assent right away. When I asked him, he answered: 'I will tell you tomorrow,' and when I asked the next day he said again: 'I will tell you tomorrow'. When he was making his decision, he spent a lot of time with me and invited me to participate in his play. Elias and his friends usually played the police and said that I was the prisoner and needed to spend the entire day in prison (from field notes, May 5th 2015). The day after these field-notes were written, Elias decided to participate in the study and gave his written assent. I reassured him that he could opt out anytime if he changed his mind.

At first, I did not consider what Elias was doing in his play, although I had participated in his play when he invited me. After a few days of keeping me waiting for his assent and playing with me, I realised that he was managing a power relationship between us. I interpreted his interaction as he needed to be sure that he could trust me and that he could opt out any time, as I promised him. As this example clarifies, in research with children, ethnographic approaches can be challenging because of power relations between children and adults (Corsaro, 1985) and the creation of trusting relationship with them (Mukherji & Albon, 2010). It took Elias some time to consider if he wanted to participate or not. He made his decision after he was sure that I was not going to control him or tell him what to do. He wanted to participate on his own terms and gave his assent when he was sure he could. As Danby (2017) indicates, it is important that the researcher is sensitive to the children's wishes by listening carefully and recognising child-centred practises that support the children's rights.

5.3   The children's various ways of communicating dissent

In this study, the participating children usually agreed to be recorded and the recorder did not seem to interrupt their activities. However, sometimes the children indicated that they did not want to be recorded even though they had decided to be a part of the study. Once I asked two girls who were playing a board game in Ravenswood preschool if I could record their activity, one of them said: 'No, not now.' In Butterfly preschool, two girls agreed that their activity of playing with animals would be recorded. However, after I had recorded for a while, they changed their mind, which they communicated to me both verbally and physically. The extract is a documentation of the recording.

> Áróra and Mía are playing together with plastic animals in one of the smaller rooms in the setting. Áróra looks at the camera (researcher) and whispers into Mía's ear. Áróra stops playing and looks at the researcher. The girls start playing again and talk to each other. Áróra whispers again to Mía. The girls sort the animals by size. Mía looks at the camera and Áróra crawls towards the researcher. Researcher: 'Do you want to look [into the camera]?' Áróra looks into the camera at Mía who looks back at Áróra and the researcher. Áróra puts her hand in front of the camera blocking the lens and then she crawls back to Mía and whispers to her ear. The researcher asks: 'Do you feel it uncomfortable when I am recording?' Áróra responds: 'Yes'.

Researcher: 'You can watch it afterwards, maybe not today but when I come back later this week. But if you want me to turn of the camera I will. Do you want me to turn it off?' Áróra shakes her head. Researcher: 'No … it takes a while to get used to having the camera around.' Mía keeps on playing and Áróra talks to the researcher and starts to make noises with one of the plastic animals and Mía covers her ears with her hands. Then Áróra joins Mía and they start playing again. Mía looks towards the camera and Áróra looks at the researcher and says: 'Please, can you turn it off?' Researcher: 'Do you want me to turn it off now?' The researcher turns off the camera. The researcher was going to sit in the room without recording but Áróra opens the door implying that the researcher should leave the room, which she does. (Recording of children's activities 19th October 2017, length of recording 7 minutes and 45 sec)

Sól, one of the children in Ravenswood preschool, stated clearly that she did not want to be recorded. However, Áróra expressed her dissent differently. She whispered to her friend, so I could not hear what she was saying, and her talk could not be recorded. She looked at the camera often, put her hand in front of the lens and made a noise that sounded like a horse, probably to interrupt the recording. Áróra's expressions of her dissent can be related to Corsaro's (2015) primary and secondary adjustment. That is, she had given her assent and decided to participate in the study and, therefore, she met the researcher's expectations (primary adjustment). However, instead of saying 'no' to the researcher, she communicated her dissent as resistance to the participation in the study (secondary adjustment). Both the camera and the researcher seemed to interrupt her play, as Pálmadóttir and Einarsdóttir (2016) found in their study.

5.4 The children's curiosity and understanding of the technology

The children often were curious about the digital devices, the mobile phone/video recorder and the laptop, that were used in the study. Before starting the video recordings in the setting, I showed the children how the mobile phone worked as a video recorder. Most of the children seemed to understand how these devices worked. However, some children needed a

longer time to find out how to use the video recorder and they continued to ask questions about the devices during the research process. In many of the video-stimulated conversations with the children, a lot of time was spent discussing the devices and other topics of children's interest. The children wanted to discuss and try out how the computer worked, the letters on the keyboard ('this is my letter'), how the recorder worked and how the recorder and computer functioned together. The time spent in these discussions were important for the children and time well spent as the children learned more about the method and, at the same time, gave important information about the topic of the study.

In the research process, I emphasised that the children were aware of what I was doing. Also, they were aware that they could decide whether they wanted to be included in it or not. One boy at Ravenswood preschool did not give his assent at the beginning of the study, although he was always watching what I was doing. After a few days he said to me: 'I want to be Tryggvi (his choice of pseudonym) in the study,' which indicated that he was seeking to take part in what the other children were doing in the study. In Ravenswood preschool, I recorded an activity of three girls who were dressing dolls. In the beginning of the recording I asked the girls if they knew why I had the camera. Extract 1 shows Sól's respond to my question about the camera.

Extract 1

Sara: Why do I have the phone?

Sól: For recordings.

Sara: Why am I recording?

Sól: So we can watch it and remember.

Sara: You are completely aware of that.

Later in the same conversation Sól keeps on asking about the devices.

Sól: Can you put [video-recordings] from the phone … into the computer?

Sara: Yes, I connect a cable to the phone and into the computer and then I send the videos to the computer.

Sól: Yees … I understand.

This example indicates that Sól understands how the video recordings work. However, she needed further explanations about how she could watch the recordings on the laptop. Some aspects of the study were made clear before I started to record, and other aspects needed further explanations. I thought I had explained the study to the children in an understandable way before gaining the children's assent (Einarsdóttir, 2012). I could have further explained the technology at the beginning of the study, as Sørensen (2014) pointed out, but that can be difficult. It is not possible to explain every part of the study at the start, as some aspects can be learned along the way.

5.5 Issues of power relations between researcher and children

When watching the video-recordings, most children were interested in seeing themselves and many children said: 'this is me, this is me.' There were children, though, who seemed to find it a bit uncomfortable to watch themselves, at least at the beginning. This was evident when three girls were watching themselves and looked away from the screen several times during the conversation. I asked the girls regularly if they wanted to stop watching the recording, but they said they wanted to keep on watching.

In Butterfly preschool, three boys, Orri, Pétur and Snorri, had agreed to take part in a video-stimulated conversation with me. The conversation took place in the arts room, one of the smaller rooms in the setting. The boys sat at the end of a square table where the computer was located, and I placed the recorder on a tripod at the other end of the table. While I placed the recorder Orri said: 'Hey, stop taking photos of me', I responded by saying: 'Do you not want to be recorded?' and Orri said: 'No' and crawled under the table. Instead of accepting his refusal right away, which could have been the proper thing to do, I decided to show Orri how the recorder works in this situation which is a bit different from when children activities are recorded. Extract 2 shows the conversation between me and the boys:

Extract 2

Sara: Come and see [Orri]. I want to show you the recorder.

Orri: [Orri joins the researcher and looks into the recorder].

Sara: Can you see them [the boys]?

Orri: [Looks into the recorder].

Pétur: [Starts to make faces and laughs].

Snorri: [Laughs and join Orri and the researcher]. Can I see?

Orri and Snorri: [Look into the recorder and laugh].

Snorri: Can I see myself?

Orri: Stop record … can I see myself, uuu.

Snorri: [Goes back to the computer and joins Pétur who is still sitting by the computer].

Sara: Should we sit down and watch for a while?

Orri: Yes.

When Orri found out how the recorder worked he sat with the other boys and me and watched the recording of their activity on the computer. During the conversation he stood up several times to look into the recorder and watch the other two boys. Once he selected two clothespins and asked Snorri and Pétur to look into the recorder while he made a play scene where the clothespins were men acting in front of the recorder. This can be interpreted that Orri was role playing different aspects, but it can also be interpreted that Orri was showing his dissent throughout the conversation. First by saying 'stop recording me' and then by doing different activities to interrupt the conversation. As Groundwater-Smith et al. (2015) suggest, power can be exercised by the participants in form of resistance and disobedience. I decided to explain to the boys how the recorder works, and another possibility to immediately turn off the camera. As Corsaro (2015)

suggested, I was aware of my position as being more powerful than the children and tried to minimise the authority and control. Still, children found ways to circumvent my authority.

5.6   Introduction of the findings to the participants

At the conclusion of the research process, before publishing, the findings were introduced to the children and educators. A story was written that included the findings, in a language that was simple and understandable for the children. Pictures from the research were used to clarify the text. I read the story to the children and educators and sought to find out what they thought of it; for example, if they saw themselves relating to the story, if it was true or false, and why they might think that. In this way, the children were provided an opportunity to offer their opinions of the findings. The following example shows how the children influenced the findings:

> In Butterfly school, one boy stopped me when I was reading the story and said: 'it was not like that' and when I asked: 'how it was?' He could not explain what he meant but he did not want his quote to be in the findings. Following his comment, the quote was erased from the summary of the findings.

The children considered the findings interesting and listened carefully when their pseudonyms were given. It seemed that the researcher was not telling them anything new; this was of course something they already knew. In this way, the children saw themselves relating to the findings on which they mostly agreed. The educators also were invited to listen to the introductions. A few used the opportunity to learn more about the children's views of their activities in the preschool settings. The researcher gave the preschools a copy of the findings and discussed them in a meeting towards the conclusion of the research process. A copy of the findings was available in the dressing rooms of the preschool settings, so the children's parents could read the report as well.

5.7   Ethics of studying children's play in preschools

Questions have been asked about whether it is ethically appropriate to uncover details about children's everyday activities and their secret spaces (Broström, 2006). In preschools, children are used to being observed when playing, as that is one of the educator's roles; therefore, children's play in preschools often is not implemented in private spaces. However, there are

aspects of play that can be private for children, such as the play theme. The research, including ethical issues, such as children's rights to opt out, were explained to the children at the beginning of the research process and also along the way. For example, I always sought and gained the children's permission before I turned on the video-camera; if they opted out, and wanted privacy, I did not record them. When ethical issues are clear, I believe it is justifiable to research children's play in preschools. At the end, the findings are supposed to benefit children through understanding more about how they play and how they can be best supported, and not to do them any harm.

It can be challenging to study children's play, especially when observing children being excluded from play. When I observed children being excluded, and the educators did not (they were always in the room with me), I pointed it out and discussed it with them, and usually the children received the support they needed to participate in play with peers. Often, I had conversations with the educators about children's participation in play, where we learned from each other. Sometimes the discussions with the educators led to their reconsidering their role in children's play and preschool practice.

6   Findings

The aim of this study was to contribute new understandings to studies of children's play and deepen my own understanding of children's views of their play activities in their peer cultures and their views of the role of educator's in what the children described as play activities. During the research process, I also found it important to delve more in-depth into children's views of rules in their peer culture because the application of rules seemed to influence the children's involvement in play activities. Three articles were written to discuss these topics, based on the findings of the study.

6.1   Study 1

Play is an important part of early childhood education. However, play is a complex phenomenon that has been studied from different perspectives and paradigms, and definitions vary in accordance with theoretical background and schools of study (Gordon, 2015; Theobald & Danby, 2014; Wong, Wang, & Cheng, 2011). The first article, ''Drawing and playing are not the same': Children's views of their activities in Icelandic preschools' was published in *Early Years: An International Research Journal* and co-authored with my supervisor Pr. Jóhanna Einarsdóttir (see Ólafsdóttir & Einarsdóttir, 2017). The aim of this article was to explore how the children viewed their activities in the preschool with a special focus on activities on their explanations of what activities were considered play and non-play. The concept of interpretive reproduction was used as a lens to explore children's activities in their peer culture (2015). Video-stimulated recordings were used to support the children's explanations of their activities.

The recordings of the children's conversations indicated both shared and different views on their activities in the preschool settings. First, the children said that play had a preparation phase where they set the stage, decided which roles to play and who could participate in the play. When the preparation was done the actual play could begin, that is, the preparation of the play was not explained as play by the children. Second, the children needed to be able to act out roles and decide how they used the material,

so their activity would be named play. One boy, Guðmundur, explained to the researcher why he suggested playing with domino blocks was play.

> Researcher: Why do you think this is play?

> Guðmundur: Because you can decide what to do with it and these blocks could be men and something.

> Researcher: So you think maybe there needs to be men for this to be play?

> Guðmundur: Yes, the blocks can be men … this is also a game.

Third, most children suggested that drawing was different from playing, that drawing could be a playful activity but that it was not play. The children often connected the activity of play to how role play has been characterised. However, there was a contrast in the children's explanations, where two children said that the activity of painting was play.

In this study a pattern was observed. On one hand, when the children were asked what they were doing in the recordings and they responded by naming the activity, such as drawing or building, they usually agreed that they were not playing. On the other hand, if the children were asked and their response was 'playing', they often referred to activities in which they took on roles and decided how to use the material.

6.2   Study 2

In preschools, play is considered children's main way of learning. When playing, children develop their ability to construct social orders as they bring experiences and knowledge to play activities. Children adjust and follow rules made by educators, but they also try to challenge and resist these rules in play (Corsaro 1985, 2015; Löfdahl, 2010; Thornberg, 2009). The second article, ''You need to own cats to be a part of the play': Icelandic preschool children challenge adult-initiated rules in play' was published in *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal* and co-authored with Pr. Jóhanna Einarsdóttir, Pr. Susan Danby and Dr. Maryanne Theobald (see Ólafsdóttir, Danby, Einarsdóttir & Theobald, 2017b). The aim of this article was twofold: First, to gain a better understanding of how children experience adult initiated rules in their peer culture; and, second, to understand how the children challenge and resist these rules in their play activities. The concepts of primary adjustment and secondary adjustment were used to explore the rules in children's peer cultures (Corsaro, 2015).

Children's play activities were recorded, and the children were invited to watch and discuss the recorded activities.

When discussing rules in the preschool setting with the children, they mostly mentioned rules made by the educators. These rules were often related to behaviour, the use of material, number of children in areas, and exclusion from the peer group. The children saw themselves as either learning the rules bit incrementally or they were taught by the educators. The children often followed the educator's rules, but they also used different strategies in their play activities to challenge these rules, for example, by excluding children from play activities even though the rule said that it was prohibited. The extract below is an example of how Jóhanna made rules about who could take part in a play activity and who could not.

> Skoppa: She did not let me play with them [looks at researcher].
>
> Researcher: No, why not?
>
> Skoppa: Why did you not let me play with you? [looks at Johanna].
>
> Jóhanna: Because there could only be three [children] and if you wanted to take part you needed to own cats. You could not be the big sister. She always wants to be the big sister [Looks at researcher].
>
> Researcher: So she did not fit into the roles?
>
> Jóhanna: No, because there could only be three and she wanted to be the big sister.

The children sometimes challenged the educator's rules by using them for their own purpose. For example, one of the educator's rules was that four children could play together in the corner of the setting and another rule said that it was not allowed to exclude children from play activities. One girl who was in control of a play activity used the rule about the number of children to choose who could be involved in the play and who could not, where one of the girls were excluded from the play. Therefore, the findings of this study indicated conflicts between two rules, both made by the educators. Thus, the rule about four children in a play area at a time led to exclusion.

6.3   Study 3

The educator's role in children's play activities is critical for their learning and development. However, educators have different perceptions of how much they should be involved in children's play, from being in control to not intervening at all (Gaskins, 2014; Wood, 2014). Children might have perspectives different from the educators about the role in their play activities (Einarsdóttir, 2014; Kragh-Müller & Isbell, 2011; Löfdahl & Hägglund, 2006). The third article, ''Þeir vilja ekki leika, bara tala saman': Sýn barna á hlutverk fullorðinna í leik' [''They do not want to play, just talk to each other': Children's views of educators' roles in play'] was published in *Netla – Veftímarit um uppeldi og menntun* and co-authored with my supervisor Pr. Jóhanna Einarsdóttir (see Sara M. Ólafsdóttir and Jóhanna Einarsdóttir, 2017). The aim of this article was to gain a better understanding of children's perspectives of the educator's role in their play. The concepts of primary adjustment and secondary adjustment were used as a lens to explore how the children explained the educator's participation or non-participation in their play activities. The children's different play activities were recorded. The children watched the recordings and explained the educator's role in their play.

The children agreed that the educators seldom participated in their play. They were often busy doing other things such as talking to each other and participating in meetings. The children said that the educator's role usually included watching over the children and the play. The educators were close to the children, observed their play and reacted when the children needed help or something went wrong. However, the children had different opinions of how much the educators should be involved in their play. Some children did not want to include the educators in their play whereas other children wanted the educators to participate and needed their support. For example, one of the girls suggested that the educators could play with the children.

6.4   Summary of the findings

The findings of the study indicate that play from the children's perspectives is make-believe play, a view explained by Bodrova and Leong (2015). The children said that they needed to prepare for play, take on and act out roles, and use the material for the purpose of the play, sometimes often differently from what was expected; for example, using a domino block for a man. One characteristic of children's play is that the children follow rules relevant for their role in the play (Bodrova, 2008; Bodrova & Leong, 2015).

When the children were asked about the rules in their play, they mainly discussed the rules of the setting and how they influenced their play. They did not mention that they made their own rules in their play. However, by using Corsaro's (2015) secondary adjustment as a lens, hidden rules made by the children were identified in the data of the study and these rules were often about inclusion or exclusion. The rules sometimes led to exclusion from play in peer cultures. Therefore, it was also important to discuss the educator's role in the children's play and how the educators could support the children to take part in play and learn through play. The children explained the educator's role differently. Many children did not want to include the educator's in their play, some of the children needed the educators to be near them as assistants, and few children needed support and wanted the educator to be involved in their play. Researchers have indicated that educator's might have different views of their role than the children (see Einarsdóttir, 2014; Kragh-Müller & Isbell, 2011; Löfdahl & Hägglund, 2006). Some of the children in this study wanted the educators to be more often involved in their play but the educators usually were passive observers.

7 Discussion and conclusion

This section discusses the findings from the three articles that were published from the study and how they relate to previous studies. My aim is also to further explain how I, as a researcher, came to these findings by learning from the children's experiences and knowledge being a part of their peer culture. In addition, to explain how that knowledge can contribute to the early childhood education and add to previous knowledge.

7.1 The children's views of their play activities

At the beginning of this study, I reviewed the literature of children's play to gain a better understanding of the phenomena. However, the more I read about play the more confused I became because the definitions of the concept were somewhat unclear and sometimes controversial (Bergen, 2014; Dockett et al., 2013; Wong et al., 2011). For example, play has been identfied as a cultural phenomenon, state of mind, and a human activity (Reifel, 2014; van Oers, 2014). When I explored the children's play activities I had Corsaro's (2015) concept of interpretive reproduction in mind. Corsaro suggests that children build their knowledge and experiences on educator views, language and actions. However, most of the children who participated in this study had their own explainations and perspectives of their activities in their preschool setting. It was expected that different children would have different views of their activities in the preschool (Corsaro, 2015; Tertoolen, Geldens, van Oers, & Popeijus, 2017); however, most children shared a common explanation of play and non-play activities.

Thus, the findings of this study are in contrast with studies that indicate that children have different views of their activities (Corsaro, 2015; Tertoolen, Geldens, van Oers, & Popeijus, 2017). In both preschools involved in the study, when the children had time for freely chosen activities the educators asked them to chose activities or tasks. That is, the educators did not use the concept of play for children's freely chosen activities. The children's explanations of play was not influenced by the educators' language as Breathnach et al. (2017) found in their study. The children in this study had their independent views and explanations of their activities in the preschool settings. They had strong opinions of play and strived to explain it to me and propably wondered why I sometimes did not

understand. For example, when three girls were discussing their activities with me, I asked them: 'Why is drawing not play? Can you explain that?' and Áróra responded impationtly: 'Because drawing and playing are not the same.'

After studying play with the children who participated in this study, the phenomenon of play became more clear to me. The children explained their activities as play when they acted out roles and were in control of their activities; for example, by deciding how to use the material they had access to. As Guðmundur explained: 'You can decide what to do with it [the material] and these blocks could be men and something.' The children's explanation are in line with how Bodrova and Leong (2015) define children's make-believe play; that is, when the children said they were playing they created an imaginary situation, took on and acted out roles. If the children were building with blocks, they indicted that they were just building until the imaginary was added to the situation, then it became play. Therefore, when I use the concept play in this study, I refer to children's make-believe play.

Play is a social, informal, creative and often an enjoyable activity in which children use their imagination, are in control and take on roles (Einarsdóttir, 2014a; Howard et al., 2006; Pramling Samuelsson & Asplund Carlsson, 2008; Wong et al., 2011). Children often explain play differently from educators; that is, educators sometimes view activities as play the children do not (Bodrova & Leong, 2015; Theobald & Danby, 2014). In this study, activities such as building and drawing were usually not explained as play by the children, but the educators seemed to view the activities differently. For example, in one of my participant observations in Ravenswood preschool (February 27th 2015), I observed three children sitting at a table building with Legos. A boy sat by the table for some time and built an airplane. When he had finished building the plane, he stood up and began flying it around in the setting. After a short while, one of the educators stopped him, and told him to sit by the table where the Lego was supposed to be. When this observation was analysed in relation to children's explanations of play, the boy was preparing the play by building the airplane but when he began flying it around the actual play began and then he was stopped by the educator.

Educators' views of play influence how much time, space and material is available for the children (Grieshaber & McArdle, 2010). It is critical to be aware that children have enough time to prepare for the play, before it begins, because according to the children the play had a preparation stage

that took time, but the children said that the preparation was not play. Therefore, children need considerable time for play because if there is not enough time the children's activities might be stopped before the children would suggest they were playing. Children need to be able to prepare for play; for example, by building the environment and taking on roles. Therefore, it is important for educators to understand children's explanations of play so that they can further support their learning through play.

Educators decide what kinds of play activities are appropriate in preschool settings. Play activities that involve noise, risk or clean-up are sometimes not supported by educators (Grieshaber & McArdle, 2010). In Ravenswood preschool there was not much space for the children to move around and the educators seemed to value quiet activities that took place sitting at tables. When the children played, they often communicated in different ways and moved around the setting. Therefore, it was more likely that play was stopped by the educators than other activities. This action can prevent the children's opportunities for learning through play (Grieshaber & McArdle, 2010). In Butterfly preschool, the children had ample time and space to move around and communicate. For that reason, the activities in which the children participated and were supported by the educators were often explained as play by the children.

If children are asked about play and other activities in their preschool, they can give important information about their knowledge and experiences from which educators can learn (Gallacher & Gallagher, 2008). The children who participated in this study added important information in the discussion of play activities in preschools. The Icelandic National curriculum guide (2011) points out that preschool children's main way of learning is through play, and most of the children suggested they were playing when they acted out roles and decided what to do with the material. That is, play is make-believe from the children's perspectives. For that reason, it is important for educators and policy makers to consider following questions:

- What activities are prioritised in the preschool settings?
- Which activities are supported and which are not?
- How much space do children have to move around the setting?
- How much time do children have to prepare for play and further develop their play and continue playing?
- What material is accessible to the children?

These are important questions to ask to support children's play and to prevent it from being interrupted. When children have opportunities to play with peers and have support from educators, they develop their identity, curiosity, their ability to learn (Löfdahl, 2010). Play can also be a foundation for life skills, such as, problem solving, creativity and empathy (Rogers, 2010). According to van Oers (2014) children's imagination is stimulated in play and is built on their experiences, knowledge and creativity. Understanding play from the children's point of view is important to support children learning through play. The children's activities became play oriented as they prepared the environment; for example, by building with blocks, taking on or acting out roles, and creating an imaginary situation. Bodrova and Leong (2015) defined play in a similar way to the children in this study. Further, they suggest that one characteristic of children's play is that children follow rules relevant for the roles they act and play. This study contributes to better understandings of how the children experienced rules in in their play in peer cultures.

7.2   The children's explanations of rules in their peer culture

In the process of this study, I realised that rules were critical in the preschool settings so that the children and their educators could function together, as Thornberg (2009) suggested. These rules were often constructed by educators, usually related to what was expected of children and their behaviour (Corsaro, 1985; Thornberg, 2009). Rules in preschool settings sometimes seem to be taken for granted with little attention on that some children can benefit from these rules while other children obey the rules without considering the consequences, as Thornberg (2009) concluded in his study. He suggested that rules could be problematic because of the risk of resulting in blind obedience.

During the process of becoming a part of the children's peer cultures I found that it was important to learn the rules of the preschool settings. Some of the rules were clear to me but other rules were learned by attending the setting on regularly basis. Therefore, the intention of discussing the rules of the preschool setting was to deepen my understanding of how the children experienced rules in their peer cultures. In the video-stimulated discussions with the children, they mainly mentioned rules in their preschool settings made by the educators and the children needed to follow and tried to initiate, as Corsaro (2015) explains with the concept primary adjustment. The children agreed that there were many rules in their settings and usually the children named rules related to

how to interact and what was prohibited in the preschool settings. For example, rules about not to exclude other children from play and that the children could not run, be loud or hurt other children.

When I learned the rules in the two preschool settings I often watched the children, tried to imitate their actions and sometimes I asked them what was allowed or prohibited to do. For me, the children were often good reminders of the rules. I also listened to the educators explaining to the children which actions were appropriate and which were not. Once, in Ravenswood preschool, I sat with the children in circle time and listened to the educators and the children discuss the rules. The children pointed out that there were rules everywhere that they needed to follow, for example, traffic rules, school rules and even rules at home. When the children were asked about the school rules they usually began the sentence on: 'we are not allowed to …' run, hurt, exclude." The discussion was not about what was allowed (field notes, 28th April 2015). In this way, I learned the rules of the preschool settings in a similar way as the children said they did.

First, I learned the rules, as Sól in Ravenswood preschool pointed out. She said that she learned the rules by coming to the preschool every day, that is, bit by bit. Second, I learned the rules from the educators as Mía in Butterfly preschool suggested. She said that the educators taught the rules and that the children followed them. Third, I learned the rules, 'the hard way', that is, by accidently breaking them. I assume the children sometimes do that as well. Once when the children were playing in the Butterfly preschool I handed a doll to a girl and needed to put it back because we did not ask for permission. I found that situation a bit uncomfortable. Therefore, in this study, the rules of the preschool settings were learned by watching how others do, listening to the educator´s explanations of rules, and by trying out or experiencing what was allowed and what was not.

In the video-stimulated conversations with the children, I tried to ask the children about rules in their play, but they did not respond to these questions. Therefore, I looked further into the data by using the concept of secondary adjustment as a lens (Corsaro, 2015) and related to previous research about rules in children's play activities (see for example, Cobb-Moore et al., 2007; Sheldon, 2010). Then I recognised that the children made their own rules in their play. Usually the rules were about who could play and who could not, like Jóhanna's rule: 'You need to own cats to be a part of the play'. The children sometimes tried to challenge or resist the adult-initiated rules by making their own rules in their play, as Corsaro (2015) has pointed out. For me, the rules made by the children were not as

obvious and clear as the rules made by the educators. Even though the children did not mention rules in their play, the rules seemed quite clear when they were playing, as other researchers have found (Cobb-More et al., 2007; Corsaro, 1985). That is, the children followed the rules in the play, for example by acting on orders from the leader of the play or other children.

The findings of the study are in line with Corsaro's (1985) study that found that children have clear conceptions of power relationships in their play. In a play activity observed by Corsaro, one of the children had more power and took control of the play by giving orders and the other children followed these orders without arguing. In this study, the children that took control of play activities were often the same children who gave orders, managed the educators' rules and decided who could participate in the play. The children found ways to manipulate or circumvent the educators' rules for their own purpose and the purpose of the play. The leaders of the children's play were sometimes in a position that strengthened their power and control in their peer culture.

In children's peer culture, secondary adjustment is an important concept. On one hand, as Corsoro (2015) suggests, the children can come to see themselves as a part of the group when they resist or challenge adult-initiated rules in a way that is accepted by the other children. However, the findings of this study suggest that through secondary adjustment the children also can be excluded from the peer group; for example, when the children make their own rules in play about who can play and who cannot. The rules of the play seemed clear to the children, but they were sometimes hidden or unclear for me and possibly the educators. The children sometimes excluded other children from play with peers even though the rules said that it was not allowed to exclude.

In this study, I recognised different conflicts between adult-initiated rules and child-initiated rules. For example, there were conflicts between the educator's rule about inclusion and a child's rule, such as when Jóhanna ruled that there could only be three children in her play and that the participating children needed to own cats. Jóhanna wanted her co-players to bring knowledge and experience of cats to the imaginary situation but Skoppa wanted to play the big sister. This is an example of how children can strive to protect their interactive space, so they do not have to change their ongoing play, as Corsaro (1995) suggested. However, in this example the educator's rule about inclusion was dominant and Jóhanna needed to invite Skoppa to participate. Even this rule was amended by the players as,

instead of changing the ongoing play, Skoppa was required to take on the role of a kitten. There were not only conflicts between rules made by adults and children. There was also an example of how a rule about four children in a play area lead to exclusion. In order to maintain her social positioning in the peer group, as Löfdahl (2010) suggested, Selma used the rule about the number of children allowed to exclude a child from play, that is, she used the educator's rules in an opposite way than was intended.

The findings from this study indicate that rules in preschool settings are complicated, both to learn and to follow. As Thornberg (2009) suggests, rules can be taken as blind obedience by some children where they follow the rules no matter what. The children make their own rules in play to have more control of their activities, as Corsaro (2015) argued. Some children, often children that take the role of a leader in play showed competence and made their own rules in the play and simultaneously challenged the adult-initiated rules. Therefore, the leaders of the play activities sometimes strengthened their own position in the peer group by making new rules but at the same time they might have weakened the position of other children, often the children that were excluded from the play in some way.

Play in preschool settings can never be free. The reason is that educators place different limitations, for example, how much time is available for play, what material is accessible for the children, and how much space the children have for play (van Oers, 2014; Wood, 2014). The children in this study said that the adult-initiated rules were both good and bad for their play. One boy in Butterfly preschool said that the rules were good for their play because he had learned not to hurt other children during play, however a girl said that the rules were bad for the children's play because if she wanted to play a cat that was running, that was not allowed because the rule said that it is not allowed to run inside the setting. However, it is not just the educator's rules and boundaries that limit the freedom in children's play. The findings are in line with Löfdahl's (2010) third adjustment; that is, the children themselves set boundaries by using different strategies, rules and orders in play. Child-initiated rules can, on one hand, limit the freedom of the children's play and, on the other hand, limit other children's opportunities to participate in play with peers. For example, Skoppa needed to take on the role of a kitten to be a member of the play.

Rules are an important part of the preschool practice because if there were no rules chaos could emerge (Thornberg, 2009). In this study, rules were resources used by the children to negotiate their social lives and to

manage their peer culture. This study indicates that it is important to consult with children when making rules in preschool settings because children can be competent rule makers and they are the ones that need to follow the rules and act according to them. Educators can learn from children and ask themselves the following questions when making rules in preschool settings:

Who sets the rules?

What is the purpose of the rules?

What consequences can the rules have?

Do some children benefit from the rules at the expense of others?

The educator's beliefs and cultural values affect children's play and learning in preschools, including the kind of rules being created and followed in preschool settings. The provision of rules influences educator decisions, such as how much time is available for play, choice of material and children's opportunities to participate in play (van Oers, 2013; Wood, 2014). Therefore, it is important for educators to be conscious of the rules they create and the purpose of these rules. In addition, educators should be aware of the rules the children themselves make in their play because sometimes these rules can lead to exclusion from the play activities, sometimes unnoticed by the educators. Another important aspect of children's play is to find out how educators can support children's participation in play activities with peers. The next section discusses the children's perspectives on the educator role in their play.

7.3 The children's perspectives on the educator's role in their play

Children have indicated that educators seldom participate in their play (Einarsdóttir, 2014b; Löfdahl, 2014). When the children are playing they usually do not think about what the educators are doing, however, they want to have them near if they need help (Einarsdóttir, 2014b). These findings are in line with what the children that participated in this study suggested. The children said that the educators never or seldom took part in their play activities. Most of the children said that the educator's role was to observe their play, assist when something went wrong and solve problems with them or for them. The children said that when they were playing the educators were often doing other things, such as, talking to

each other, working on the computer, cleaning up the setting, going to the restroom, and participate in meetings.

I learned very much from my role as a researcher and being a part of the children's peer culture. After I had spent some time with the children in the setting, showing interest in their different activities that they invited me to participate in their play. At the same time the children said that the educators could not play with them because they would ruin the play. It took me a while to find out why I could take part in the children's play, but the educators could not. I thought about what I had in common with the educators, such as, being an adult, a woman, and a preschool teacher. When I thought about our differences, I realised that what differed the most from the other adults was my role as a researcher avoiding to take control and give orders. These thoughts were documented in my field notes:

> This was an interesting day at the Ravenswood preschool. In the video-stimulated conversation with the children, they said that the educators could not participate in their play because they would ruin the play. Then at the end of the conversation the children asked me if I wanted to play with them. Which I thought was in contrast with what they just told me. (Field-notes, May 13th 2015)

At that point I interpreted that being an adult was not the reason why the children did not want to include the educator in their play. There were other reasons. Children's play involves power relationships and one of the children's explanations of play is that they are in control of their activities as other researchers have also found (Einarsdóttir, 2014a; Howard et al., 2006). I did not hold the same power as the educator's and therefore, it was safe for the children to invite me to play with them. The children did not invite the educators to play with them because of the risk of losing the power and control of their play to a more powerful person, the educators.

In Ravenswood preschool, I recognised two different cultures when the children participated in freely chosen activities, children's peer culture and the educators' culture. During freely chosen activities these two cultures were separated, that is, the children had ownership of their activities and the educators did not disturb them as Gaskins (2014) pointed out in her study. When the children had explained to me what they thought play was, I realised that from their perspectives very few of the activities in the preschool setting were play and therefore I needed to further deepen my

understanding of the educator's role in the children's play when entering the Butterfly preschool setting.

In Butterfly preschool, the children's peer culture and the educators' culture were not completely separated when the children were playing. When the children were playing the educators usually did not take part but there were exceptions. The educators sometimes took part in the children's play as Gaskins (2014) suggested, that is, they stepped into the children's play often in way of controlling the children's activities. Some of the children in the Butterfly preschool said that they wanted the educators to take part in their play. That was evident in a video-stimulated conversation with four girls. They said that they wanted the educators to participate more often in their play, for example, by playing with them.

The findings of this study indicate that the children were positioned differently in play by having roles, such as leaders, co-workers and followers. The children's positions in play influenced how they viewed the educator's role in their play. The children that took the lead of the play did usually not want the educators to be involved because of the risk of losing control. The children that described themselves as co-workers saw how the educators could participate but they did not need them or want them to. The children that often followed the leader of the play wanted to involve the educators more often in their play and needed their support. However, educator's seldom take part in children's play (Einarsdóttir, 2014b; Kragh-Müller & Isbell, 2011; Löfdahl & Hägglund, 2006). This study offers educators understandings of how different status and power influences how the children see their role in play. In this way they can observe the children's play regarding their position in their peer culture and volunteer to take part in the children's play on their terms, without taking control of their activities.

The educators' role in children's play is important in early childhood settings; for example, educators support the play, provide challenges, and motivate children to keep on playing (Pramling Samuelsson & Asplund Carlsson, 2008). In their study, Pramling Samuelsson and Johansson (2009) found that the educator's role was mainly to serve the children, that is, the children sought help when they dealt with too challenging activities or communication. This is in line with the findings of this study. In one of the video-stimulated conversations, Elena in Ravenswood preschool said the educators did not take part in their play and rationalised by saying: 'because we can do it ourselves but sometimes we need help.' Indicating

that the children do not need the educators except when they are dealing with something they need help or support to do.

The children who participated in this study indicated that their activities became play when the imaginary was added to the situation. In their study, Pálmadóttir and Einarsdóttir (2015) found that educators showed emotional distance when they did not follow the development of children's play. The findings of this study indicate that the educators' distance from play might also discourage the children's creativity and imagination, important aspects of play and learning. For example, when the educator stopped the boy in the Ravenswood preschool was when he began flying his Lego airplane around, his creativity was ignored. The findings of this study reveal that it is critical for educators to observe the children's play and encourage the children's imaginary world when emphasising children's learning through play.

The findings of this study indicate the role of educators in children's play in peer cultures is complex. The children explained the educators' role as non-participants, observers, and possible participants, often in relation to their positioning in their peer group. Therefore, it is important for educators to understand the children's views of their role in the children's play. Educators can observe the children's play, encourage their imaginary world, volunteer to take part in their play, and ask the children if they want to include them in their play, as the children usually do and ask: 'Can I play with you?'

7.4   Summary of the discussion and conclusion

The findings of this study suggest that it is important to consult with children about their activities in preschools. The children that participated in this study gave important information about their play activities, rules in their peer culture, and the educators' role in their play. Most children saw make-believe play as play where they used their imagination, took on and acted out roles, and were in control of their activities. The children expressed that they needed: uninterrupted time for play; to be able to prepare for their play; access to various play material; and support by educators. The participating children had their independent opinions and explanations of their activities, and did not use the same language as the educators. One reason could be that the cultural values reflected in Icelandic early childhood education emphasise, among other things, the ideals of democracy, autonomy, and creativity. According to the national curriculum guidelines for preschools, children should have opportunities to

influence and be active participants in developing their society (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2011). Although, the first level of education in Iceland is called Playschool, most of the children in this study made a clear distinction between play and other activities.

In the children's make-believe play, there were hidden rules made by the children that often referred to; who could be involved in the play and who could not; which roles were appropriate for the play theme; and orders about how to act. The children sometimes challenged the educators' power and control by resisting, challenging, or circumventing the rules in the preschool setting. The children who took the leading position in play adjusted the educators' rules to their play, often to keep control and fulfil their desires and needs. The children made their own rules and orders to maintain, or even strengthen, their position in their peer group. The findings suggest that educators need to be aware of the rules that they make themselves and the rules the children make to gain control of their lives because these rules can lead to exclusion from children's play activities.

The children suggested that the educator's role was important in different ways. Some children did not want to have educators nearby when playing, whereas other children wanted the educators to be close so that they could help if something went wrong, and a third group of children wanted the educators to take part in their play. The children's status in the peer group reflected their views of educator's role in their play, the children with lower status wanted to involve the educators more often. However, I did not investigate what influenced the children's status in their play. Other studies have indicated that children's social orders depends on factors, such as knowledge, age, gender and size (Danby, 1996). The educator role is therefore important to support children's play by observing their play and position in the peer group, and volunteer to participate in their play so that play can be the children's main way of learning. Another important aspect of the educator's role is to support and maintain the children's imaginary world. If the imaginary is taken away from the children's activities, the children usually do not explain these activities then as play.

The strengths of the methods used in this study are that the children had opportunities to share their views and opinions of their activities in the preschool by watching their recorded activities and explaining them to the other children and me. This is in line with studies conducted by Theobald (2012, 2017b). She found that it was possible to gain a better understanding of the children's social world when the children that participated in her

studies reflected, interpreted their thoughts and feelings, reactions, and concerns. In this study, the video-recordings captured the children's activities and their interactions which the children could watch and discuss. The video-stimulated conversations with the children were usually relaxed, that is, the children were interested in watching themselves and discuss what they were doing. The pauses between discussion were never a problem because we could always just watch the recording and think in between without saying anything.

The limitations of the methods were that the video-camera and I both influenced the environment and participants because the researcher can never be discounted from the environment as Danby (1997) and others have suggested. The educators sometimes seemed to avoid the camera and were not often seen in the recordings. Also, sometimes they acted differently from what they normally did when I was around, as Mukherji and Albon (2010) pointed out in their study. The reason for that could be that they were avoiding the camera; however, it is more likely the culture around play in the two settings. Play is something the children own and should not be interrupted by the educators. Another limitation of the study could be that the findings were mainly build on the children's verbal communication so that the children with good verbal skills had greater opportunities to express themselves. However, the video-recorded conversation also captured different communication, that is, the children's bodily expressions are also included in the findings.

7.5   Contribution of the study and future research

At the beginning of the research I believed that it was important to invite children to participate in the study and that they could add to the understanding of aspects of their lives. However, in the research process I realised even more how much can be learned from children if they are treated with respect and appropriate methods are used so they can express themselves in different ways. It is important to invite young children to participate in research in education for the reason of improving their everyday lives and learning in preschools. Researchers, policy makers and educators can learn from children's perspectives and opinion and aim to create communities for children where they can learn through play and social interactions.

This study contributes to the research field of early childhood education where children's perspectives are critical for supporting their play and learning in preschool. When discussing play in preschools, the participating

children had their independent views of how they explained their activities, not influenced by the educator's language as other studies have suggested (e.g. Corsaro, 2015; Tertoolen et al., 2017). In taking on a least adult role, I gained the children's trust and was invited to their peer culture. This study contributes to child studies and early childhood research by adding the video-stimulated conversations to the research process, where the children themselves could explain and interpret their activities.

The children's explanation of rules was often influenced by the educators' language, in line with Corsaro's (2015) primary adjustment; that is, some rules were taught to the children who followed them. This study also reveals that children often challenged adult power and control by making their own rules in play, often hidden from the educators, as Corsaro (1995, 2015) and Löfdahl (2010, 2014) found in their studies. This study adds to the understanding of conflicts between rules made by educators and by children. What rules were valued and followed seemed to be related to the educators' values and beliefs, as other studies have indicated (Wood, 2014). Rules about inclusion were clear in the preschool settings, but still sometimes the children made their own rules or used the educators to exclude other children from play. Further research is needed to gain a better understanding of the complexity of rules in children's preschool cultures.

This study builds on a sociological perspective that adds to the understanding of children's play in educational settings. Children's play often occurs in interaction with others, including children and adults, and is influenced by cultural values and experiences (Wood, 2013). The findings of this study indicate that children have different status or possessions in their peer groups as other researchers have found (e.g. Löfdahl, 2010). The children in this study indicated that their status in the peer group influenced how they viewed the educator's role in their play. The children also suggested that it was important for the other children's participation to have knowledge and experiences of the ongoing play theme, such as owning cats, so they could participate in play where children were playing kittens. Therefore, the children's status in the peer group was a factor that both influenced how the children dealt with adult-initiated rules in the setting and how they viewed the educator's role in their play.

Children's status in peer groups is not simple because a child can be a follower in one play activity and a leader in another one. The different status can be explained by the cultural and social knowledge the children bring to a play, which affects how the children can participate in the play.

One of the things that I learned from the children was how they include and exclude other children in their play activities. I think it is important to add to the knowledge and understanding of inclusion and exclusion in children's peer cultures by conducting more research with children on this topic.

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Appendix A

Sara Margrét Ólafsdóttir
Lækjarmel 16
301 Akranes

Reykjavík 25. febrúar 2015
Tilvísun: S7250/2015/ TS/--

Hér með staðfestist að Persónuvernd hefur móttekið tilkynningu í yðar nafni um vinnslu persónuupplýsinga. Tilkynningin er nr. S7250/2015 og fylgir afrit hennar hjálagt.

Vakin er athygli á því að tilkynningin hefur verið birt á heimasíðu stofnunarinnar.
Tekið skal fram að með móttöku og birtingu tilkynninga hefur engin afstaða verið tekin af hálfu Persónuverndar til efnis þeirra.

Virðingarfyllst,

Teitur Skúlason

Hjál.: - Tilkynning nr. S7250/2015 um vinnslu persónuupplýsinga.

Appendix B

Tilvísun í mál: SFS2015010128

Skóla - og frístundasvið Reykjavíkur heimilar fyrir sitt leyti að ofangreind rannsókn fari fram
í leikskólum Reykjavíkur að því tilskildu að eftirfarandi skilyrðum sé fullnægt:

1. Að fyllsta trúnaðar sé gætt.
2. Að viðkomandi leikskólastjórar heimili rannsóknina.
3. Að starfsfólk leikskóla afli upplýsts samþykkis (skriflegs samþykkis) fyrir rannsókninni
áður en rannsakendur fá upplýsingar um viðkomandi aðila.
4. Að Persónuvernd verði tilkynnt um rannsóknina.

Virðingarfyllst

Ásgeir Björgvinsson

Appendix C

Dear parents/guardians.

In my doctoral study, at the University of Iceland, School of Education, I am conducting a research with children on their perspectives of participating in play with peers in their preschool setting. My intention is to video-record the children's activities in their preschool setting. Then I will invite the children to watch the recorded activities and participate in discussion with me about them. The conversation with the children will also be video-recorded. In that way the children have opportunities to be active participants in the study by sharing their views and opinions about their activities in their preschool.

Confidentiality is promised. Pseudonyms will be used both for the preschool and the participating children. At the end of the research process, all the data from the study will be deleted. Participants can opt out of the research at any time if they wish.

If the parents give their informed consent, their child will be asked for written informed assent by explaining the study to them and their role in the research.

Kind regards,

Sara Margrét Ólafsdóttir, doctoral student.

Informed consent

With my signature I agree that my child can participate in research on children's perspectives of participating in play with peers in their preschool setting, that is, only if the child also agrees to take part. I have been informed about the study, and I trust that the data will be used only for research purposes and confidentiality will be kept.

_____

Date and name of parent/guardian

Kynning á rannsóknar og upplýst samþykki

Kæru foreldrar/forráðamenn.

Í doktorsverkefni mínu við Menntavísindasviði Háskóla Íslands er ég, undirrituð, að rannsaka upplifun barna af þátttöku í leik. Til þess að fá fram upplifun barna af leik verða teknar myndbandsupptökur af athöfnum þeirra og þau taka svo þátt í að greina þær. Það verður gert með því að horfa fyrst á upptökurnar og ræða svo um þær. Þannig fá börnin tækifæri til þess að vera virkir þátttakendur þar sem þau deila skoðunum sínum.

Farið verður með allar upplýsingar sem trúnaðarmál. Hvorki verður greint frá nafni leikskólans né þátttakenda í rannsókninni. Að rannsókn lokinni mun gögnum hennar verða eytt á viðeigandi hátt. Þátttakendur geta hætt þátttöku hvenær sem er ef þeir óska þess.

Leitað verður eftir samþykki allra barna á deildinni með því að útskýra rannsóknina fyrir þeim og þau geta ákveðið að hætta þátttöku þegar og ef þau vilja.

Með fyrirfram þökk.

Sara Margrét Ólafdóttir, doktorsnemi.

Upplýst samþykki

Ég undirrituð/aður samþykki og staðfesti með undirskrift minni að barn mitt megi taka þátt í rannsókn á upplifun þess af þátttöku í leik, svo framarlega sem barnið samþykki einnig þátttöku. Ég hef kynnt mér ofangreinda kynningu og treysti því að öll gögn verði meðhöndluð sem trúnaðarmál.

_____

Nafn barns

_____

Dagsetning og nafn foreldris/forráðamanns.

Appendix D

Dear educator

In my doctoral study, at the University of Iceland, School of Education, I am conducting a research with children on their perspectives of participating in play with peers in their preschool setting. My intention is to video-record the children's activities in their preschool setting. Then I will invite the children to watch the recorded activities and participate in discussion with me about them. The conversation with the children will also be video-recorded. In that way the children have opportunities to be active participants in the study by sharing their views and opinions about their activities in their preschool.

Confidentiality is promised. Pseudonyms will be used both for the preschool and the participating children. At the end of the research process, all the data from the study will be deleted.

All the educators in the preschool setting will be asked for informed consent. The study will be explained to them and they will be notified that they can opt out at any time. The children will also be asked for their informed assent.

Kind regards,

Sara Margrét Ólafsdóttir, doctoral student

Informed consent

With my signature I agree to participate in the study about children's experiences of play in the preschool. I have been informed about the study, and I trust that the data will be used only for research purposes and confidentiality will be kept.

_____

Date and educators name

Kynning á rannsókn og upplýst samþykki

Kæri starfsmaður.

Í doktorsverkefni mínu við Menntavísindasviði Háskóla Íslands er ég, undirrituð, að rannsaka upplifun barna af þátttöku í leik. Í þeim tilgangi verða teknar myndbandsupptökur af leik barnanna í leikskólum og í framhaldi af því verða þau beðin að taka þátt í umræðum um þær. Það verður gert með því að horfa fyrst á upptökurnar og ræða svo um þær. Þannig fá börnin tækifæri til þess að vera virkir þátttakendur og láta í ljósi skoðanir sínar.

Farið verður með allar upplýsingar sem trúnaðarmál. Hvorki verður greint frá nafni leikskólans né þátttakenda í rannsókninni. Að rannsókn lokinni mun gögnum verða eytt á viðeigandi hátt.

Leitað verður eftir samþykki allra starfsmanna á deildinni með því að útskýra rannsóknina fyrir þeim og þeir geta ákveðið að hætta þátttöku þegar og ef þeir vilja. Jafnframt verður leitað eftir samþykki barnanna og foreldra/forráðamanna þeirra.

Með fyrirfram þökk,

Sara Margrét Ólafdóttir, doktorsnemi.

Upplýst samþykki

Ég undirrituð/aðður samþykki og staðfesti með undirskrift minni að taka þátt í rannsókn á upplifun barna af þátttöku í leik. Ég hef kynnt mér ofangreinda kynningu og treysti því að öll gögn verði meðhöndluð sem trúnaðarmál.

_____

Dagsetning og nafn starfsmanns.

Appendix E

Dear preschool child

At my university, I am doing a research on children's play . The research is done so that adults can better understand how children play and that can help them feel good in the preschool. I would like to know when you are playing, what you like and don´t like about play and how you think educators can take part in play.

In order to gain this knowledge, I am going to video-record when you and the other children are playing together in the preschool setting. Then I would like to show you the video-recordings and we can discuss what is happening there.

If you would like to participate in this study, then you can sign your name, letter or symbol on this paper.

Kind regards, Sara.
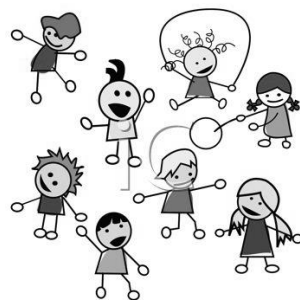
Upplýst samþykki

Kæra leikskólabarn.

Í háskólanum mínum er ég að gera rannsókn á leik barna. Þessi rannsókn er gerð svo fullorðið fólk geti betur skilið hvernig börn leika sér og geti hjálpað þeim að líða vel í leikskólanum sínum. Mig langar að vita hvenær þú ert að leika þér, hvað þér finnst skemmtilegast og leiðinlegast við leik og hvernig þér finnst fullorðnir taka þátt í leik.

Til þess að fá þessar upplýsingar ætla ég að taka myndbandsupptökur þegar þið krakkarnir eru að leika saman í leikskólanum þínum. Svo ætla ég að sýna þér upptökurnar og við getum rætt saman um það sem er að gerast á þeim.

Ef þig langar að vera með í þessari rannsókn getur þú sett stafinn þinn

eða annað tákn á blaðið.

Kveðja Sara.
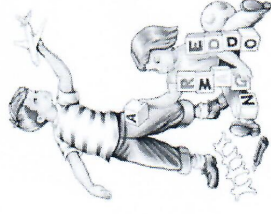
Articles in the PhD thesis

Article I. 'Drawing and playing are not the same': children's views on their activities in Icelandic preschools

'Drawing and playing are not the same': children's views on their activities in Icelandic preschools

Sara M. Ólafsdóttir & Jóhanna Einarsdóttir

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'Drawing and playing are not the same': children's views on their activities in Icelandic preschools

Sara M. Ólafsdóttir [ID] and Jóhanna Einarsdóttir [ID]

School of Education, University of Iceland, Reykjavik, Iceland

ABSTRACT

Play is an important part of early childhood education and has been defined from different perspectives and paradigms. However, definitions of play have been studied more from adults' perspectives than from those of children themselves. This ethnographic research, with children aged three to five years and built on sociological constructs, will explore children's views on play in two preschool settings in Iceland. Video-stimulated recordings were used to support children's conversations about their different activities in the settings, to explore which activities they considered play. Most of the children said that they were playing when they took on roles and could decide what to do with the material. When the children were preparing the play or were drawing, they usually said they were not playing. These findings add to the understanding of play from children's perspectives and are valuable to the research field and for educators working with young children.

Introduction

Play is a complex phenomenon that has been studied extensively from different perspectives and paradigms that often have different views of play (Gordon 2015). Although play seems quite easy to recognise when seen, it is difficult to explain, and definitions vary in accordance with theoretical background and schools of study (Theobald and Danby 2014). To some extent, there are also differences in how people see play in practice (Wong, Wang, and Cheng 2011). In Iceland, the term *playschool* applies to all group services for children from 18 months to six years old. The term also points to the fact that the main emphasis in early childhood education is on children's learning through play instead of focusing on academic skills (Einarsdottir 2017). In this article, the term *preschool* is used for playschool. The Icelandic National Curriculum guidelines for preschool view play as natural to children, spontaneous, inseparable from early childhood, and as the proper focus of all preschool activities. According to the curriculum, children should play freely on their own terms, having possibilities to express their ideas, experiences and feelings. It is stressed that in play children have opportunities to form social groups and create their own culture where they can express their views while simultaneously respecting the views of other children (Ministry of Education,

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Science, and Culture 2011). The guidelines indicate that play should be central to all preschool practice with the aim of strengthening children's self-esteem, well-being, confidence and communication skills (Einarsdottir 2017).

Research on children's perceptions of play indicates that they do not always view their activities in the same way as adults (Dockett and Perry 2007; Theobald and Danby 2014). Educators might view some activities as play that children might not (Bodrova and Leong 2015). Some researchers, however, (see, e.g. Bodrova 2008; Bodrova and Leong 2015) limit the definition of children's play to make-believe play. This means that the children are playing when they create an imaginary situation, take on and act out roles, and follow rules relevant for the role and the play. Reunamo et al. (2013) suggest that in play 'children incorporate motifs for action into themselves, other children, or objects that are not restricted by the real qualities of the items' (293). Previous studies on children's play have mainly been from the adult's point of view; however, recently children's perceptions have been taken into account in research, providing a new perspective (Brooker 2014). It is important to consult with children about play because they might give important information about their experiences and knowledge from which adults can learn (Dockett and Perry 2007; Gallacher and Gallagher 2008).

This article discusses an ethnographic study with children, aged three to five years, which was conducted in two preschool settings in Iceland. The study builds on childhood research that views children as competent and active participants influencing and reproducing their preschool community (Corsaro 2005), and on *The Convention on the Rights of the Child* (United Nations 1989), which recognises children's right to have influence on matters that affect them in any way. This is part of a larger study on children's perspectives on their activities in their preschool settings in Iceland and Australia. The aim of this part of the study is to explain how children view their activities in their preschool settings.

Peer cultures – William Corsaro

Through the years, play has been studied from the perspective of different disciplines, such as psychology, biology, sociology, and education (Henrick 2015). William Corsaro (2005, 2015) has conducted ethnographic research with children from a sociological perspective where he views children as active and creative social agents who contribute to the production of adult society and simultaneously produce their own peer cultures. To further clarify how this happens, he constructed the term *interpretive reproduction*. The concept *interpretive* describes the creative and innovative aspects of children's participation in society, and *reproduction* captures the idea that children actively contribute to cultural production and change. In other words, interpretive reproduction refers to children's participation in their own peer cultures, which they create by appropriating information from the adult world. From this perspective, children are viewed as active competent social agents who have influence on their preschool society and the research process. At the same time, one must be aware of the influences educators, the researcher and society have on the children and their activities in the preschool.

In preschool, children form relationships with other children outside the family, who are important members of their lives. Children create their own *peer cultures* by using the experience and knowledge they have gained at home to participate in social events with peers (Corsaro 1992). *Peers* have been specified as children who spend time together in preschools

on a daily basis over longer periods of time (Löfdahl 2014). *Culture* has been defined 'both as the context within which the child develops and the context into which the child develops' (Rogers 2010, 153). Löfdahl (2014) argues that peer cultures are contexts for children, where they change and expand their understanding of the community by using their experiences, meanings and actions to contribute to the society, both here and now and also in the future. Peer culture is, according to Corsaro (2015), a relatively stable set of activities or routines, artefacts, values and concerns that children produce and share in interaction with peers. In peer cultures children are likely to share norms, attitudes and values, which they express in their play and other activities.

In this study, the children are seen as competent and active participants in shaping and sharing values, concerns, materials and routines. They use experiences and knowledge gained from family and preschool society to create their own culture of peers. Therefore, in each of the two preschools there is a unique peer culture that is created by the preschool community: the children, their families and the educators. This is the lens that was used in this study, both when exploring children's activities in their preschool settings and when the children participated in the research process by observing and discussing their own activities.

Children's perspectives on play

Play in preschools has been studied from the perspective of different groups, such as educators (Wu 2014), parents (O'Gorman and Ailwood 2012) and children (Brooker 2014). This study explains how children view their activities in their preschool settings, which means that the children's own experiences, perceptions and understandings of their life world are presented (Sommer, Samuelsson, and Hundeide 2013). Research with children about their activities in preschool settings has indicated that they have different views from adults on play (Dockett and Perry 2007) and that children generally make a clear distinction between play and non-play (Einarsdottir 2017). This study focuses on children's views on play and non-play.

Researchers have found different characteristics of children's activities that need to be established if children are to view their activities as play (Brooker 2014). The findings from a study by Wong, Wang, and Cheng (2011) suggest that children see play as a self-initiated activity, intrinsically motivated, enjoyable, creative and often involving social interaction. These findings are in line with other studies indicating that children see play as an informal, creative and enjoyable activity in which they use their imagination, take on roles, and are in control. Also, children often consider play as a social activity, because they find it important to have someone to play with (Brooker 2014).

Educators and researchers have developed ways to reframe, rethink and redefine the role of play in early childhood settings by inviting children to take part in the discussion. Theobald and Danby (2014) explored how children explain their activities in preschool. When the children were asked about their activities, they named the activity, for example, building or listening, rather than using the term *play* for what they were doing. The term *play* did not come up until it was introduced to them by the educators. The educators interpreted this as children's play being a part of who they were; therefore, they did not label activities separately, that is, play or non-play.

In different cultures, children may view their activities in different ways (Wu 2015). Wu (2015) studied the difference between Chinese and German children's views on play and learning in kindergarten. She found that some of the Chinese children considered activities such as singing, stringing beads and reading as types of play. However, the German children only considered their free-play as play. Wu suggested that the children were influenced by the educators' view of play, that is, the Chinese educators believed many of children's activities were play, while the German educators considered only children's free-play as play.

Research where children's views were taken into consideration also emphasised characteristics of non-play activities. Children seem to view non-play as activities controlled by educators and activities that require a specific outcome (Brooker 2014; Samuelsson and Carlsson 2008). This does not necessarily mean that the children relate play to the absence or involvement of educators, but they do consider activities controlled by the educators as non-play (Howard, Jenvey, and Hill 2006). The children in Theobald et al.'s (2015) study distinguished between play and non-play activities, and they used the term *work* for the latter. Some children said that they were working but not playing in the arts room and that they were not playing when they needed to listen to the educators and learn from them.

The current study

As reported here, play has been studied from different disciplines and perspectives; however, a better understanding of play in peer cultures is needed and this can be done by asking the players themselves (Howard and McInnes 2012). This article discusses play from children's perspectives, building on childhood studies from a sociological construct. The aim of this study is to explain how the children themselves experience their activities in preschool. This is done by using video-stimulated accounts (Theobald 2012), which means that the children's activities are video-recorded and they are invited to observe them and discuss their activities. The discussions with the children are also recorded and used for further analysis. The video-stimulated recordings with the children will, therefore, add to the studies of play from children's perspectives. The research question that will be answered in this article is: *What characterises activities in preschool that children consider play and non-play?*

Methodology

The present study was conducted in two preschool settings with children aged three to five years and is inspired by ethnographic approaches. This means the researcher, who is the first author of this article, engaged in fieldwork for an extended period of time, from February 2015 until January 2016. She spent four to five months in each preschool setting, three days a week, three to four hours each day. In this environment she got to know the children, the educators and the culture of the settings (Silverman 2013) and undertook participant observation, which was documented in field notes (see Corsaro 1985). The researcher was aware that her position as an adult in the setting could be more powerful than the children's position (Löfdahl 2010). Therefore, for the purpose of equalising the power relationship between the researcher and the children, the researcher acted differently from the educators in the setting by taking part in the children's different activities. For example, she sat on the floor with the children during circle time when the educators sat on chairs, and she took part in children's freely chosen activities while the educators usually watched.

Participants and context

This study was conducted with two groups of children in two preschools in Reykjavík, Iceland. One criterion for choosing these preschools was that the settings needed to include at least one qualified preschool teacher on the staff, whereas only 30% of the staff in Icelandic preschools are qualified. Another criterion was that the setting has to emphasise children's learning through play, as specified in the Icelandic National Curriculum guidelines for preschools (Ministry of Education, Science, and Culture 2011). Most of the children who participated in the study had attended preschool since the age of two and stayed there for seven to nine hours on weekdays. Therefore, the children were quite familiar with each other, the educators, and the setting.

First, all gatekeepers (the municipality, preschool principals, educators and the children's parents) were asked for informed consent (Dockett, Einarsdóttir, and Perry 2011; Gallacher and Gallagher 2008). Next the children themselves were asked for informed assent being gatekeepers in their own account (Danby and Farrell 2005). All gatekeepers gave their consent and 46 children out of 52 gave their assent. The children who participated were invited to choose a pseudonym for their preschool and for their name. This was done with the aim of helping the children understand the researcher's duty of confidentiality. The preschools were given the names Ravenswood and Butterfly.

In the first preschool, Ravenswood, 18 out of 20 children and four educators participated. The preschool was chosen because a certified preschool teacher was on the staff and the children had approximately one hour for play or freely chosen activities in the morning. This was the activities on which this study would mainly focus. The setting was rather small and divided into two rooms, one smaller than the other. The smaller room had one large table and the bigger room had two large tables. Thus, the children's freely chosen activities often took place sitting at tables. Activities often observed involved puzzles, drawing, building with Lego and playing board games. The children's views of play in Ravenswood influenced how the second preschool setting was chosen; that is, there needed to be more emphasis on activities that took place on the floor with different materials than was often the case in the first preschool.

In the Butterfly preschool, 28 children out of 32 and five educators participated. This setting was spacious and divided into four rooms, two big rooms and two small rooms. The two smaller rooms had tables but there were none in the bigger rooms. Therefore, children's freely chosen activities often took place on the floor. In this setting, the children's choice of activities often involved unit blocks, hollow blocks, clothing/dressing, household equipment, plastic animals, dolls and drawing. Here, the children had more time for free activities and play in the morning than at Ravenswood. After circle time and group activities, there were often two to three hours remaining for freely chosen activities. In both settings, when the children had time for freely chosen activities, the educators were close by but usually did not take part in the activities.

Method and analysis

Video-stimulated recordings were used to support children's conversations about their activities in their preschool settings (Theobald 2012). Children's varying activities in different areas in the preschool settings were recorded. The children who were observed in the

Table 1. Number and length of recorded activities and conversations with the children.

Preschool	Number of activity recordings	Total length of activity recordings	Number of recorded conversations	Total length of recorded conversations with children
Ravenswood	16	2 h 12 min	13	2 h 16 min
Butterfly	20	5 h 23 min	16	4 h 56 min

recordings were invited to watch them and talk about their activities. This meant, they had opportunities to explain the recordings and discuss what they were doing in the activities recorded and interpret what the other children and educators were doing. The children were asked open-ended questions to encourage them to go into a deeper conversation, for example, 'What were you doing there?' and 'How do you play?' The conversations with the children took from 10 min up to 35 min.

The researcher made sure that all children who wanted to participate in the study were recorded and had an opportunity to watch and take part in discussions. All recorded activities were used to support children's conversations and the researcher did not stop data gathering until she found she had answers to the research questions, and the children began repeating themselves. For example, in the first setting at the time when the researcher thought she had got the answers, a girl said to her, 'You are always asking the same questions'. This convinced the researcher that the conversation had been saturated. The conversations were video-recorded and then transcribed and used for further analysis. Table 1 shows the number and length of the recordings of the children's activities and conversations.

As Table 1 indicates, there is a difference in number and length of the recordings of children's activities and conversations with the children between the two preschools. The first reason is the number of children who participated, 18 children at Ravenswood and 28 children at Butterfly. Therefore, there were more recordings taken in the latter. The second reason is that recordings of activities that took place while children sat at tables were shorter than those that took place on the floor where children had the opportunity to move around. Also, the conversations with the children about activities that took place on the floor were longer than those of children who were seated.

The conversations with the children were transcribed verbatim and physical expressions were registered as well, such as when a child nodded instead of saying yes or showed some kind of emotional state, like sadness. Therefore, the transcript indicated what the participants did and said (Corsaro 1985). The transcribed conversations with the children were coded looking for things that recurred, salience and patterns (Graue and Walsh 1998; Lichtman 2010) related to the children's play and non-play activities. The focus was on freely chosen activities and how the children explained what they were doing in those activities.

Trustworthiness

The findings of this study were introduced to the children at the end of the data construction phase. The researcher wrote a story about the findings, in language that was simple and understandable for the children, and read it to the children and the educators to determine what they thought of it, such as if they recognised the story as relating to them. While the story was read, the children had opportunities to provide their views and opinions.

Most of the children showed interest in listening to the story. They were excited to hear their pseudonyms quoted but they did not make many comments. However, in the Butterfly preschool, one boy stopped the researcher when she was reading the story and said, 'It was not like that'. When asked, 'How was it?' he could not explain what he meant, but he did not want his quote in the findings. Following his comment, the quote was erased from the summary of the findings. The researcher interpreted the children's reaction to the story to be that the findings did not surprise them. She was not telling them anything new; this was, of course, something they already knew. Thus, the children saw themselves relating to the findings, on which they mostly agreed.

Findings and discussion

The recordings of the children's conversations indicated that they had both common and different views on their activities in their preschool settings. This section will discuss how the children viewed their activities, that is, how they explained some activities as play and others as non-play. The children explained: play needed preparation, but the preparation was not play. They further indicated that different ways of using materials influenced the explanations of their activities. Additionally, they expressed the belief that the activity of drawing was different from play. The findings presented here show characteristics of activities the children considered play and non-play.

'The play has not started yet' – preparing for play

A common characteristic of play, according to the children, was that it had a preparation phase where the children set the stage, decided which roles to play and decided who could be involved in the play. Once the preparation was finished, the actual play could begin. One example from a recording in the Butterfly preschool illustrated this. A girl named Jóhanna called out, 'The play has not started yet' to let the other children know that she was still preparing and not ready to start the actual play. In the recording, she was building a cat house with hollow blocks and putting the props in place. The researcher asked Jóhanna, 'What were you doing before the play started?' to which she responded, 'We were practising'. The researcher asked 'how do you practise?' Jóhanna then crawled on the floor and showed the researcher how to play the cat.

At Ravenswood, the researcher had a discussion with three girls who were dressing dolls during one of the recordings. The girls said that the educator had asked them to dress the dolls because they had guests coming to the preschool later that day. She then asked the girls if they were playing. The girls responded by saying they were not playing, and Sól explained further, 'This is just like dressing yourself'. Then the researcher asked the girls if they thought they could play with the dolls and the girls agreed they could. The researcher followed up the conversation by asking them how they used the dolls in play. Extract 1 contains the responses of two of the girls.

Extract 1
Sól: Then you just do whatever you like with them, something you know how, except bending them.
R: If you wanted to play with the dolls, what would you do?
Sól: Then we would play 'house'.
R: Play house ... how do you do that?
Elísa: Then you play with all the material.

R:	All the material … what do you do then?
Sól:	Then we play the big sister and the mom and dad and brother and the little baby or something.
R:	Yes … what do you do next … when you have decided who is the sister and mom and …
Sól:	Then you just play, start to play.

In this example, Sól and Elísa explain how the dolls can be used for play. Sól said that when playing with the dolls, she could do whatever she liked with them, building on her knowledge, skills and experience. When Sól 'does whatever she likes', she needs to be in control of the activity using her imagination and creativity, which is in harmony with the findings of Brooker (2014). In this way, Sól uses her imagination, creativity and knowledge to contribute to the preschool community through play, which is in line with other studies (Corsaro 2015; Löfdahl 2014). Sól also said that she could not bend the dolls, that is, the dolls could not be treated roughly, which can be related to one of the rules of the role she played (Bodrova 2008) as someone who takes care of a baby and handles it carefully. She could also be referring to the rules of the setting made by educators indicating that children are not allowed to handle materials roughly. This example illustrates how the girls actively contributed to their peer culture through play, while at the same time appropriating information from the adult world (Corsaro 2015). The dolls were often used for play; however, this was not always exclusively the case. The activity of dressing the dolls because guests were expected was not play, because it was controlled by the educator and had the purpose of getting them dressed. This correlates with other studies that show that children do not define as play activities which are controlled by educators and which have specific outcomes (Brooker 2014; Samuelsson and Carlsson 2008).

Sól and Elísa in Ravenswood preschool explained in Extract 1 how play needed to be prepared before it began. This is similar to Jóhanna in Butterfly preschool who said she needed to practice before the play could start. Sól and Elísa also explained how they used all the material and decided which roles to play before the actual play could begin. The preparation was a necessary part of the children's play, often enjoyable and taking considerable time. According to the girls, this part of the activity was not play.

Building with blocks is sometimes play

The children explained how different ways of using the material in the setting could influence how they viewed their activities, that is, if they viewed their activities as play or non-play. At Ravenswood, the researcher had a discussion with four children, two boys and two girls, about how they viewed their activities in their preschool setting. The children had chosen to use domino blocks on the floor and they had different opinions on the activity. When the children watched the video recording and commented on what they were doing, the girls said that they were not playing because they were just arranging the blocks or lining them up. The boys, however, said that they were playing and they were adamant in their discussion about this activity. Extract 2 below is an example of the video-stimulated conversation with the children where Guðmundur explains to the researcher why the boys think the activity of using domino blocks is play.

Extract 2

R:	Why do you think this is play?
Guðmundur:	Because you can decide what you do with it and these blocks could be men and something.
R:	So you think maybe there needs to be men for this to be play?
Guðmundur:	Yes, the blocks can be men … this is also a game.

This example shows that for Guðmundur, acting out roles was important in order for the activity to be called play. Also, he needed to be able to make decisions about what to do with material, for example, changing blocks into men or something else. This is in harmony with how other research views children's play (Brooker 2014), such that if the children's activities involve being in control, taking on roles, and using their imagination, they consider the activity to be play. These characteristics of children's play are in accordance with how children's make-believe play has been described by other researchers (Bodrova 2008; Bodrova and Leong 2015); that is, the children suggested that they were playing when they acted out roles, created an imaginary situation, and followed rules related to the play.

In this study, the children's explanations of which activities were play and which were non-play were sometimes connected to how the children used the material. This was evident when the four children using the domino blocks explained their activities. Guðmundur's explanation of how he could decide what to do with the blocks and that they 'could be men and something', can be interpreted as him being able to use the blocks in a different way from what is expected (Reunamo et al. 2013). On the one hand, when the domino blocks were used as expected by lining them up and making them fall, the activity was not viewed as play by the girls, but rather as a game like the boys also suggested. On the other hand, when the children were able to change the blocks and make them into something different, such as men, the boys said that the activity was play. Thus, the children's choices of how they used the material influenced how they viewed their activities.

'Drawing and playing are not the same'

When the children observed the video recordings and had discussions about activities that took place in the arts room they usually said they were not playing. When two girls at Ravenswood, Elena and Elísa, watched themselves colouring in a recording, they said that this was not play. However, they said that they could play while colouring if they were having fun doing it. The researcher had a similar discussion with some children in the Butterfly preschool where Selma, Áróra and Jóhanna were watching a recording of themselves drawing in the arts room. They said that they were usually not playing when they were in the arts room; they played in other areas and said that drawing was not play. Extract 3 shows an example of the video-stimulated conversation:

Extract 3
R: You said that you were not playing in there, that drawing was not play. When do you play then?
Áróra: When we are not in the arts room.
R: Why is drawing not play? Can you explain that?
Áróra: Because drawing and playing are not the same.
Selma: Playing is what Jóhanna was doing before [she came here]; then she was not drawing.
R: Jóhanna, how did you play?
Áróra: You were playing house or hollow blocks.
Jóhanna: I was playing house and tomorrow I am going to choose the hollow blocks.

The girls agreed that drawing and playing were not the same, which is similar to the findings of Theobald and Danby (2014). Selma could not really explain what play was, but she pointed at Jóhanna's activity of playing house to clarify the difference between play and drawing. Elena's explanation that drawing is not play but that she could have fun doing it indicates that she views drawing as a playful activity rather than actual play. This can be related to the idea that play is something children like to do (Brooker 2014; Howard, Jenvey, and Hill 2006), although having fun doing activities does not necessarily mean that the

children are playing. Also, the children can find ways to play in different situations even though the activity they are participating in is itself not viewed as play.

Most of the children viewed the activity of drawing and colouring as non-play. However, in the Ravenswood preschool, two children said that the activity of painting a picture of themselves was play, in contrast to what the other children had said. These two children, the oldest children in the setting, participated more often in formal activities than the younger children, and made visits to the primary school they were soon going to attend. This can be related to findings from Wu's (2015) study, which indicates that children who participate in a more formal learning environment define their activities more broadly than children in playful preschool practice. As Corsaro (2015) argues, children are active in influencing their preschool community, but they are also influenced by the educator's views and actions.

Other studies with children in preschools have shown that children named the activity rather than used the term *play* for what they were doing (Theobald et al. 2015). However, a pattern was observed in the data of this study. First, when the children were asked what they were doing in the recordings and their first response was naming the activity – for example, drawing, painting, or building – they usually agreed that they were not playing. But when the children were asked and their first response was 'playing', they often referred to activities in which they took on roles or were pretending and made their own decisions of how to use the material.

Summary and conclusion

The purpose of this paper was to explain how children viewed their activities in the preschool setting, with a special focus on activities the children explained as play and non-play. Video-stimulated conversations were used to study the children's different activities in their peer culture. This was an ethnographic study conducted in two preschool settings in Iceland; thus the strength of this study is that the researcher took part in children's peer culture over an extended period of time. The children were seen as active participants in the research process and competent in observing their own recorded activities and explaining what they were doing. Therefore, the researcher could learn from the children's experiences of their activities in the preschool setting.

The limitation of this study is that the findings apply only to the children who participated in the two preschool settings at the time the study was conducted. Additionally, the findings are primarily based on the children's conversations with the researcher and each other, which gives children with good verbal skills a greater opportunity to contribute to the findings. However, the video-recorded conversations with the children also captured their different ways of communicating, such as physical expressions. The aim of this paper was not to give a precise definition of what play is; however, it does gives an important view of the phenomenon from children's perspectives.

When the children who participated in this study explained when they were playing, they usually agreed on two aspects of their activities that needed to be in place in order to suggest *play*. The children needed to be able to act out roles and decide what to do with the material, as Guðmundur pointed out when he said, 'You can decide what to do with it [the material] and the blocks can be men or something'. This leads to the assumption that play from a

child's perspective is strongly related to Bodrova's (2008) definition of make-believe play, that is, the children are playing when they create an imaginary situation and act out roles.

Another aspect related to the children's play was that it required preparation. The children had to prepare by building the environment and taking on roles. This part of the activity was not regarded as play, as has been found in other studies (Theobald et al. 2015). The play did not begin until the preparation or practice was completed, as was observed when Jóhanna announced to the other children, 'The play has not started yet' to let them know that she was still practicing and preparing for play. This was also observed when Sól and Elísa explained how to play with the dolls. Before the actual play could begin, they took out the material, made it ready and decided which roles to play. The preparation of children's play was often observed by the researcher as an enjoyable activity which took considerable time. Therefore, it is important for educators to take into account when planning the preschool practice that children need time to prepare their activities before they start playing, thus, giving time for uninterrupted play time.

The two preschools in this study had different emphases in their practice. In the Ravenswood preschool, the children were often observed sitting at tables doing activities that they did not consider to be play, for example, drawing and participating in board games. There were not many opportunities for children's make-believe play because of how the setting was organised and the choices of materials accessible to the children. In the Butterfly preschool, on the other hand, the setting was spacious and organised in such a way that the children had diverse materials and uninterrupted time for make-believe play. The children pointed out the differences between play and non-play activities. This was apparent when Áróra stated, 'Drawing and playing are not the same'. The children were often engaged and enjoyed these different activities indicating that a more balanced approach would be preferable in preschool settings where children can choose between varied activities based on their needs and interests. However, it is critical to take into account the curriculum guidelines that suggest play is children's main way of learning.

Research has indicated that in today's preschools, children's activities seldom fit the definition of play and children have limited time for play because of pressure on educators to start teaching children academic skills at a young age (Bodrova 2008; Bodrova and Leong 2015). This is also the case in Icelandic preschools (Einarsdottir 2017). In the Ravenswood preschool, only a few of the children's recorded activities were viewed as play by the children. After introducing these findings to the educators, they began to observe and find ways to change the environment and add materials that support children's play. In that way, the educators needed to develop their practice to further meet the requirements of the Icelandic National Curriculum for preschools (2011) and place greater emphasis on children's play in the setting. For preschool educators, this is something worth considering: how many of children's activities in their setting are considered play by the children? How is the setting organised and what kind of materials are accessible to the children?

This study contributes to research with children about their views of play and non-play activities in preschools. The study can be of value for early childhood educators by helping them to understand how children explain their activities in preschool settings, so that they can further support children's learning through play. Therefore, it is critical that children's perspectives are taken into account in the discussion of play in preschools. This study only emphasises children's perspectives on play and non-play. The educators were not asked about their perspectives and, therefore, this is not discussed in the paper. However, it would

have been interesting to determine how the educators in these two settings interpreted children's activities.

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Article II. 'You need to own cats to be a part of the play': Icelandic preschool children challenge adult-initiated rules in play

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'You need to own cats to be a part of the play': Icelandic preschool children challenge adult-initiated rules in play

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ABSTRACT

In preschool settings, children challenge the adult-initiated rules in many ways during their play activities with peers. This ethnographic study with children aged 3–5 years was built on Corsaro's sociology of childhood construct that views children as agents and active participants in preschool society. The study is conducted in two preschools in Iceland, and explores children's perspectives of adult-initiated rules in their preschool settings and how they challenge these rules in their play activities. Children's perspectives were explored by video-recording their play activities and inviting the children to watch and discuss the recordings. The children reported how they interactionally managed the adult-initiated rules in their preschool settings. The findings indicate the different strategies used by the children to challenge these rules, which were often related to who could take part in the play. The implication of the study is a better understanding of the complexity of rules within and around children's play in peer cultures. Such understanding offers educators awareness of how these rules influence children's participation in play activities.

Introduction

Play is considered important in early childhood education as it is recognised as being beneficial for children's development, use of social knowledge and practices, and creation of peer culture (Corsaro 1985; Grieshaber and McArdle 2014). Play is considered to lay a foundation for crucial life skills, such as problem solving, creativity, and empathy (Rogers 2011). In play, children develop their identity, their curiosity, and their ability to learn and construct local social orders as they bring knowledge and experiences to play activities. For instance, social order can be observed in how some children are included by peers in play contexts but others excluded (Löfdahl 2010). Many of these interactions involve the children's orientation to rules, and adults and children alike can initiate these. Rules are critical in early childhood settings so that children and educators can function together (Thornberg 2009). These rules, often constructed by educators, usually are related to what is expected of children and their behaviour (Corsaro 1985; Thornberg 2009). Children adjust and follow educators' rules, but they also try to

challenge or resist these rules to gain more control of their lives (Corsaro 2015). Children's resistance can be described as being agentic in that they are displaying that they are able to make decisions about their everyday lives. This article explores how children themselves experience rules made by educators in their preschool settings and how they challenge these rules in freely chosen play activities. This article contributes to a better understanding of rules in preschools from the children's perspectives.

The data are drawn from a research project with children, aged 3–5 years, conducted in two preschool settings in Reykjavik, Iceland. This is part of a larger study on children's perspectives on their activities in their peer cultures in Iceland and Australia. The study is built on sociology of childhood constructs that views children as competent, strong and active participants in society (Corsaro 2015). The methodology of the study is based on Corsaro's (1985) ethnographic research with children. Video-stimulated accounts were used to understand children's perspectives (Theobald 2012). This method involved video-recording children's play activities in the preschool settings and inviting the children in the video-recordings to watch them and to discuss what they were doing. This approach was able to show how children talked about their preschool experiences of adult-initiated rules in their peer cultures, and how these rules influenced their participation in freely chosen play activities.

Rules in preschool settings

Educators make rules in preschools to create and maintain social order, to regulate children's behaviour, and to make different school activities function. Thornberg's (2009) Swedish study investigated what he called the hidden curriculum of school rules in primary schools. The findings suggest that almost every action that children take in their setting is covered by rules. Some of the children who participated in his study trusted the educator's competence in making rules with which they agreed, but other children were critical of the rules and wanted to participate in making them. Still other children argued that they were dependent on the educator's rules for the reason of functioning together in the setting, as chaos would emerge without rules. Thornberg concluded that school rules could be problematic because of the risk of resulting in blind obedience.

Significant changes occur in children's lives when they start preschool. Starting preschool usually means that children's social worlds are broadened to include educators, and they are more likely to interact with more children than they usually do in their home contexts. When children attend preschool and participate in daily routines, they gradually feel a sense of belonging where they come to see themselves as a part of a group and they create their own peer cultures (Corsaro 1988; Theobald and Reynolds 2015). The emergence of peer cultures in preschools can be shaped by the educators' boundary maintenance, which includes the educators' ideas, materials, rules, and restrictions in the preschool setting (Corsaro 1985). Peers, as well, shape that social world in their own social spaces to undertake their own social activities (Danby 2002). In other words, children's activities can involve an orientation to both educator and peer constructed rules.

Corsaro (2015) uses the concepts *primary adjustment* and *secondary adjustment* to explain how the process of the emergence of peer culture can happen. Primary adjustment refers to when children are under the control of adults in that they are told what to do, for example obey and adjust behaviour (Corsaro 2015). This type of behaviour can be related

to rules in preschools, made by educators and which children follow. Rules have been described as 'cultural resources to which members orient in order to make sense of their social worlds' and often the purpose is to provide guidance towards appropriate conduct (Cobb-Moore, Danby, and Farrell 2009, 1478). Primary adjustment, in this study, is therefore used as a lens to explore adult-initiated rules in the preschool settings.

Secondary adjustment means that children seem to have adjusted to following the educators' rules, but actually they are undertaking a collective form of resistance (Corsaro 2015). In this way, children deal with and challenge the rules and authority of educators in order to gain control of their lives. Löfdahl (2014, 344), working within a 'sociology of childhood' framework, suggests that secondary adjustment can be seen when children ignore or exclude other children from play even though the educator's rule says 'anyone can join'. Secondary adjustment is used to investigate how children responded to the adult-initiated rules in their play activities in peer cultures.

Educators usually have good intentions when planning children's activities and making rules in the preschool settings. However, children sometimes use the educators' input in an opposite way than was intended, for the benefit of creating and maintaining the children's social positioning in their peer culture (Löfdahl 2010). Corsaro (2015) suggests that, even though children adjust and follow educators' rules, they also try to challenge or resist these rules to gain more control of their lives. They may appropriate the educators' rules for the purposes of constructing their own peer culture that both draws on the adult rules but also circumvents them (Danby and Baker 1998a). This article explores children's accounts of their own activities to understand more about when rules are challenged or resisted.

Children as social agents and competent rule makers

Within a sociology of childhood perspective, children are viewed as being agentic. This means that children are competent and active participants in co-constructing their social worlds. They use their experiences, knowledge, and collective actions to produce and reproduce their peer cultures (Corsaro 2005). This view is emphasised in this study along with *The Convention of the Rights of the Child* (United Nations 1989) that was signed in Iceland in the year 1990, ratified in the year 1992, and became a part of the Icelandic laws in 2013. According to the Convention, children have rights to have a say in matters that affect them in any way and, at the same time, keep their best interests in the forefront. From these perspectives, children are constructed as competent and active participants in constructing the preschool society.

While children are viewed as competent according to the Convention, in practice their agency as rule makers and law-enforcers within their preschool settings may not always be recognised. They use different strategies to create their own social order and rules within the setting constructed and regulated by adults (Cobb-Moore, Danby, and Farrell 2009). Children's creation of social order in their peer culture is complex and often occurs outside the audible and visual scrutiny of the educators (Danby and Baker 1998b). Being a part of a shared peer culture, sometimes outside the gaze of educators, can be experienced differently by each child even though children take part in similar activities (Sandberg and Eriksson 2010). Children use a variety of social, linguistic and cognitive skills when entering play activities with peers. Also, children's play 'poses the challenge of competing with others for power and status as well as negotiating with them to

achieve consensus and reciprocity' (Sheldon 1996, 73). Löfdahl (2010) concluded that children construct conditions for participation in play activities in preschool settings within and through their peer cultures. However, little has been reported from the children's own accounts about their role and participation in rules.

Children often spend years together in preschools where they seek social participation in play with peers and create their own peer cultures (Corsaro 1985; Rizzo and Corsaro 1995). In their peer cultures, children learn about social structures, power relationships, and participation in activities (Löfdahl 2010). Children's social status in their peer culture depends on a variety of factors, such as their knowledge, gender, age, and size, all of which influence how they can participate in the play activities (Danby 1996; Grieshaber and McArdle 2010). Löfdahl and Hägglund (2006) found that older children often decide who can participate in play and that they find ways, verbally or nonverbally, to include or exclude peers from play without breaking the educator's rules. Rizzo and Corsaro (1995) suggest that what some educators might think of as exclusion could also mean that children are protecting their interactive space, that is, protecting their ongoing play activity.

Children's play in preschool is influenced by the cultures, rules, and practices in the settings. These aspects reflect the pedagogical beliefs of the educators, the materials, spatial resources, and time available for freely chosen play, that is, the educators decide which choices are available and what degrees of freedom are allowed in play (Wood 2014). Van Oers (2014) suggests that children's play is never free because of rules around and within play. He argues that part of the excitement of play for children is to solve the inherent tensions between rules and freedom, to explore the action possibilities of activities in their own ways within the confines of their interpretations of the compelling limits of these activities.

Within the sociology of childhood framework, social differences matter in children's peer cultures (Löfdahl 2010; Wood 2014). Wood (2014) suggests that, when forming relationships with other children, children construct social orders that influence the actions of children on others, their positions within the groups, and the effect they can have on educators' rules. Löfdahl (2010) points out that, when children construct social order in their peer groups, social differences matter. The cultural and social knowledge that children bring to a play situation influences how the interaction unfolds. Some children get to play and some do not.

Children seem to recognise the social orders in play in their preschool settings. Corsaro's (1985) study on children's interaction in their peer cultures concluded that the children had clear conceptions of status and power in their play. In the play activity that he observed, one of the children was positioned as the 'boss'. Being the boss meant that the child had more power and the duty to give orders. 'There were no violations of status expectations; that is, the baby never told the mother what to do, the kitties never chased their masters from the house, workers never gave orders to the boss' (97). In some play activities, there was no need for 'bosses'; that is, the children requested joint actions, which meant that they did things together. Being the boss is not always a successful strategy, however. Theobald and Danby (in press) showed how, after viewing themselves playing a pretend game of school, a group of girls complained about another girl who made all the decisions about the game. This resulted in a breakdown of the friendship group and had consequences for their future play activities.

Play is an important part of preschool practice, and rules have been seen as necessary in preschool settings so that children and educators can function together (Corsaro 1985; Thornberg 2009). However, research has indicated that interactional rules in preschool settings are complicated and can lead to blind obedience by some children, while other children try to challenge or resist the educator's rules (Corsaro 1985; Cobb-Moore, Danby, and Farrell 2009; Thornberg 2009). This article contributes to the understanding of rules in preschool settings from children's perspectives. The following research question is to be addressed: *How do the children experience adult-initiated rules in their preschool settings and how do they challenge these rules in their play activities?*

Participants and methods

This study, with children aged 3–5 years, was inspired by ethnographic approaches and took place in two preschools in Reykjavik, Iceland. The researcher, who is the first author of this article, spent four months in each preschool. Most of the children who participated in the study had attended preschool since the age of two and stayed in the preschool 7–9 hours a day. Therefore, the children were familiar with each other, the educators, and the setting.

In the first preschool, Ravenswood preschool (pseudonym), there were 20 children and four educators. The children had approximately one hour for free activities or free play after breakfast every morning, until the children had story time and group activities that were often decided by the educators. The setting was rather small and divided into two rooms, one smaller than the other. The smaller room had one big table and the bigger room had two big tables. Thus, the children's freely chosen activities often took place sitting at tables. Activities often observed were puzzles, drawing, building Lego, and playing games.

In the second preschool, Butterfly preschool (pseudonym), there were 32 children and five educators. Here, the children had a longer time for free activities and play in the morning. After circle time and group activities there were often two to three hours left for freely chosen activities. This setting was spacious and divided into four rooms, two big rooms and two small rooms. The two smaller rooms had tables, but there were none in the bigger rooms. Therefore, children's freely chosen activities often took place on the floor. In this setting the children's choice of activities was often unit blocks, hollow blocks, clothing/dressing, household equipment, plastic animals, and dolls. In both settings, when the children had time for freely chosen activities, the educators were close to the children, but usually the educators did not take part in the children's activities.

In preschools, children's positions often are less powerful than educators in that the educators are seen as authority figures (Corsaro 1985; Thornberg 2009). This is recognised in researching with children, where the researcher is in a more powerful position than the children (Dockett, Einarsdóttir, and Perry 2011). For the purpose of equalising the power relationship between the researcher and the children, the researcher acted in different ways to those of the educators. In the study reported here, the researcher took part in children's different activities in a similar way to Corsaro's (1985) approach. When entering the settings, the researcher undertook participant observation, using field-notes (for a description of this approach, see Corsaro 1985). For example, she sat on the floor with the

children in group circle time and took part in children's freely chosen activities. For the first month in each preschool, the researcher learned the names of the children, emphasised creating a trusting relationship with them, and became familiar with the culture of the settings. Then she began the video-stimulated recordings.

Video-recordings were used to stimulate children's conversations about their activities in their preschool settings. This approach is called video-stimulated accounts (Theobald 2012). Children's different activities in different areas in the preschool settings were recorded. The children who were observed in the recordings were invited to watch it and talk about their activities, which gave them opportunities to explain the recordings, discuss what they were doing in the activities recorded, and interpret what the other children and educators were doing. The children were asked open-ended questions to encourage them to go into a deeper conversation, for example 'what were you doing there?' and 'how do you make decisions?' The conversations with the children took from 10 minutes up to 35 minutes. These conversations were video-recorded.

The conversations with the children were transcribed verbatim and physical expressions were registered as well, such as when a child nodded instead of saying yes or showed some kind of emotional state, like sadness. Therefore, the transcript indicated what the participants did and said (O'Reilly 2012). The transcribed conversations with the children were sorted into categories and emerging themes (Braun and Clarke 2006; Lichtman 2010) related to rules in and around children's freely chosen play activities. On one hand, the focus was on primary adjustment where children explained adult-initiated rules in their preschool settings. On the other hand, emphasis was on secondary adjustment when children resisted or challenged the educator's rules in play in peer culture. Therefore, the main data of this study are the recordings of children's different activities in their preschool setting and the children's conversations with the researcher about their activities.

Ethical matters

Ethical matters were considered during every level of the research process, including the preparation of the research, gathering of data, analysing the data, and interpretation of the data. All gatekeepers gave their written informed consent. These gatekeepers were the municipality that runs the preschools, preschool principals, educators, and the children's parents. After gaining informed consent from the gatekeepers, all the children were informed about the research so they would know what was expected of them, and they were asked for informed assent (Danby and Farrell 2005; Einarsdóttir 2007; Dockett, Einarsdóttir, and Perry 2011). When the children were informed about the research they were asked what they thought research was, and their definitions were documented. One group of children responded by saying that scientists do research, experiment, and know many things. They also suggested that research was about looking very closely into something, like using a magnifier. They argued that research was about finding things, searching, describing, and telling stories. The children's knowledge and definitions were used as a guide when the study was explained to the children and what was expected of them.

When the study was explained to the children, they were told that the researcher was some kind of scientist who was very curious about their activities in the preschool and that she wanted to look closely into what they were doing. Instead of using a magnifier to find

out, she would use a video-recorder. They could watch the recordings later, and explain what they were doing. At the end of the research, they would have an opportunity to hear the story about the findings. The expectations were explained to the children that they would be asked if their activities in the preschool setting could be recorded, and then they would be invited to watch the recording with the researcher and have a discussion about it. In addition, emphasis was on the children's rights to choose whether they wanted to participate or not.

Through the research process the researcher observed carefully the children's different ways of communicating their assent, verbally and physically, because children can communicate their assent differently (Danby and Farrell 2005). Even though the children gave their written informed assent at the beginning, they sometimes declined to participate when the researcher asked if she could turn on the recorder and also when she asked if they would like to watch the recordings. Therefore, some children participated in the entire research process and others took part in only some aspects of the study. The children were invited to choose a pseudonym for their preschool as well as a pseudonym for their name, with the aim to help the children to understand the researcher's duty of confidentiality.

In Ravenswood preschool 18 children out of 20 gave their assent and in Butterfly preschool 28 out of 32 children gave their assent. Therefore, the researcher neither video-recorded in the rooms which included children that did not want to participate, nor wrote notes about them or their activities. For example, one day when the researcher came to Butterfly preschool to video-record, the children that did not give their assent were playing in all four rooms. Because of that, no recordings were made that day.

At the end of the data collection phase, the findings were introduced to the children and the educators. A story was written about the findings, in a language that was simple and understandable for the children. Pictures from the research were used to clarify the text. The researcher read the story to the children and the educators to find out what they thought of it, such as if they recognised the story as relating to them. In that way, the children had an opportunity to provide their views. The following is an example of how the children influenced the findings:

> In Butterfly preschool, one boy stopped the researcher when she was reading the story and said: 'it was not like that' and when he was asked 'how was it?' he could not explain what he meant but he did not want his quote to be in the findings. Following his comment, the quote was erased from the summary of the findings.

Most children did not seem to consider the findings of much interest, although they listened carefully when their pseudonyms were quoted. It seemed like the researcher was not telling them anything new; this was of course something they already knew. In that way, the children saw themselves relating to the findings on which they mostly agreed.

Findings and discussion

Rules in the preschool settings can sometimes be confusing for an outsider, including the visiting researcher. When the researcher entered the preschool settings, she was sometimes uncertain about what was allowed and what was prohibited. For example, once when the children had time for free play activities, the researcher handed a girl a doll that was sitting

on a shelf where the children could not reach. The educator asked the researcher to put the doll back because the girl forgot to ask for permission. However, most of the children seemed confident about rules in the settings even though the rules were not visible or made explicit.

In this section, we discuss the findings under the following headings: children's views on educator's rules in their preschool setting, children challenging adult-initiated rules in their peer culture, and children using the educator's rules for their own purpose. The main findings are built on data from Butterfly preschool, supported by one example from Ravenswood preschool. The reason for this approach is that the children more often defined preschool children's activities as play in the Butterfly preschool than in the Ravenswood preschool.

Children's views on educator's rules in their preschool setting

When the children were asked about rules in their settings, they mostly mentioned the rules made by the educators. These rules were often related to how to behave, how much material was allowed, how many children could play together, and that they could not exclude other children from playing. Other examples of rules commonly mentioned by the children were 'you cannot run, be loud or hurt someone'. Thus, the children often referred to things they could not do. The children saw themselves learning rules in their preschool setting differently. For example, in Ravenswood preschool, Sól said that there were many rules and that the children learned the rules by coming to the preschool every day. This can be interpreted as she learned the rules bit by bit. At other times, the educators taught the rules and the children followed them. This was evident in the Butterfly preschool when Mía and Maja were watching a recording of themselves building hollow blocks. Below is the video-stimulated conversation about the recording:

Extract 1

R:	You said there were many rules in your preschool setting, how do you learn these rules.
Mía:	uum … well the educators teach us the rules.
R:	Do they teach you the rules?
Mía:	Yes, and we learn them.
R:	Do they make the rules and tell you the rules?
Mía:	Yes, and we do the ru[les].

The girls suggested the rules in the setting were made by educators and the children were expected to follow them, as was evidenced in Corsaro's (2015) study. The rules were a part of the children's everyday preschool practice and sometimes they seemed to be taken for granted, or as blind obedience as Thornberg (2009) suggested, both by the children and educators. For their play, the children saw both limitations and benefits of the rules. Mía said that the rules were not good for the children's play, for example if she wanted to play a cat that was running this was not allowed because of the rules. However, Snorri suggested that the rules were good for play because then he could learn how not to hurt other children while playing. Even though the children agreed that there were

adult-initiated rules in the settings, they also suggested that they could have some freedom and control of their play activities.

Among the children, there were a range of responses to the question about if they wanted to be in control of play. While some children did not pursue control of play activities and suggested that the children made joint decisions, other children found it necessary to control play activities, which is in harmony with Corsaro's (1985) findings. According to the children, taking control of play could mean that one of the children made decisions about who could take part in their play, which roles the other children should play, and what the other children should do in the play activity. The children who took control of play activities, often older children, were usually the same ones who managed the educator's rules, decided who could take part in a play activity, and gave orders, as other researchers have found (Corsaro 1985; Cobb-Moore, Danby, and Farrell 2009).

Children challenging adult-initiated rules in their peer culture

The children used different strategies in their play activities to challenge the educator's rules. Extracts 2 and 3 are two different examples of a girl who was searching for social participation, that is, trying to get access to children's play activities. However, the children who were in control of play used different strategies either to protect their ongoing activity or to exclude her from playing.

Children resisting the educator's rules by making their own rules in their play

The children used different strategies to include or exclude other children from play. In Butterfly preschool, three girls built a cat house from hollow blocks and were playing kitties. When Skoppa was watching the video of her participation in this activity, she commented that she had wanted to get access to the play activity with the three girls and that she had asked Jóhanna, who was in control of play, if she could participate. However, Jóhanna did not want to include Skoppa in the play activity and made arguments as to why not. Extract two below is a part of the video-stimulated conversation where Jóhanna was explaining the incident to Skoppa and the researcher.

Extract 2

Skoppa:	She did not let me play with them [looks at researcher].
R:	No, why not?
Skoppa:	Why did you not let me play with you? [Looks at Jóhanna].
Jóhanna:	Because there could only be three [children] and if you wanted to take part you needed to own cats. You could not be the big sister. She always wants to be the big sister [Looks at researcher].
R:	So she did not fit into the roles?
Jóhanna:	No, because there could only be three and she wanted to be the big sister.

The argument made by Jóhanna can be interpreted as three rules that indicate who can be a part of the play activity, that is, a) 'there can only be three [children]', b) 'you need to own cats', and c) 'you cannot be the big sister'. There were already three children playing and Skoppa did not own cats, and she always wanted to play the big sister. In the recording, Skoppa went to an educator who was nearby and told her that she was not allowed to participate in the play activity. The educator reminded Jóhanna of the rule about not

excluding other children and said: 'Jóhanna, we are all playing together, remember'. Then Skoppa was allowed to take part in the play activity but she could not be the big sister, according to Jóhanna.

This is an example of children striving to protect their interactive space, where a different role would change what the girls had already underway, as was evident in Rizzo and Corsaro's (1995) study. Jóhanna showed her competence by using three different rules of her own without breaking the educator's rules, as suggested by Löfdahl and Hägglund (2006). Moreover, in this study, there were conflicts between the educator's rule about including children in play and Jóhanna's rules about being three and owning cats. The educator's rule of not excluding others has more value than Jóhanna's rule and Skoppa needed to choose a different role from what she usually plays, that is, she liked to play the big sister because she was a big sister in real life. Therefore, Jóhanna's rule about owning cats had more value than Skoppa's wish for being the big sister in the play activity.

Children using the educator's rules for their own purpose

In one of the observations in Butterfly preschool, two girls, Selma and Magga, were playing house in a corner of one of the bigger rooms in the setting. Magga and Selma agreed that Selma was in control of play and that Selma could decide who could participate in the play activity. Three other girls, Sara, Skoppa, and Una, asked if they could be a part of the play activity. Below is Selma's explanation, from the video-stimulated recording, of who could play and who could not.

Extract 3

R: Look there [at the recording], everybody is asking 'can I participate?' How do you decide who participates in the play?
Selma: I decided that Sara could play.
Sara: I took part.
R: You took part and … was Una also allowed to participate?
Selma: Yes.
R: But why was Skoppa not allowed to participate?
Selma: Because, you know, the educator said that two [children] could come because two [children] had left [the area].
R: But Skoppa was the first to ask … wasn't she?
Selma: Yes, but I was afraid that everybody would step on her toe … because there is not much space in the corner.
R: There is not much space in the corner and how many children are allowed to play in the corner?
Selma: There can always be four [children] at a time.
R: Four at a time, who decides how many children can play in each area?
Selma: The educators.
R: Therefore, you said to Skoppa that there were already four?
Selma: Yes, four.

In this conversation, Selma says that Skoppa cannot play because there can only be four children in the area at a time, and refers to the educator's rule about the amount of children allowed in the area. Selma manipulated the educator's rules for the purpose of including some children but excluding others from the play activity, which also was prohibited.

Selma shows competence in the way that she appropriates adult language for her own purpose, a similar behaviour also was evident in Cobb-Moore, Danby, and Farrell's (2009) study. Selma used the educator's rule, in an opposite way than was intended, for the benefit of maintaining her social positioning in the peer group (Löfdahl 2010). Furthermore, this example shows conflicts between two rules both made by the educators, probably with the intention to include children in play and avoid chaos in a small area. However, the rule about four children in a play area at one time leads to exclusion. This can be interpreted that the educators value order in their setting over chaos and inclusion.

Conclusion

The purpose of the study was to gain a better understanding of how children experience adult-framed rules in their peer culture and how children challenge these rules in their play activities. The study video-recorded children's play activities in two preschools and asked the children about their activities as the children were observing their own video-recorded play. The findings suggest that the children agreed that many of the rules made by the educators were needed in their preschool settings. Primary adjustment therefore was often obvious; that is, the children knew the rules and did what was expected of them (Corsaro 2015). However, secondary adjustment was also noticed where the children resisted the rules made by the educators, for example by excluding other children from play even though the rule said 'everybody should play together' (Löfdahl 2014). The children who took control of play activities made rules within their play, often related to who could play and who could not, to resist the educator's rules.

The findings from this study supports the findings of Cobb-Moore, Danby, and Farrell (2009) that children are competent rule makers. This aspect of children's peer culture appeared in how the children resisted the educators' rules without breaking them (Löfdahl 2010). The children used different strategies to cope with the rules made by the educators; for example, they made their own rules for their own purpose and the purpose of the play activity, as other researchers have identified (Sheldon 1996; Cobb-Moore, Danby, and Farrell 2009). In the example with Jóhanna, the educator's rule said that 'everybody should play together' but Jóhanna made up a rule that said 'you need to own cats to be a part of the play'. In that way she made conditions for play by referring to something that is not even there, a strategy also noticed by Sheldon (1996). In this way Jóhanna could both include and exclude her peers for the purpose of the play activity. Another strategy used by the children was to manipulate the educator's rule regarding the number of children allowed in one area to include and exclude children from the play activity, as Selma did when she used the educator's rule to choose participants in her play activity. Corsaro (2015) suggests that, through secondary adjustment, children come to see themselves as part of a group. However, as this study shows, secondary adjustment also can lead to children experiencing exclusion from the peer group.

Children's play can never be free because of different limitations, often because of decisions made by educators, such as time available for play, space, and material (van Oers 2014; Wood 2014). This study shows that the children themselves also suggested that play is not free, as they use different strategies and rules in play. Rules made by the children for the purpose of play were not obviously visible and audible, and therefore it

is likely that they are not easy to identify by educators. What was recognised in the data, but was not obvious while the researcher was in the Butterfly preschool setting, was that one of the girls, Skoppa, seemed to have a hard time getting access to play activities with peers even though the rule about inclusion and exclusions seemed clear. This is something to consider, that is, exclusion from peer groups can be hidden in children's different strategies of including or excluding other children from play.

Rule making and rule following are everyday activities in preschool interactions, where many children and educators play and work together. Nevertheless, very often the rules in a preschool setting seem to be taken for granted by adults, with little attention as to who benefits from the rules and who does not. For children, as shown here, rules are resources used by the children to negotiate their social lives and to manage their peer cultures. The findings of this study provide a better understanding of rules in children's peer cultures. Such understanding offers educators awareness regarding the rules they make by observing how these rules influence children's involvement in play activities. The findings of this study suggest further research of how educators can support children's involvement in play activities with peers, and how children negotiate and manage the rule construction and enactment.

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Article III. 'Þeir vilja ekki leika, bara tala saman': Sýn barna á hlutverk fullorðinna í leik

Sara M. Ólafsdóttir og Jóhanna Einarsdóttir

„Þeir vilja ekki leika, bara tala saman"

Sýn barna á hlutverk fullorðinna í leik

► Um höfunda ► Efnisorð

Niðurstöður rannsókna með börnum gefa til kynna að börn tali um leik þegar þau fást við viðfangsefni sem þau stýra sjálf, taka sér hlutverk og nýta efnivið á fjölbreyttan hátt. Hlutverk fullorðinna er talið mikilvægt í leik barna en hugmyndir um það hvernig nálgast megi leikinn eru ólíkar, allt frá því að stýra eigi leik barna yfir í það að láta hann afskiptalausan. Rannsóknir með börnum sýna að þeim finnst mikilvægt að hinn fullorðni, leikskólakennarinn, fylgist með leiknum og sé nálægur svo hægt sé að leita eftir stuðningi hans. Auk þess vilji börn geta deilt uppgötvunum sínum með fullorðnum. Hér verður greint frá rannsókn sem var gerð með þriggja til fimm ára börnum í tveimur leikskólum á Íslandi. Markmiðið var að öðlast betri skilning á hlutverki leikskólakennara í leik út frá sjónarhorni barna. Myndbandsupptökur af athöfnum barnanna voru notaðar sem kveikja að samræðu við þau. Börnin fengu tækifæri til þess að horfa á upptökurnar, ræða þær og útskýra hlutverk kennaranna í leiknum. Niðurstöðurnar benda til þess að leikskólakennarar séu oftar áhorfendur að leik barna en beinir þátttakendur. Börnin höfðu mismunandi stöðu í leiknum, sum voru ráðandi en önnur fylgjendur. Staða þeirra í leiknum hafði áhrif á það hvernig þau litu á hlutverk kennaranna. Börnin sem voru ráðandi í leik sáu oft ekki hvernig leikskólakennarinn gæti verið þátttakandi í leik án þess að skemma hann en þau sem voru fylgjendur í leiknum þurftu gjarnan á stuðningi leikskólakennarans að halda og sóttust eftir nærveru hans í leik sínum. Rannsóknin gefur innsýn í hlutverk fullorðinna í leik barna. Með því að hlusta á hugmyndir barna um leik og fylgjast með stöðu þeirra í barnahópnum geta leikskólakennarar ígrundað og endurskoðað hlutverk sitt í leik barna.

► About the authors ► Key words

'They do not want to play, just talk to each other': Children's views of educators' roles in play

Play in preschools is a complicated phenomenon that has been studied from different perspectives and paradigms. Researchers have connected children's play in preschools to activities where the children are in control, take on roles, and use materials in different ways. Research conducted with children aims to learn from children's knowledge and experiences. Furthermore, research with children about their perspectives on the role of educators in their play has indicated that children find it important for educators to observe their play and to remain nearby so that the children can seek their support and can share their discoveries with their educators. This article discusses an ethnographic research project conducted with children aged three to five years in two preschool settings in Iceland. The study is built on the UN's Convention on the Rights of the Child and Corsaro's (2015) construct of the sociology of childhood, which views children as competent and active participants in the preschool society. The aim of the study is to add to the understanding of educators' roles in children's

play from the children's own perspectives. Video-stimulated recordings were used to support children's conversations about their play activities in the preschool settings. Children's activities were video-recorded, and they were invited to watch the recordings and discuss the educator's role in their play. The conversations with the children were also video-recorded and transcribed for further analysis. The researchers considered their ethical responsibilities throughout the entire research process. All gatekeepers gave their written consent and the children were gatekeepers in their own account. They were informed about the study and gave their own written accent. The findings show that the preschool educators seldom took part in children's play activities; their role was often to be close to the children and to observe and react when the children needed help or something went wrong. The children took on different roles in their play; some children took on the roles of leaders in play, while other children followed these leaders. In addition, some children liked to make joint decisions in their play. The children's status within the peer group influenced how they explained the educator's role in regard to their play. The children who were leaders in the play did not see how the educators could be involved in their play without ruining it. However, the children who followed the leaders needed the educators' support and wanted them to take part in their play. The study concludes that play cultures in preschools could be reviewed. Educators might reconsider their participation in children's play, especially concerning children who sometimes are passive observers of the play rather than active participants. The study provides insight into children's perspectives of the role of educators in children's play in preschools. By listening to children's ideas about play and observing their status in play, educators can consider or review their roles in children's play.

Inngangur

Leikur er flókið fyrirbæri sem hefur verið skilgreint með ólíkum hætti út frá mismunandi fræðigreinum og sjónarhornum. Á síðastliðnum áratugum hefur færst í vöxt að tekið sé mið af sjónarmiðum barna og að þau taki þátt í rannsóknum. Rannsóknir með börnum hafa sýnt að börn telja sig vera að leika sér þegar þau hafa stjórn á viðfangsefnum sínum, geta tekið sér hlutverk og ráða hvernig þau nýta þann efnivið sem þau hafa aðgang að (Bodrova og Leong, 2015; Jóhanna Einarsdóttir, 2014; Sara M. Ólafsdóttir og Jóhanna Einarsdóttir, 2017).

Í Aðalnámskrá leikskóla (Mennta- og menningarmálaráðuneytið, 2011) segir að leikur sé megin-námsleið barna og þungamiðja leikskólastarfsins, enda er fyrsta skólastigið hér á landi kallað leikskóli en ekki forskóli eins og tíðkast víða annars staðar í heiminum. Í námskránni segir orðrétt: „Leikur er sjálfsprottinn og börnum eðlislægur. Þau leika sér af fúsum og frjálsum vilja og á eigin forsendum. Leikur getur veitt gleði og vellíðan en jafnframt falið í sér valdabaráttu og átök" (bls. 37). Einnig er bent á hversu mikilvægt hlutverk fullorðinna er í leik barna og í því samhengi taldar upp mismunandi leiðir sem leikskólakennarar geta nýtt til þess að styðja nám barna í gegnum leik. Þeir þurfi að vera vakandi fyrir því sem vekur áhuga barna, spyrja opinna spurninga og vinna markvisst með það sem börnin fást við og sýna því áhuga (Mennta- og menningarmálaráðu-neytið, 2011). Ljóst er að auka þarf þekkingu á hlutverki fullorðinna í leik barna með því að fá fram sjónarmið barnanna sjálfra vegna þess að börn hafa oft aðrar skoðanir en fullorðnir.

Hér er fjallað um etnógrafíska rannsókn með börnum á aldrinum þriggja til fimm ára, sem gerð var í tveimur leikskólum í Reykjavík. Gengið er út frá hugmyndafræði um *félagsfræði bernskunnar* (Corsaro, 2015) og þeirri sýn að börn séu hæf til þess að taka þátt í rannsóknum (Dockett, 2008). Auk þess er tekið mið af *samningi Sameinuðu þjóðanna um réttindi barnsins* (lög um samning Sameinuðu þjóðanna um réttindi barnsins nr. 19/2013) en þar segir að börn hafi rétt til þess að tjá sig um málefni sem þau varða en um leið þurfi að huga að hagsmunum barnsins og tryggja því vernd. Markmið rannsóknarinnar er að öðlast skilning á því hvernig börn líta á hlutverk fullorðinna í leik. Myndbandsupptökur eru notaðar sem kveikja að samræðu við börnin. Athafnir barna og full-

orðinna í leikskólanum voru teknar upp á myndband. Börnunum var síðan boðið að horfa á mynd-
bandið og um leið að ræða um hlutverk fullorðinna í leik þeirra. Sú umræða var jafnframt tekin upp
á myndband og afrituð til frekari greiningar. Tilgangurinn var að þekking og reynsla barnanna af
athöfnum kennaranna í leikskólanum gæti nýst leikskólakennurum til að skoða og jafnvel endur-
skoða hlutverk sitt í leik barna. Rannsóknin er hluti af stærra rannsóknarverkefni sem unnið var í
samstarfi við rannsakendur í Queensland University of Technology í Ástralíu.

Jafningjamenning barna í leikskólum – William Corsaro

Í rannsókninni er stuðst við hugtök úr etnógrafískum félagsfræðirannsóknum félags- og mennt-
unarfræðingsins Williams Corsaro (2005, 2015) um það hvernig börn túlka heiminn í kringum sig
og endurskapa hann í leik og öðrum athöfnum. Corsaro notar hugtakið *túlkandi endursköpun* (e.
interpretive reproduction) til þess að útskýra hvernig þetta gerist. *Túlkun* (e. interpretive) tengist
því hvernig börn leggja merkingu í umhverfi sitt og það samfélag sem þau taka þátt í. *Endur-
sköpun* (e. reproduction) lýsir síðan því hvernig þau leggja með skapandi hætti sitt af mörkum til
þess að breyta umhverfinu og hafa með virkri þátttöku sinni áhrif á samfélagið. Þetta þýðir að börn
lesi í umhverfi sitt og athafnir annarra og síðan túlki þau og nýti það sem þau skynja til þess að
hafa áhrif á, byggja upp og endurskapa það samfélag sem þau lifa og hrærast í. Með hugtakinu
túlkandi endursköpun er gert ráð fyrir því að börn séu getumikil og hæf til þess að hafa áhrif á líf
sitt en jafnframt séu þau lituð af þeirri menningu sem þau lifa í. Þessar hugmyndir eru sá grunnur
sem þessi rannsókn er byggð á.

Þegar börn hefja leikskólagöngu verða töluverðar breytingar á lífi þeirra. Þau fara að taka þátt í
stærra samfélagi en því sem þau þekkja að heiman og í leikskólanum kynnast þau fleiri börnum
og fullorðnum sem oft verða mikilvægir þátttakendur í daglegum athöfnum (Corsaro, 2001). Börn-
in taka þátt í daglegu starfi í hópi og smátt og smátt fer þeim að finnast þau tilheyra honum og
byrja að skapa sína eigin *jafningjamenningu* (e. peer culture). *Jafningjar* (e. peers) leikskólabarna
eru börn á svipuðum aldri sem dvelja saman í leikskóla, daglega og yfir lengra tímabil (Löfdahl,
2014). *Menning* (e. culture) hefur verið útskýrð sem það samhengi eða þau tengsl (e. context)
sem börnin skapa hér og nú og jafnframt þau tengsl sem þau byggja upp til framtíðar (Rogers,
2010). Löfdahl (2014) segir að jafningjamenning sé það þegar hópur barna leitast við að byggja
upp og breyta skilningi á samfélagi leikskólans. Þau leggi sitt af mörkum til samfélagsins með
reynslu sinni, þekkingu og athöfnum, sem nýtist bæði hér og nú en einnig til framtíðar. Corsaro
(2015) segir að í jafningjamenningu deili börn venjum, viðhorfum og gildum, sem þau túlki í leik
og öðrum athöfnum.

Fullorðnir ráða miklu um það hvernig jafningjamenning barna skapast vegna þess að það eru þeir
sem ákveða meðal annars eftir hvaða reglum börnin þurfa að fara, hvaða efniviður er í boði og
hvaða takmarkanir börnunum eru settar (Corsaro, 1985). Corsaro (2015) talaði um *fyrri aðlögun*
(e. primary adjustment) og *síðari aðlögun* (e. secondary adjustment) til þess að lýsa því hvernig
börn byrja á því að laga sig að reglum fullorðinna og fara eftir þeim skilyrðislaust. Síðar, þegar
börnin hafa aðlagast þessum reglum, leitast þau við að öðlast meira sjálfstæði og reyna þá að
sniðganga þær eða streitast á móti, og segir Corsaro (2015) að þá fari þeim að finnast þau til-
heyra hópi. Greining Löfdahl (2014) á rannsóknum sem byggðar eru á hugmyndafræði Corsaro
sýnir að síðari aðlögun geti til dæmis falist í því að börn finni leiðir til þess að útiloka önnur börn
frá leik þó að regla hinna fullorðnu segi að það sé bannað að skilja út undan.

Í rannsókn Söru M. Ólafsdóttur, Danby, Jóhönnu Einarsdóttur og Theobald (2017) kom í ljós að
síðari aðlögun getur bæði leitt til þess að börnunum finnist þau tilheyra hópi en einnig að þau upp-
lifi að þau séu útilokuð frá hópnum, til dæmis í leik. Í rannsókninni kom fram að staða barnanna
í hópnum hafði töluvert að segja um það hverjir fengu að vera með í leik og hverjir ekki. Sum
börnin tóku sér stöðu stjórnanda í leik og ákváðu til dæmis söguþráð hans, hvaða börn væru með
í leiknum og hvaða hlutverkum þau gegndu. Öðrum börnum þótti ákjósanlegra að taka sameigin-
legar ákvarðanir í leiknum og enn önnur voru fylgjendur, þ.e.a.s. þau fóru eftir því sem stjórn-
andinn lagði til. Í þessari rannsókn verða hugtökin *fyrri aðlögun* og *síðari aðlögun* notuð til þess
að útskýra hvernig staða barnanna innan leiksins getur haft áhrif á það hvernig þau sjá hlutverk
fullorðinna í leik.

Viðhorf fullorðinna til leiks – Leikmenning

Rannsóknir hafa sýnt að menning innan leikskóla og viðhorf fullorðinna ráði miklu um það hvernig þeir nálgast leik barna (Gaskins, 2014; Wood, 2014). Gaskins (2014) bendir á að í sumum samfélögum sé litið svo á að leikurinn sé eign barnanna og hinn fullorðni eigi ekki að trufla hann, vegna þess félagslega náms sem þar fer fram. Annars staðar þyki mikilvægt að stíga inn í leik barna og stýra honum vegna þess að vernda þurfi börnin og kenna þeim. Grieshaber og McArdle (2010) benda á að viðhorf fullorðinna ráði því einnig hversu mikinn tíma og rými börn fái til leiks og hvaða efniviður sé þeim aðgengilegur. Þessi atriði gefi börnum til kynna í hvaða viðfangsefnum sé mikilvægt að þau taki þátt, hvernig þau geti kannað eigin hugmyndir og hversu virk þau geti verið í leik. Fleer (2015) skoðaði hvar og hvernig kennarar staðsetja sig þegar börn leika sér. Í ljós kom að hlutverk kennara var yfirleitt að gefa börnunum tækifæri til leiks með því að gefa þeim tíma og skipuleggja umhverfi. Hins vegar stigu kennararnir sjaldan inn í leik barnanna, en það kom þó fyrir að þeir tækju að sér hlutverk í leik.

Hugmyndir fullorðinna um þátttöku í leik barna eru því ólíkar, allt frá því að hinn fullorðni láti leik barna afskiptalausan yfir í það að leik sé stýrt af fullorðnum. Pramling Samuelsson og Johansson (2009) telja að fullorðnir forðist að taka þátt í leik barna vegna þess að þeir þori ekki að stíga inn í hann af hættu á að trufla leikinn eða eyðileggja hann. Þær telja að þegar hinir fullorðnu standi alfarið utan við leik barna geti þeir misst af mikilvægum námstækifærum í leiknum, það er að tengja saman leik og nám barnanna.

Rannsakendur hafa bent á ýmsar leiðir sem fullorðnir gætu nýtt til þess að taka þátt í leik barna (Johnson, 2014; Pramling Samuelsson og Asplund Carlsson, 2008). Johnson (2014) leggur til að hinn fullorðni fylgist með leik barna og styðji þau í leiknum. Það megi gera með því að vera nálægt börnunum og hvetja þau, leika með þeim, skipuleggja umgjörð leiksins og leggja til leikfléttur. Auk þess geti hinn fullorðni kennt í leik með því að stýra völdum „leikþáttum“, til dæmis koma með hugmyndir að orðum sem nota megi í leiknum. Rannsakendur virðast því vera sammála um að börn þurfi oft einhvers konar stuðning frá fullorðnum í leik ef nýta á leik sem námsleið. Sá stuðningur geti falist í því að hinn fullorðni sé viðstaddur og fylgist með eða sé virkur þátttakandi í leik með börnunum.

Mismunandi ástæður geta verið fyrir því að börn bjóði fullorðnum að koma að leik sínum. Pramling Samuelsson og Johansson (2009) telja að börn bjóði fullorðnum til dæmis þátttöku í leik þegar þau þurfi hjálp, ef einhver brýtur reglur og þegar þau vilji fá viðurkenningu á hæfni sinni eða getu. Þá vilji þau stundum bjóða fullorðnum þátttöku í ánægjulegum upplifunum sínum. Rizzo og Corsaro (1995) hafa komist að svipuðum niðurstöðum og benda á mismunandi aðferðir sem fullorðnir nota til þess að koma að leik barna. Oft felast þær í því að leysa ágreining milli barnanna, minna á reglur leikskólans og halda leik gangandi, til dæmis með því að spyrja börnin leiðandi spurninga og hvetja þau til þess að skiptast á og deila mikilvægum gildum og réttindum. Niðurstöður rannsóknar Tarman og Tarman (2011) benda til þess að hlutverk leikskólakennara sé að gefa börnum nægan tíma fyrir leik og skapa öruggt umhverfi til leiks. Þeir þurfi að koma með hugmyndir til þess að auðga leik barnanna og einnig að fylgjast með leik þeirra áður en þeir stíga inn í hann. Kennarar geta verið of stýrandi og þá fá börnin ekki tækifæri til þess að leggja sitt af mörkum, vera frumleg og skapandi.

Sýn barna á hlutverk fullorðinna í leik

Gerðar hafa verið rannsóknir með börnum til þess að fá fram viðhorf þeirra til hlutverks fullorðinna í leik þeirra (Jóhanna Einarsdóttir, 2014; Kragh-Müller og Isbell, 2011; Löfdahl og Hägglund, 2006). Flestar þessar rannsóknir hafa annars vegar leitt í ljós að börn líti á athafnir sem ekki er stýrt af fullorðnum sem leik og hins vegar að fullorðnir séu sjaldan þátttakendur í leik barna. Börnin sem tóku þátt í rannsókn Jóhönnu Einarsdóttur (2014) í íslenskum leikskóla voru yfirleitt ekki mikið að velta því fyrir sér hvað hinn fullorðni væri að gera á meðan þau lékju sér. Á ljósmyndum sem börnin tóku var áherslan meiri á önnur börn en fullorðna, þar sem þeir stóðu yfirleitt í bakgrunni. Ein stúlknanna sem tók þátt í rannsókninni talaði reyndar um að henni þætti skemmtilegt þegar kennari tæki þátt í leik með börnunum en sagði jafnframt að það gerðist sjaldan. Börnin sögðu að fullorðnir létu þau yfirleitt í friði á meðan þau lékju sér en þau vildu hafa þá nálægt til þess að geta

leitað aðstoðar ef þau þyrftu á því að halda. Að sögn barnanna stóðu hinir fullorðnu yfirleitt hjá þeim, fylgdust með, hjálpuðu, tóku ákvarðanir og studdu börnin. Svipaðar niðurstöður má greina í rannsókn Guðrúnar Öldu Harðardóttur og Baldurs Kristjánssonar (2013) þar sem börnin léku sér yfirleitt án áhrifa eða afskipta fullorðinna.

Rannsóknir á sjónarmiðum barna hafa því sýnt að þátttaka fullorðinna sé ekki mikil í leik þeirra (Jóhanna Einarsdóttir, 2014; Löfdahl, 2014). Þó hafa rannsóknir sýnt fram á að yngri leikskóla-börn leiti frekar eftir þátttöku fullorðinna en þau sem eldri eru (Hrönn Pálmadóttir og Jóhanna Einarsdóttir, 2015; Pramling Samuelsson og Johansson, 2009). Börnin sem tóku þátt í rannsókn Pramling Samuelsson og Johansson (2009) litu oft á hlutverk fullorðinna sem nokkurs konar þjónustuhlutverk, það er að segja, þau leituðu til þeirra þegar þau tókust á við viðfangsefni eða samskipti sem þau gátu ekki leyst sjálf. Þær benda á að ef hinir fullorðnu gefa ekki kost á sér til þátttöku í leik barna leiði það til þess að börnin leiti einungis til þeirra þegar þau þurfi á aðstoð þeirra að halda en ekki til þess að bjóða þeim þátttöku í leik.

Börn hafa gefið til kynna að hlutverk fullorðinna í leik þeirra sé að skipuleggja umhverfi leik-skólans, stýra reglum í kringum leikinn og stýra athöfnum barnanna (Hrönn Pálmadóttir og Jó-hanna Einarsdóttir, 2015). Hrönn Pálmadóttir og Jóhanna Einarsdóttir (2015) gerðu rannsókn með ungum börnum í leikskóla. Börnin sem tóku þátt í rannsókn þeirra virtust virða og samþykkja hlutverk fullorðinna með því að fylgja reglum þeirra. Börnin töldu auk þess mikilvægt að hinir fullorðnu fylgdust með og skildu söguþráð leiksins og hvernig hann þróaðist. Ef þeir fylgdust ekki með væru afskipti þeirra af leiknum í ósamræmi við gang hans. Til dæmis var aðkoma full-orðinna oft í þá átt að benda börnunum á hvar þau ættu að leika og hvernig nota ætti efniviðinn. Rannsóknir Fleer (2015) hafa varpað ljósi á mikilvægi þess að hinir fullorðnu átti sig á innihaldi leiks áður en þeir hafa af honum afskipti. Þegar hinn fullorðni sitji nálægt börnum í leik og þekki söguþráð leiksins geti hann komið inn í leik barnanna og stutt þau gætilega í leiknum. Í rannsókn hennar voru mörg dæmi um að kennarar rangtúlkuðu aðstæður í leik vegna þess að þeir þekktu ekki söguþráðinn. Fleer benti jafnframt á að það gæti verið erfitt fyrir leikskólakennara að fylgjast með þeim fjölmörgu leikþemum sem geta verið í gangi í einu á einni leikskóladeild og bregðast við þeim með viðeigandi hætti.

Eins og sjá má af niðurstöðum fyrri rannsókna á hlutverki fullorðinna í leik barna ráða viðhorf full-orðinna miklu um það hvaða tækifæri börn hafa til leiks og hversu mikinn þátt þeir taka í leik. Víða virðist hafa verið sköpuð sú menning í kringum leik barna að hinn fullorðni sé fremur áhorfandi en þátttakandi. Hins vegar kemur fram í Aðalnámskrá leikskóla (Mennta- og menningarmálaráðu-neytið, 2011) að fullorðnir eigi að styðja leik barna á margvíslegan hátt. Þess vegna er mikilvægt að komast að því hvernig börn líta á hlutverk og þátttöku fullorðinna í leik sínum. Með því að fá fram viðhorf barna verða fullorðnir færari um að skoða hlutverk sitt út frá þörfum hvers barns og þannig getur leikur betur nýst öllum börnum sem námsleið. Edmiston og Taylor (2010) hafa ein-mitt bent á mikilvægi þess að hlusta á raddir barna þegar verið er að mynda ramma um leik þeirra. Með auknu jafnræði og virðingu fyrir leik barna og skoðunum þeirra geti börnin haft áhrif á þátt-töku fullorðinna í leik sínum. Spurningin sem leitast er við að svara í þessari grein er:

Hver er sýn leikskólabarna á hlutverk fullorðinna í leik?

Þátttakendur og aðferð

Rannsóknin fór fram í tveimur leikskólum í Reykjavík, einni deild í hvorum skóla. Þátttakendur voru börn á aldrinum þriggja til fimm ára. Vistunartími barnanna var yfirleitt sjö til níu klukkustundir á dag og því þekktu börnin vel hvert annað og umhverfi leikskólans. Rannsóknin var byggð á et-nógrafískum aðferðum þar sem rannsakandi, sem er fyrri höfundur þessarar greinar, dvaldi í fjóra til fimm mánuði á hvorri deild. Áður en gagnaöflun hófst lagði rannsakandi áherslu á að kynnast börnunum, starfsfólki og menningu deildanna.

Á fyrri deildinni, sem hér er nefnd Krummaskógur (gervinafn), voru 20 börn og fjórir starfsmenn, þar af einn leikskólakennari. Skipulaginu á deildinni var þannig háttað að á morgnana höfðu börnin um það bil eina klukkustund til þess að taka þátt í mismunandi viðfangsefnum sem þau völdu sér sjálf, en það var sá tími sem rannsakandi skoðaði og þá voru tekin upp myndbönd. Eftir það var sögustund og hópastarf en þeim stundum var oft meira stýrt af starfsfólki deildarinnar.

Rými deildarinnar skiptist í tvö leiksvæði, annað stærra en hitt. Gólfpláss var frekar lítið vegna þess að í stærra rýminu voru tvö stór borð og eitt borð í því minna. Því sátu börnin oft við borð þegar þau höfðu val um viðfangsefni. Efniviðurinn sem börnin höfðu aðgang að var meðal annars púsl, litir og blöð, ýmsir kubbar, perlur og borðspil.

Á hinni deildinni, Fiðrildadeild (gervinafn), voru 32 börn og fimm starfsmenn. Á þeirri deild var skipulaginu þannig háttað að börnin fóru í samverustund eftir morgunmat og þaðan í hópastarf. Eftir það höfðu þau oft tvo til þrjá tíma fyrir viðfangsefni sem þau völdu sjálf en það var sá tími sem rannsakandi lagði áherslu á og tók upp. Deildin var rúmgóð og skiptist í fjögur rými, tvö stærri og tvö minni. Í minni rýmunum voru borð en engin í þeim stærri. Þegar börnin höfðu val um viðfangsefni voru þau því oft á gólfinu og hreyfðu sig um rýmið sem þau voru í hverju sinni. Efniviðurinn sem börnin höfðu aðgang að var meðal annars einingakubbar, holukubbar, föt og búningar, heimilisáhöld, dýr og dúkkur. Á báðum deildunum, Krummaskógi og Fiðrildadeild, var starfsfólkið yfirleitt nálægt börnunum og aðstoðaði þau í frjálsum stundum en tók ekki virkan þátt í viðfangsefnum þeirra.

Myndbandsupptökur voru notaðar sem kveikja að samræðu (e. video-stimulated accounts) við börnin um athafnir þeirra í leikskólanum (Theobald, 2012). Athafnir barnanna voru teknar upp á myndband á mismunandi svæðum á deildunum. Börnunum, sem komu fram á upptökunum, var síðan boðið að horfa á þær og ræða um athafnir sínar og annarra. Þannig fengu þau tækifæri til þess að útskýra hvað þau voru að gera á upptökunum og jafnframt að túlka hvað önnur börn og fullorðnir voru að gera. Börnin voru spurð opinna spurninga og voru þannig hvött til að dýpka umræðuna um upptökurnar, t.d. voru þau spurð eftirfarandi spurninga: „Hvað eruð þið að gera þarna?" og „Hvar er kennarinn á meðan þið eruð að leika ykkur?" Samtölin við börnin tóku frá 10 mínútum til 35 mínútur og voru einnig tekin upp á myndband. Tafla 1 sýnir fjölda og lengd upptaka af athöfnum barnanna og samtölum við þau.

Tafla 1 – Fjöldi og lengd myndbandsupptaka og samtala við börnin				
	Fjöldi myndbands-upptaka af at-höfnum barnanna	Lengd myndbands-upptaka af at-höfnum barnanna	Fjöldi samtala sem tekin voru upp á myndband	Lengd samtala sem tekin voru upp á myndband
Krummaskógur	16	2 klst. 12 mín.	13	2 klst. 16 mín.
Fiðrildadeild	20	5 klst. 23 mín.	16	4 klst. 56 mín.

Samtölin við börnin voru afrituð orðrétt og líkamleg tjáning þeirra var skráð, til dæmis þegar börnin kinkuðu kolli í stað þess að segja „já" eða létu í ljós tilfinningar sínar, svo sem gleði. Í þessum gögnum kom því fram hvað börnin gerðu og sögðu. Afrituðu samtölin við börnin voru síðan marg-lesin og leitað í þeim eftir þemum og mynstrum (Braun og Clarke, 2006; Lichtman, 2010) sem gátu svarað rannsóknarspurningunni um það hvernig börnin útskýrðu hlutverk fullorðinna í leik sínum. Hugtakið túlkandi endursköpun (Corsaro, 2015) var meðal annars notað við greiningu gagnanna. Því var gert ráð fyrir að börnin hefðu áhrif og skoðanir í leikskólanum en jafnframt væru þær litaðar af viðhorfum fullorðinna, umhverfi og menningu leikskólans.

Siðferðileg ábyrgð rannsakenda

Í rannsóknum með börnum er mikilvægt að hafa í huga ýmis siðferðileg álitamál sem upp kunna að koma í rannsóknarferlinu (Danby og Farrell, 2005; Dockett, Jóhanna Einarsdóttir og Perry, 2011; Jóhanna Einarsdóttir, 2007). Í öllu rannsóknarferlinu höfðu rannsakendur í huga siðferði-lega ábyrgð sína, meðal annars við undirbúning rannsóknarinnar, aðkomu að vettvangi, öflun gagna, gagnagreiningu og túlkun gagnanna. Í upphafi gáfu allir hliðverðir (e. gatekeepers) upplýst samþykki fyrir þátttöku barnanna í rannsókninni. Hliðverðir voru sveitarfélagið sem rekur leik-skólana, leikskólastjórarnir, starfsfólk deildanna og foreldrar barnanna. Eftir að þessir aðilar höfðu veitt samþykki sitt gáfu börnin sjálf upplýst samþykki sitt, það er að segja, þau voru upplýst um rannsóknina og ákváðu sjálf hvort þau vildu vera með í henni eða ekki.

Þegar börnin voru upplýst um rannsóknina ræddi rannsakandi við þau í litlum hópum. Rannsakandi leitaðist við að fá fram þekkingu og hugmyndir barnanna um það hvað rannsókn væri og skráði þær hjá sér. Byggt var á þessum upplýsingum þegar rannsóknin var útskýrð fyrir börnunum og þeim sagt til hvers væri ætlast af þeim. Börnin komu með ýmsar hugmyndir um hvað það þýddi að gera rannsókn. Þau töluðu meðal annars um að lögreglumenn og vísindamenn gerðu rannsóknir, þeir gerðu tilraunir og vissu mjög mikið. Börnin sögðu jafnframt að í rannsóknum væri eitthvað skoðað mjög vel, til dæmis mætti nota til þess stækkunargler. Í rannsóknum væri hægt að segja sögu, leita, finna hluti og segja frá. Einnig kom fram að það gæti bæði verið leiðinlegt og skemmtilegt að gera rannsóknir.

Þegar rannsóknin var útskýrð fyrir börnunum var þeim sagt að rannsakandinn væri nokkurs konar vísindamaður sem væri mjög forvitinn um hvað börnin væru að gera í leikskólanum og langaði að skoða það nánar. Í stað þess að nota stækkunargler til þess að komast að því hvað börnin væru að gera ætlaði hann að nota myndbandsupptökuvél, þau gætu síðan horft á upptökurnar og útskýrt hvað væri að gerast. Rannsakandi sagði börnunum einnig til hvers væri ætlast af þeim, það er að segja að þau yrðu spurð hvort taka mætti upp á myndband það sem þau væru að gera í leikskólanum, síðan yrði þeim boðið að horfa á upptökurnar og ræða þær við rannsakanda og hin börnin. Í lokin fengju börnin tækifæri til þess að hlusta á sögu sem hefði að geyma niðurstöður rannsóknarinnar. Þá var lögð áhersla á rétt barnanna til þess að ákveða hvort þau vildu taka þátt eða ekki. Börnin voru upplýst um að þau gætu neitað þátttöku á hvaða tímapunkti sem var í rannsókninni. Það varð til þess að sum þeirra neituðu annaðhvort að vera tekin upp á myndband eða að horfa á upptökuna og ræða hana. Önnur börn völdu hins vegar að taka þátt í öllu rannsóknarferlinu. Börnin kusu um gervinafn fyrir leikskóladeildina og völdu sín eigin gervinöfn, en þannig gátu þau betur gert sér grein fyrir trúnaði rannsakanda. Eftir að rannsóknin hafði verið útskýrð fyrir börnunum gáfu þau samþykki sitt með því að skrifa nafn sitt, upphafsstaf eða annað tákn á blað með upplýsingum um rannsóknina. Sum barnanna völdu einnig að myndskreyta blaðið. Alls tóku 46 börn þátt í rannsókninni, 18 börn af 20 börnum deildarinnar Krummaskógar og 28 börn af 32 á Fiðrildadeild.

Í leikskólum eru börn oft í valdaminni stöðu en fullorðnir þar sem hinn fullorðni er nokkurs konar yfirvald (Corsaro, 1985; Thornberg, 2009). Þessu þarf líka að gera ráð fyrir í rannsóknum með börnum, þar sem rannsakandi er í valdameiri stöðu en börnin (Dockett, Jóhanna Einarsdóttir og Perry, 2011). Svo að draga mætti úr valdastöðu rannsakanda tók hann sér annað hlutverk en hinir fullorðnu á deildunum (Corsaro, 1985). Hann tók þannig þátt í mismunandi viðfangsefnum með börnunum á annan hátt en hinir fullorðnu, til dæmis sat rannsakandi á gólfinu með börnunum þegar kennarinn sat á stól í samverustundum. Auk þess tók hann þátt í leik og öðrum athöfnum með börnunum á meðan aðrir fullorðnir á deildunum fylgdust með þeim. Fyrsta mánuðinn á vettvangi notaði rannsakandi til þess að kynnast börnunum, læra nöfn þeirra, byggja upp traust samband og samskipti við þau og öðlast skilning á menningu deildanna. Á meðan á þessu stóð skráði rannsakandi hjá sér vettvangsnótur og hélt því áfram allt rannsóknarferlið. Eftir um það bil mánuð á vettvangi hófust upptökur sem notaðar voru sem kveikja að samræðu við börnin um hlutverk fullorðinna í leik þeirra.

Í lok gagnaöflunar voru niðurstöðurnar kynntar fyrir börnunum og starfsfólki deildanna. Rannsakandi skrifaði sögu um niðurstöðurnar á einföldu máli og notaði myndir til þess að skýra textann. Hann bauð síðan börnunum til sín í litlum hópum og las niðurstöðurnar fyrir þau svo hann gæti komist að því hvað þeim fyndist um þær og hvort þeim þættu þær eiga við um sig. Þannig fengu börnin tækifæri til þess að segja álit sitt og gera athugasemdir um niðurstöðurnar. Yfirleitt voru ekki gerðar neinar athugasemdir en í einum hópnum stoppaði drengur rannsakanda af þegar hann var að lesa og sagði: „Þetta var ekki svona" og rannsakandi spurði á móti: „Hvernig var það þá?" Drengurinn gat ekki útskýrt það nánar en gerði rannsakanda ljóst með athugasemd sinni að hann vildi ekki að vitnað væri til þess sem hann sagði. Því var tilvitnuninni eytt úr niðurstöðunum. Börnin virtust sýna niðurstöðunum nokkurn áhuga og hlustuðu sérstaklega eftir gervinafni sínu. Rannsakandi upplifði kynningarnar á niðurstöðunum eins og hann væri ekki að segja börnunum eitthvað nýtt, heldur væri þetta nokkuð sem þau vissu þá þegar. Það má túlka þannig að börnin hafi samþykkt þær að mestu leyti.

Niðurstöður og umræða – Sýn barnanna á hlutverk fullorðinna í leik

Hér verður greint frá því hvernig börnin útskýrðu hlutverk kennaranna í leik sínum þegar þau horfðu á upptökur af eigin athöfnum og annarra. Þemun sem komu fram við greiningu gagnanna voru kennari sem áhorfandi og aðstoðarmaður, sáttasemjari og *leikfélagi*. Börnin notuðu hugtakið kennari yfir allt starfsfólk deildanna og þess vegna verður það notað þannig í þessum kafla.

Börnin voru sammála um að kennararnir tækju sjaldan eða aldrei þátt í leik þeirra. Flest börnin veltu því hvorki fyrir sér hvar kennarinn væri né hvað hann væri að gera á meðan þau væru að leika sér. Þau sögðu til dæmis að þau vissu ekki eða myndu ekki hvað kennarinn væri að gera. Sum barnanna höfðu þó ýmsar hugmyndir um hvað kennarinn væri að fást við á meðan þau lékju sér, til dæmis horfði hann á þau, sæti við borð, væri í stofunni sem þau lékju sér í, sæti á kennara-stól, hjálpaði þeim, tæki til, væri í tölvunni, á fundi, færi út af deildinni og talaði við aðra.

Hlutverk kennara sem áhorfendur og aðstoðarmenn

Börnin sem tóku þátt í þessari rannsókn töluðu oft um að kennararnir væru nokkurs konar áhorf-endur að leik þeirra. Kennararnir horfðu á börnin leika sér og kæmu að leiknum þegar þau þyrftu á aðstoð þeirra að halda. Tvær stelpur í Krummaskógi, Elísa (4 ára) og Elena (5 ára), horfðu á upptöku þar sem þær sátu við borð og voru að lita í litabækur sem þær höfðu komið með að heiman. Kennarar voru ekki sýnilegir á upptökunni og rannsakandi spurði hvar kennarinn væri á meðan þær væru að leika sér. Stelpurnar gáfu til kynna að þær væru ekki mikið að velta því fyrir sér hvar hann væri en Elena kom með þá hugmynd að hann væri á klósettinu. Stelpurnar urðu síðan hálfhneykslaðar þegar þær voru spurðar hvort kennarinn tæki þátt í leik þeirra. Þær svöruðu því neitandi og á eftir fylgdi hlátur. Rannsakandi spurði svo: „Af hverju tekur kennarinn ekki þátt í leiknum?" Elena svaraði: „Af því að við getum það alveg sjálf en stundum þurfum við hjálp," en hún benti jafnframt á að þær þyrftu sjaldan á hjálp að halda. Á Fiðrildadeild var Rósa ein að leika sér að einingakubbum. Hún byggði kastala, notaði plastdýr með og sagðist vera í selaleik. Hún talaði um að sér fyndist betra að leika sér ein vegna þess að ef það væru fleiri gætu þeir kannski ekki gert þetta rétt eða eins og hún vildi hafa það. Hún sagðist ekki vilja hafa kennarann með í leik. Hér er dæmi úr samtali rannsakanda við Rósu um það hvar hinn fullorðni væri á meðan hún léki sér:

> **Dæmi 1**
>
> R: … þegar þú ert að leika, hvar er kennarinn þá?
>
> Rósa: Uuumm … bara stundum eru þeir á fundi eða eitthvað.
>
> R: Stundum á fundi?
>
> Rósa: Uum.
>
> R: Uhum … mundirðu vilja hafa kennarann að leika með þér?
>
> Rósa: Neiii, bara ekkert.
>
> R: Nei, … finnst þér betra að vera bara ein?
>
> Rósa: Já.
>
> R: Hmm … af hverju viltu ekki hafa kennarann með?
>
> Rósa: Bara, út af því að þeir vilja ekki leika, bara tala saman.

Rósa var vön því að kennarinn tæki ekki þátt í leik með henni, að hann væri yfirleitt að fást við eitthvað annað, svo sem á fundi. Í þátttökuathugunum sást Rósa oft ein í leik og það kom fram í samtalinu við hana að hún væri með því að forðast árekstra við önnur börn. Út frá reynslu sinni og þekkingu á hlutverki fullorðinna ályktaði hún að kennararnir vildu ekki leika og gerði þá líklega

ráð fyrir því að það þýddi ekki að bjóða þeim í leik. Corsaro (2015) bendir á að börn túlki umhverfi sitt og nýti það til endursköpunar en Rósa virtist hafa aðlagast þeirri menningu sem ríkti í leik-skólanum, að leikurinn væri barnanna, hinn fullorðni tæki ekki þátt, og hún reyndi ekki að finna leiðir til þess að breyta því. Viðbrögð Elísu og Elenu í Krummaskógi við spurningunni um það hvort kennarinn tæki þátt í leik þeirra gefa til kynna að þeim hafi þótt það nokkuð fjarstæðukennt að kennarinn gæti verið með í leik þeirra. Á deildinni var leikmenningin einnig þannig að hinir fullorðnu tóku sjaldan þátt í leik barnanna, líkt og fram hefur komið í öðrum rannsóknum (Fleer, 2015; Jóhanna Einarsdóttir, 2014; Löfdahl, 2014). Elena benti jafnframt á að það að leika sér væri nokkuð sem börnin gætu sjálf og því þyrftu þau ekki á kennaranum að halda. Það er í samræmi við niðurstöður Pramling Samuelsson og Johanson (2009) sem sýna að börn líti á fullorðna í leik-skólum sem nokkurs konar þjóna eða aðstoðarfólk að grípa til þegar þau takast á við eitthvað sem þau geta ekki sjálf.

Kennarar sem sáttasemjarar

Á deildunum tveimur þar sem rannsóknin fór fram töldu börnin að kennarinn væri yfirleitt ekki með þeim í leik, hann kæmi ef eitthvað færi úrskeiðis. Rannsakandi ræddi við þrjá drengi, þá Pétur, Orra og Snorra (allir 5 ára) sem horfðu á upptöku þar sem þeir voru saman í einingakubbum. Í vettvangsathugunum mátti greina að Pétur rölti oft um deildina, fylgdist með því sem fram fór og spjallaði við kennarana eða rannsakandann. Orri og Snorri voru hins vegar oft saman í leik og þeir sögðu að þeir tækju oftast sameiginlegar ákvarðanir í leiknum. Drengirnir voru sammála um að kennarinn tæki aldrei þátt í leik þeirra. Þeir sögðu að kennararnir væru að tala hver við annan og stundum við börnin á meðan þau væru að leika sér. Þegar þeir voru spurðir hvenær kennarinn talaði við börnin sögðu þeir að hann kæmi þegar eitthvað væri að, til dæmis ef einhver væri að skemma eða meiða. Drengirnir höfðu misjafnar skoðanir á því hvort kennarinn ætti að vera með í leik þeirra. Þannig töldu Orri og Snorri að kennarinn ætti ekki að vera með þeim í leik en sáu þó fyrir sér að hann gæti mögulega tekið þátt. Hins vegar vildi Pétur að kennararnir tækju oftar þátt í leik með börnunum. Í Krummaskógi ræddi rannsakandi við fjögur börn, Guðmund, Róbert, Sól og Dagnýju, sem voru að horfa á upptöku af sér þar sem þau voru á gólfinu að raða dómínó-kubbum. Þau voru spurð hvar kennarinn væri á meðan þau lékju sér. Dæmið hér á eftir sýnir viðbrögð Sólar við spurningunni.

Dæmi 2

R: En hvar er kennarinn á meðan þið eruð í svona leik … eða svona kubbum?

Sól: Þeir eru kannski bara að fara fram eða eitthvað.

R: Eru þeir að fara fram eða eitthvað … eru þeir ekki með ykkur í svona leik?

Sól: Nei … við leikum alltaf sjálf.

R: Eruð þið alltaf að leika sjálf?

Sól: Þeir eru bara eitthvað að horfa á okkur, ef einhver meiðir sig og eitthvað og það er verið að rífa af eða eitthvað … rífa af eða eitthvað.

R: Já, þannig að kennararnir horfa á og fylgjast með ef einhver …

Sól: … er að rífa eða ef einhverjir eru að meiða sig.

R: Já, þá koma kennararnir.

Sól talaði um að kennarinn væri aldrei með börnunum þegar þau lékju sér, heldur fylgdist hann með þeim og kæmi þegar einhver meiddi sig eða ef átök kæmu upp í leiknum. Börnin í Krumma-skógi og á Fiðrildadeild voru sammála um að kennarinn væri yfirleitt ekki með í leik barnanna en hann kæmi og talaði við þau þegar eitthvað færi úrskeiðis. Flest börnin voru sammála um að það fyrirkomulag væri gott, það er að segja, þau vildu fæst hafa kennarana með, líkt og aðrar rann-sóknir hafa sýnt (Jóhanna Einarsdóttir, 2014; Kragh-Müller og Isbell, 2011; Löfdahl og Hägglund, 2006). Pétur, sem stóð oft utan við leik barnanna sem nokkurs konar áhorfandi, var hins vegar á

öðru máli og sagðist vilja hafa kennarann með. Rannsóknir hafa sýnt að oftar séu það yngri börn sem leiti eftir aðstoð kennara í leik (Hrönn Pálmadóttir og Jóhanna Einarsdóttir, 2015; Pramling Samuelsson og Johansson, 2009). Pétur, sem var fimm ára, þurfti á stuðningi kennara að halda til þess að taka þátt í leik með öðrum börnum en þrátt fyrir það leitaði hann ekki eftir honum. Það er í samræmi við rannsókn Pramling Samuelsson og Johansson (2009). Þær benda á að ef hinir fullorðnu gefa ekki færi á sér til þátttöku þegar börn eru í leik leiði það til þess að þau leiti einungis til þeirra eftir aðstoð þegar eitthvað fer úrskeiðis frekar en til að fá stuðning til þátttöku.

Kennarinn sem leikfélagi

Börnin voru flest sammála um að þau þyrftu ekki á kennurum að halda þegar þau lékju sér en það voru nokkrar undantekningar frá því. Tvö börn í Krummaskógi, Elías og Íris, töluðu um að kennararnir sætu yfirleitt og horfðu á börnin á meðan þau væru að leika sér. Elías og Íris horfðu á upptöku þar sem þau sátu við borð með einum kennara og voru að mála. Þegar börnin ræddu hvað kennarinn væri að gera á meðan þau væru að leika sér sagði Elías: „Svo eru hinir kennar-arnir byrjaðir að setjast við borð með krökkunum og gera eitthvað … og horfa á þá … eins og Jóna (kennari) er að gera núna.“ Elías benti auk þess á að kennararnir gætu hjálpað til með því að rétta honum liti. Skoppa (4 ára), Solla (4 ára), Sara (3 ára) og Kolla (3 ára) horfðu á upptöku af sér þar sem þær voru í mömmó á Fiðrildadeild en þær sögðust vera að baka köku. Stúlkurnar sögðu að kennarinn horfði á þegar þær væru að leika sér og tæki ekki þátt í leiknum. Í þátttökuathugunum mátti greina að Skoppa var stundum útilokuð frá leik barnanna og Kolla fékk oftast hlutverk í leik með börnunum, en var þó frekar áhorfandi en virkur þátttakandi í leiknum. Stúlkurnar voru sammála um að þær vildu að kennarinn tæki oftar þátt í leik þeirra, eins og eftirfarandi dæmi sýnir.

Dæmi 3

R: Hvar er kennarinn þegar þið eruð að leika ykkur?

Skoppa: Horfa … horfa.

R: Að horfa á?

Skoppa: [kinkar kolli].

R: Er hann með ykkur í leiknum?

Skoppa: Neeeiii [hlær].

R: Af hverju er hann ekki með í leiknum?

Solla: Bara.

Embla: Bara.

Skoppa: Bara.

R: Eru það bara krakkarnir sem leika?

Allar í kór: Jááá.

R: En, stelpur, mynduð þið vilja hafa kennarann með þegar þið eruð að leika ykkur?

Solla: Já.

Skoppa: Já.

R: Hvað mynduð þið vilja að kennarinn myndi gera?

Skoppa: Leika við okkur.

Stúlkurnar fjórar á Fiðrildadeild vildu að kennarinn léki oftar við þær, sem gæti helgast af ungum aldri þeirra, líkt og fram hefur komið í öðrum rannsóknum (Pramling Samuelsson og Johansson, 2009; Hrönn Pálmadóttir og Jóhanna Einarsdóttir, 2015). Þessi rannsókn gefur til kynna að staða barnanna í barnahópnum hafi auk þess áhrif á það hvort þau vilji hafa kennara með í leik eða ekki. Stúlkurnar fjórar í dæminu hér að framan höfðu ekki sterka valdastöðu í barnahópnum þar sem Skoppa átti stundum í erfiðleikum með að fá aðgang að leik og Kolla var oft í aukahlutverki eða nokkurs konar áhorfandi að leiknum. Þrátt fyrir það leituðu stúlkurnar ekki eftir stuðningi kennara við þátttöku í leik. Þegar dæmin hér að framan eru tengd hugtökunum *fyrri aðlögun* og *síðari aðlögun* (Corsaro, 2015) sést vel að leikmenning innan leikskóladeildanna er sterk. Börnin sem tóku þátt í rannsókninni höfðu lagað sig að menningu fullorðinna, sem tóku ekki þátt í leik þeirra, og þau fundu sér ekki leiðir til þess að breyta leikmenningu deildanna og bjóða fullorðnum þátttöku í leik.

Samantekt og lokaorð

Hér hefur verið fjallað um rannsókn með börnum, þriggja til fimm ára, sem gerð var í tveimur leikskólum á Íslandi. Rannsóknin er byggð á hugmyndafræði *félagsfræði bernskunnar* (Corsaro, 2015), *samningi Sameinuðu þjóðanna um réttindi barnsins* (lög um samning Sameinuðu þjóðanna um réttindi barnsins nr. 19/2013) og þeirri sýn að börn séu getumikil og hæf til þess að taka þátt í rannsóknum (Dockett, 2008). Markmið rannsóknarinnar var að fá fram sýn barna á hlutverk fullorðinna í leik þeirra. Notaðar voru myndbandsupptökur sem kveikja að samræðu við börnin í þeim tilgangi að þekking þeirra og reynsla gæti nýst leikskólakennurunum til að skoða og jafnvel endurskoða hlutverk sitt í leik barna.

Menning beggja leikskólanna var þannig að kennararnir tóku sjaldan þátt í leik barnanna, líkt og aðrar rannsóknir hafa sýnt fram á (Jóhanna Einarsdóttir, 2014; Kragh-Müller og Isbell, 2011; Löfdahl og Hägglund, 2006). Segja má að ríkt hafi tvenns konar menning innan leikskóladeildanna, fullorðinsmenning og barnamenning, sem virtist vera að miklu leyti aðskilin þegar börnin voru að leika sér. Börnin léku sér og hinir fullorðnu voru áhorfendur sem stigu sjaldan inn í leik barnanna. Hinir fullorðnir virtust líta svo á að leikurinn væri barnanna, hugmyndir barnanna virtust vera litaðar af því viðhorfi og þau buðu því ekki fullorðnum þátttöku (Corsaro, 2015; Gaskins, 2014). Þetta kristallast í orðum Rósu: „Þeir vilja ekki leika, bara tala saman." Í sumum tilfellum sáu börnin ekki hvernig hinir fullorðnu gætu mögulega tekið þátt án þess að skemma leikinn. Elías í Krummaskógi benti á það **að kennararnir tækju frekar þátt og hjálpuðu til við athafnir barnanna þegar þau sætu við borð en að stíga inn í viðfangsefni sem börnin teldu vera leik. Það bendir til þess að** flóknara sé fyrir fullorðna að taka þátt í þykjustu- og hlutverkaleik barna en að teikna eða spila. Niðurstöður þessarar rannsóknar gefa til kynna að víða þurfi að breyta leikmenningu innan veggja leikskóla, það er að hinir fullorðnu gefi oftar kost á sér í leik með börnum vegna þess að þannig er líklegra að börnin leiti til þeirra eftir stuðningi til þátttöku í leik, en ekki bara þegar eitthvað fer úrskeiðis.

Niðurstöður rannsóknarinnar sýna að börn hafa mismunandi stöðu í leik, þau geta verið stjórnendur, tekið sameiginlegar ákvarðanir eða verið fylgjendur (Sara M. Ólafsdóttir o.fl., 2017). Staða barnanna í leiknum tengdist því hvernig þau litu á hlutverk fullorðinna í leik. Sum börnin vildu ekki hafa fullorðna með en önnur þurftu á stuðningi þeirra að halda. Þessar niðurstöður árétta mikilvægi þess að kennarar taki eftir börnum sem standa utan við leik og hlusti á raddir þeirra um það hvernig megi styðja þau til þátttöku, til dæmis með því að vera leikfélagi. Í barnahópi á leikskóladeild er líklegt að einhver börn séu ekki virkir þátttakendur í leik með öðrum börnum. Ef það eru alltaf sömu börnin sem standa utan við leikinn, leika ein eða eru áhorfendur að leik, er ólíklegt að leikur sé þeirra meginnámsleið í leikskóla eins og Aðalnámskrá leikskóla segir til um. Því er mikilvægt fyrir leikskólakennara að fylgjast vel með stöðu barnanna í barnahópnum og veita þeim viðeigandi stuðning í leik. Þó er mikilvægt að einblína ekki einungis á stöðu þeirra valdaminni heldur skoða hvernig megi styðja öll börn til þess að læra í gegnum leik.

Rannsóknin sýnir að gagnlegt er að fá fram hugmyndir barnanna um það hvað kennararnir séu að gera á meðan þau leika sér. Þó að þau væru ekki mikið að velta hlutverki kennaranna fyrir sér komu þau með hugmyndir um hvað þau héldu að þeir væru að gera og höfðu þannig ákveðna innsýn í hlutverk þeirra. Þannig töluðu þau um að hinir fullorðnu væru til dæmis á fundum, í tölvunni, færu út af deildinni o.s.frv. Þarna lýstu þau fjölbreyttu og flóknu starfi leikskólakennara, sem þurfa

að setja sig í mörg hlutverk og takast á við margbreytileg verkefni yfir daginn. Þar sem leikur á að vera meginnámsleið barna og þungamiðja leikskólastarfsins (Mennta- og menningarmálaráðuneytið, 2011) er mikilvægt að staldra við og skoða betur hvaða öðrum verkefnum verið er að sinna á meðan börnin eru að leika sér, hvaða verkefni hafa forgang og hvar leikur barnanna er í forgangsröðinni.

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Um höfunda

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Efnisorð

Leikur, sýn barna, hlutverk fullorðinna, leikskóli

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Key words

Play, children's views, educator's role, preschool