Children’s Work in Sweden
A part of childhood, a path to adulthood

Tobias Samuelsson
At the Faculty of Arts and Science at Linköpings universitet, research and doctoral studies are carried out within broad problem areas. Research is organized in interdisciplinary research environments and doctoral studies mainly in graduate schools. Jointly, they publish the series Linköping Studies in Arts and Science. This thesis comes from the Department of Child Studies at the Tema Institute.

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Linköping, a summer day 2008

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Introduction

Do children in Sweden work? Children in Sweden sell products for companies at a value of several hundreds of millions SEK every year (Åkerberg 2003). According to articles in the Swedish’s papers “Dagens Industri” (Åkerberg 2003), ”Svensk bokhandel” (Schmidt and Olsson 2004) and “Svenska Dagbladet” (Roxvall 2006), 100,000-120,000 children in Sweden in the age range 9-14 years sell “Christmas magazines” every year, starting a couple of months before Christmas. According to the same articles, this business has an annual turnover of between 200 and 250 million SEK. The Christmas magazine companies are not the only ones that have large turnovers from business activities in which the main workforce is children. According to the “Dagens Industri” article, numerous children in Sweden sell underwear, cookies, lottery tickets, socks, salami and tulips through their school and spare time associations, and all this generates big money for companies that have children working for them (Åkerberg 2003). Moreover, 150,000 schoolchildren in Sweden, in the age group 9-12, collected 46 million SEK by selling May-flowers, Majblommor¹, for the philanthropical organization Majblommans Riksförbund during the spring of 2007 (www.majblomman.se). This is not a situation particular to Sweden. In fact, the United Nations Children’s Fund, UNICEF, claims that, “In most industrialised countries, children routinely start earning money before reaching the minimum age for full-time employment (variously set at 14, 15 or 16)” (UNICEF 2005:31).

One of my premises for setting out on this ethnographic study was

¹ Small artificial flowers that children in Sweden sell for charity in April and May every year. See further in note 93.
that children in Sweden do in fact work. However, not everyone in Sweden seems to agree on this, and not everyone recognizes that the phenomenon of working children is also alive in our part of the world. One widespread and popular opinion seems to be that working children is only a historical phenomenon, a thing of the past or at least something only existing in poor countries in the south, in developing countries. Let me give you two examples. In the social services in Vikåsa, one of the two communities in which my fieldwork was undertaken, one civil servant whom I talked to during my fieldwork asked me with surprise “so you really think children under the age of sixteen work?” when I presented my research idea to her. Similarly, I often got surprised looks and comments when presenting my research idea in the field. One day, while having coffee in a teachers’ staff room in a school in Ekköping, the other community in which my fieldwork was undertaken, a teacher, Elsa, and I had a conversation regarding my research. Because she had been on vacation, Elsa had missed the information on my research project, and she was a bit curious and asked me why I was hanging around at the school. When I told her that the project was about working children, Elsa looked a bit confused. After a while she said, “child labour you mean, that’s illegal”.

These reactions are interesting in different ways. They are interesting because they underline that work is a multi-faceted concept. In Swedish society, the term work is used in many different ways and is given various meanings in different contexts. Two of these, work and labour, can be seen in the civil servant’s and Elsa’s comments presented above. In this study, I have chosen to use the term “children’s work” rather than “child labour”, the term used above by the teacher Elsa. The category children’s work is, I argue, more useful if a researcher wishes to study and describe the work children undertake, presumably on the children’s own initiative and fully voluntarily. The term child labour has negative connotations, as it generally refers to work activities that are considered to harm children’s health and fully voluntary. The term child labour has negative connotations, as it generally refers to work activities that are considered to harm children’s health and fully voluntary.

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2 Thinking back on my own childhood in the southern part of Sweden, I remember that I used to do quite a lot of both paid and unpaid work as a child. On a reflexive note, I must admit that I, at least to some degree, possibly expected to find something similar, several years later, in the Sweden of today.

3 The names of places and persons are fictitious to prevent identification of the participants in the research project.

4 In Swedish, the difference then is between “barns arbete”, children’s work, and “barnarbete”, child labour.
Moreover, I argue that these short descriptions neatly summarize two widespread and popular conceptions regarding working children in Sweden. First, it is illegal for children to work, and second, children, or more precisely people under the age of 16, do not work. This appears to be somewhat contradictory. On the one hand, children’s contributions to companies and associations obviously generate large amounts of money. On the other hand, people claim that children do not work. I argue that this contradiction is based on the variation in the work concepts that are used side-by-side in our society. Moreover, it is an effect of the way children and childhood are perceived in Swedish society.

Hidden and Invisible Work

Scholars sometimes describe children’s work as “hidden” and/or as “invisible” (e.g., Hungerland et al. 2005; James et al. 1998; Mizen et al. 2001; Qvortrup 1997). Children’s work, these scholars argue, is hidden and invisible because it is not counted (Freidson 1978; Hungerland et al. 2005; Qvortrup 1997; Wadel 1979). Children’s activities are not counted as work,

5 The category children’s work is useful because, as Nieuwenhuys (1998:77) puts it, “children’s work, by opposition to child labour, is not only the damnation of the poor but also the way socially valued goods and services are produced and fundamental institutions come about and are maintained”. However, the distinction between these two categories is not waterproof. Rather, this seems to be a distinction that is “primarily a moral one” (James et al. 1998:110) and a distinction that is “essentially political” (Myers 1999:22). Scholars such as Fyfe (1989) and Schildkrout (1980) have pointed to the problem of making any kind of clear-cut distinction between child labour, i.e. work assignments that are exploitative, and children’s work, i.e. work assignments that are non-exploitative. The researchers argue that the area is too complex to make such a clear-cut distinction. When it comes to children, the distinctions that are made in regard to labour and work often seem to be solely based on a moral presupposition about what a good childhood is supposed to be like. Given this, we can neither condemn nor praise the work different children undertake (Boyden et al. 1998; Fyfe 1989; Schildkrout 1980). Rather, “we must look in more detail at the nature of the specific cultural and social contexts in which it occurs, and evaluate the nature of children’s work, case by case” (Schildkrout 1980:480). Overall, I argue that this calls for use of the term children’s work rather than child labour.
or not even counted at all. De Coninck-Smith, Sandin and Schrumpf (1997) have identified two correlated factors in this process: “empirical ignorance” and “cultural blindness”.

De Coninck-Smith, Sandin and Schrumpf (1997) claim that child labour is often seen as something that disappeared in the Northern industrial countries as a result of labour regulations, technological development and the introduction of widespread schooling. They argue that this is a historical misunderstanding. What is more, they suggest that this misunderstanding might be explained by “empirical ignorance” (de Coninck-Smith et al. 1997:9). Little has been written on the matter, which in turn could be explained as resulting from the scarcity of sources in the form of public records. According to Dahl (1984:129), studies on work in general have often been “male centred” and “market centred”.6 Too much research has been devoted to work in industrial environments and on paid work and gainful employment, phenomena that do not easily fit with the work children do (Dahl 1984; de Coninck-Smith et al. 1997; Hengst and Zeiher 2000; Leonard 1998). Put together, this has strengthened the idea that working children is a thing of the past in Sweden. This in turn has created a sort of “cultural blindness” (de Coninck-Smith et al. 1997:10) when it comes to the question of children’s work in our society (see also Dahl 1984; James et al. 1998; Morrow 1994; Qvortrup 1985; Thorne 1987).

Qvortrup (1994a) has argued that children’s work outside the home could be seen as a public secret; everyone knows about the existence of children’s work, but no one knows under what circumstances and to what extent children actually work. I am prepared to agree with Qvortrup when it comes to the knowledge problem regarding children’s work outside the home. I would like to add, however, that there exist general knowledge problems also concerning children’s work at home and concerning informal and unpaid work in general. As I pointed out above, many children in Sweden take part in lucrative business activities that create large profits for many companies and organizations. Moreover, previous research in Sweden has shown that children take part in a number of productive and reproductive activities in and outside the home (Johansson 2005; Justegård 2002; Näsmann and von Gerber 2003). Thus, the information flow regarding children’s work has increased from the mid-1990s, when Qvortrup argued

6 My translations from original Swedish.
that children’s work outside the home could be seen as a public secret. Despite this, the popular opinion in Sweden seems to be that children do not work. A “cultural blindness” seems to prevail. The tasks children perform for the companies and organizations I mentioned above are not recognized as work. Consequently, the children taking part in the activities are not recognized as workers. Similarly, children’s, often informal and unpaid, activities in and outside the home are categorized in less auspicious terms than work.

De Coninck-Smith, Sandin and Schrumpf (1997:9) argue that the idea that work is not part of childhood has created a blind spot and that the history of child labour is thus, in a way, the “history of the adult world’s reluctance to accept children as social and cultural agents”. There is a reluctance to acknowledge children’s participation when it comes to work. My claim is that it is not only adults who are reluctant to accept children as social and cultural agents in this field. Many children in Sweden are also, at least in part, reluctant to accept children as social and cultural agents when it comes to work. In the present study, I will take a closer look at this conundrum. The overreaching aim of the study is thus to apply a child perspective and to study children, childhood and work to find out how childhood is constructed in the Sweden of today.

The Research Perspective

This study can be placed in the tradition of the “New Social Studies of Childhood”, or the Social Studies of Childhood, as I prefer to call it. In this tradition, researchers try to see children as individuals and foreground their different competences, capabilities and strategies. Within this approach, childhood is to be understood as a social construction (Boyden et al. 1998; James et al. 1998; James and James 2004). This implies that the

7 Worth underlining is that this research approach has been around since the late 20th century and is in that regard by no means “new” any more. Given that, this field is nowadays more often referred to as the Social Studies of Childhood. This is how I will henceforth refer to it in this book.
definition of childhood, and how children are supposed to behave, depends on the social and cultural context. Researchers in this field also try to study the child as an agent, as a social being and as a co-creator of its own position (Caputo 1995; James et al. 1998; Thorne 1987). This is in opposition to earlier ideas on socialization put forward by sociologists like Parsons, who have argued for a perspective in which the individuality of actors can be explained solely by a top-down approach focusing on the society and the form of socialization rather than on the individual’s actions (James et al. 1998; Jenks 2005). Furthermore, it is also in opposition to ideas in developmental psychology in which the child tends to be objectified and placed in an order of succession from an unfinished "becoming" to a fully grown adult (Jenks 2005). Connected to these theories was the sociological idea in which children were mainly seen as formable objects that were part of a parental project. In the Social Studies of Childhood, children are perceived as people who are already part of society. Thus, children are not merely outcomes of social processes, but actors within them (Corsaro 1997; James et al. 1998; James and Prout 1997; Jenks 2005; Mayall 2002; Qvortrup 1994b).

The paradigm shift that occurred with the Social Studies of Childhood did not only deal with the ontological understanding of children. Rather, the “new” ideas about ontology also have consequences for the epistemology. Prout and James (1997:8) summarize the key features of the Social Studies of Childhood in a few points:

1. Childhood is understood as a social construction. As such it provides an interpretative frame for contextualising the early years of human life. Childhood, as distinct from biological immaturity, is neither a natural nor universal feature of human groups but appears as

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8 Different scholars have discussed the categories "Becoming", "Being" and "Project" in various ways in regard to children, childhood, parents and parenthood over the years. Halldén (1991) uses the categories “Being” and “Project” to distinguish between different parents’ approaches to their children’s development, their ideas on the appropriate level of involvement in the developmental process, etc. Qvortrup (1994a) uses the category “Being“ in opposition to “Becoming” to underline an interest in children’s activities here and now, as participating members of the society of today, and not only as coming members of a future society. Lee (2001) problematizes the dichotomization between “Being” and “Becoming” regarding the division between adulthood and childhood. Connecting this debate to theories of a new “lifelong learning”, Lee ends up arguing that we are all “becomings”. See also Johansson (2005) for a similar discussion.
a specific structural and cultural component of many societies.

2. Childhood is a variable of social analysis. It can never be entirely divorced from other variables such as class, gender, or ethnicity. Comparative and cross-cultural analysis reveals a variety of childhoods rather than a single and universal phenomenon.

3. Children’s social relationships and cultures are worthy of study in their own right, independent of the perspective and concerns of adults.

4. Children are and must be seen as active in the construction and determination of their own social lives, the lives of those around them and of the societies in which they live. Children are not just the passive subjects of social structures and processes.

5. Ethnography is a particularly useful methodology for the study of childhood. It allows children a more direct voice and participation in the production of sociological data than is usually possible through experimental or survey styles of research.

6. Childhood is a phenomenon in relation to which double hermeneutic of the social science is acutely present (…). That is to say, to proclaim a new paradigm of childhood sociology is also to engage in and respond to the process of reconstructing childhood in society.

James, Jenks and Prout argue that what they describe as “the practice of childhood” is often produced by a separation between the world of adults and the world of children (James et al. 1998; see also Nieuwenhuys 2003; Näsman 1998). Traditionally, studies on children and childhood have often been based on research conducted in settings that are dominated by children (James et al. 1998; Prout and James 1997). According to Reynolds (1991:xix), “Studies of children continue to be relegated to sealed-off areas where specialists focus on aspects of childhood in isolation from the analysis of broader social, economic and political forces”.9 Scholars in the Social Studies of Childhood argue in favour of widening the research focus on children and childhood. One of the areas outlined as neglected and in need of more research is the area of children and work (Prout and James 1997).

Regarding research on working life, it is normally concentrated only on the activities of adults. In the present study, the angle is somewhat different. In line with the ambitions of the Social Studies of Childhood, the

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9 As we will see in the section on previous research, this has changed somewhat since that time. However, I argue that the predominant focus, concerning studies on children and childhood, is still the one outlined by Reynolds (1991).
aim here is to study children in their own right and not merely as participants in an adult project. The starting point is that children and adults are complementary participants in society. Instead of studying children in demarcated specific child spaces, the ambition is to study children in society and as parts of the societal division of labour (Qvortrup 1985, 1994b; Schildkrout 1978). I wish to focus my attention on an area where children are not expected to be found in our society and to focus on children and work.

The study presented in this book is part of a larger project called “Childhood and Work”.10 In the project, a group of researchers have mapped out how opportunities to participate on the Swedish labour market have changed for children and youth from the 1950s to the present (Engwall and Söderlind 2007; Söderlind and Engwall 2008). Moreover, children’s and young people’s work has been investigated from a family economical and a societal perspective through studies of parents’ and teachers’ attitudes towards children’s work (e.g., Engwall 2007; Söderlind 2007). Finally, in the project, we have studied work on the individual level by focusing on children’s own stories (e.g., Engwall 2006; Samuelsson 2007; Samuelsson and Engwall 2008). The study presented here is a piece of this final part, where the focus is on the child perspective.

Structuration

As mentioned, the Social Studies of Childhood criticizes previous approaches to the study of children and childhood on a number of counts. Scholars in this tradition have argued that previous research traditions have not sufficiently taken into account children’s agency or the cultural contexts that influence how childhoods are shaped. On top of this, previous research has not sufficiently considered how these two aspects, the agent and the structure, work together in the construction and reconstruction of

10 “Childhood and Work” was a joint project between the Institute for Futures Studies and the Department of Child Studies at Linköping University. The Swedish Council for Working Life and Social Research financed the research project (FAS nr 2003 – 0537).
childhood. This critique is influenced by Giddens’ theories on structuration (e.g., Giddens 1979, 1984).

Giddens (1979, 1984) argues that the dichotomy between agency and structure is a false one and claims that what we are dealing with is rather a “duality of structure”. Rather than seeing actor and structure as two separate antagonistic systems, he argues that they are intertwined in the structuration process that takes place in day-to-day life. This structuration process is what will be in focus in the present study. As we can see, Giddens’ theory of structuration concerns how social activities both produce and reproduce the circumstances that generated these circumstances in the first place. In the theory, there is a focus on action and relations. Special interest is given to how human beings, through actions in their day-to-day life, contribute to the production and shaping of social reality and thus to the reshaping of structures. This is the structuration process.

A central element of Giddens’ (1979, 1984, 1991) ideas on structuration is the reflexive individual – the agent. Reflexivity, in Giddens’ sense, refers to the ongoing monitoring of the flow of everyday life undertaken by individuals. Consequently, the reflexive individual is conscious of how the world works, and she/he contributes to social reproduction through her/his actions. The reflexive individual is thus an agent. As an agent, the individual reflects over and takes into consideration the consequences of her/his action while acting. Regarding consciousness, Giddens differentiates between “practical consciousness”, “discursive consciousness” and “the unconscious”. The agent’s capacity for knowledge is largely carried in what Giddens calls the practical consciousness. Practical consciousness contains the many things that the agent knows tacitly, about how to go about in everyday life situations, non-conscious practices undertaken without being able to explain them. Great parts of the practical consciousness are in this way “occluded from view” (Giddens 1984:xxx). Given this, reflexivity functions, as Giddens puts it, only to a certain extent on an explicit discursive level, as discursive consciousness, where agents are able to explicitly report on their actions. However, Giddens also argues that the division between the practical

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11 My usage of the terms “agent” and “actor” goes back to Giddens, who alternates between them and uses them synonymously (Giddens 1984:xxii).

12 The third level, “the unconscious”, will not be dealt with in this study.
consciousness and the discursive consciousness can be altered by, for example, various forms of socialization or learning experiences.\textsuperscript{13} Moreover, most agents are, “normally able, if asked, to provide discursive interpretations of the nature of, and the reasons for, the behaviour in which they engage” (Giddens 1991:35).

The action is thus intentional. This intention is however not the base for the agency. Agency is not necessarily connected to any intention the agents might have for their action, but rather to the possibility to act (Giddens 1984; Giddens and Pierson 1998). Thus, the agency goes back to the fact that the agent, at any moment of conduct in the flow of day-to-day life, could have chosen to act differently.

Yet agency and intentionality do not mean that the individual always gets her or his way, i.e. that the effects of actions always turn out as intended or that the single individual controls the turn of events (Giddens 1979, 1984; see also James and James 2004). Giddens (1984:8) argues that, “The durée of day-to-day life occurs as a flow of intentional action”.\textsuperscript{14} But the agent’s actions and choices might create intended as well as unintended consequences. Moreover, the unintended consequences of an agent’s action might, as Giddens (1984) points out, systematically feedback and condition further actions of the very same agent.

When it comes to structure, then, it should be noted that structure is not “an entity” as such. Structures do not exist outside the action, although they can turn into habits and resources that are perceived as natural and definite (Giddens 1979, 1984). The existence of structure is dependent on reflexive knowledgeable agents. This is because “Structure only exists in so far as people do things knowledgeably and do them in certain contexts that have particular consequences” (Giddens and Pierson 1998:81). Structures do not exist as such, if agents do not take them into consideration in their actions. Structures are created and recreated through the actions of individual agents. Structure is thus both the medium and the outcome of the conduct it organizes. Thus, structure creates both possibilities for action and hinders actions. According to Giddens (1984:377), structure contains both “rules” and “resources”, which agents use in various ways in their day-to-day actions. Thus, analysing structuration means studying the way in which social systems are produced and reproduced in interaction, an

\textsuperscript{13} There are, thus, no absolute barriers between these two categories (Giddens 1984).

\textsuperscript{14} Emphasis in original.
interaction that is based on activities of situated knowledgeable agents who use and draw upon rules and resources in their day-to-day life.

**Childhood, Children and the Child**

In the Social Studies of Childhood, ideas similar to Giddens’ have been outlined in, for example, “The cultural politics of childhood” approach, presented by James and James (2004) and in Corsaro’s (1997) theory of “Interpretive reproduction”. Theoretically, this is the starting point of the present study. Both these theoretical approaches base their theoretical foundation on the interplay between childhood, children and the child.

In a common sense framework, childhood is often merely perceived as a chronological category, like a limited phase in an individual’s life (Näsman and von Gerber 2003). For example, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and Swedish law define childhood as the time period extending from birth until the age of 18 (www.rb.se/eng/ChildRights/LongVersion/). Furthermore, in a common sense framework, childhood is often perceived as a natural and universal phenomenon that has the same features everywhere. The term “the child” often comes to symbolize all children or at least a larger collective of children. Consequently, there is a general use of the term “the child” in, for example, legal contexts and texts as well as in some research literature and governmental policy. James and James (2004) are critical to this misleading use of the term. They argue that the “the term ‘child’ should only be used to refer to the individual social actor, to the young person one meets on the street or in the schoolyard” (James and James 2004:16). For analytical work, James and James prefer and suggest use of the terms children and childhood.

Scholars in the Social Studies of Childhood have argued that childhood is a constant structural feature of all societies (James and Prout 1997; Qvortrup 1994a). Childhood can be understood as a category or structural form in the same way as social class and age groups can (Corsaro 1997; James and James 2004). For children, as Corsaro (1997) points out,
childhood is a temporary period, something they grow out of and leave behind as they move into other phases of life (see also James and James 2004). For society however, childhood is a permanent category (Qvortrup 1994a). Moreover, it is a “category that never disappears even though its members change continuously and its nature and conception vary historically” (Corsaro 1997:4). As Prout and James (1997:27) suggest, childhood may thus be seen as “a social institution that exists beyond the activity of any particular child or adult”. The institution of childhood may be seen as concurrent structures in the shape of material conditions, societal institutions as well as the discourses on how children should be, and traditions and ideas concerning normality that occur in the particular community where children live their everyday lives (Prout and James 1997). Hence, as James and James (2004:14) argue:

‘childhood’ is the structural site that is occupied by ‘children’, as a collectivity. And it is within this collective and institutional space of ‘childhood’, as a member of the category ‘children’, that any individual ‘child’ comes to exercise his or her unique agency.16

Various processes on the macro- and the micro-level of everyday life affect the content of childhood as a structural form. Thus, childhood, as it is experienced by different children in various societies and cultures at different times, can turn out very different and be experienced very differently. Even if there always exists a childhood as a structural form, the content of this childhood can vary substantially. Children’s lived childhood, as well as adults’ adulthood, is affected by macro-structural changes as well as micro-events taking place in the local setting of day-to-day life. Children are not simply affected by these changes. Rather,

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15 The term "institution" is not to be understood as a timeless entity floating through history. Rather, it is to be understood in line with Douglas’ definition as a “legitimized social grouping” (Douglas 1987:46). Douglas makes a distinction between more instrumental or provisional arrangements and what she characterizes as institutions. In her line of thinking, institutions could be “a family, a game or a ceremony” (Douglas 1987:46). These phenomena are conventions that have become institutionalized. Furthermore, Douglas argues that legitimization of the established institutions is often based on an idea of naturalness. When questioned about them, actors refer to the natural order of things or to the order of the universe (Douglas 1987). A somewhat similar discussion on childhood as a social institution can also be found in Wadel (1984).

16 Emphasis in original.
children are very much agents in these changes (Corsaro 1997). While children take part, producing their own childhood, they simultaneously contribute to the production of the rest of society. In sum, then, childhood (and society) is in this way socially constructed, and children play a part in the very process of social construction.

This connects to the cultural politics of childhood outlined by James and James (2004) and to Corsaro’s interpretative reproduction (1997). According to James and James, the very ambition of their approach is to investigate “the ways in which structure and agency combine during childhood in the process of social and cultural reproduction” (James and James 2004:8). Similarly, Corsaro’s approach is to focus “on childhood as a social construction resulting from the collective actions of children with adults and each other” (Corsaro 1997:43).17 Both these approaches put the focus on this social construction and attempt to show how the social construction of childhood takes place in a dialectic and reflexive process.

Summing up this theoretical part, it is clear that three levels have to be included when setting out to investigate how the structuration process takes place. First, it is important to acknowledge the way local constructions of childhood are affected by cultural determinants. Aspects such as the family structure, the nature of kin and gender relations and the structure of the school system are important here. These cultural determinants also include “the social status to which children are assigned” (James and James 2004:6). Second, we need to identify the processes by which these determinants are put into practice. Law and social policy are key mechanisms in the construction of childhood.18 Third, we have to emphasize that children are active agents in the childhoods that are constructed in the structural space referred to as childhood. Children play an important part, both individually and collectively, in the construction of childhood through their actions and their choices, “albeit often unintentionally” (James and James 2004:9).19

17 Emphasis in original.
18 Law should not merely be understood in the narrow sense as strict legal terms. Law should rather be understood broadly as “processes of social ordering” (James and James 2004:7) including various informal, everyday regulatory aspects.
19 Here James and James argument is in line with what Giddens (1979, 1984) has outlined.

Since the late 20th century, scholars representing the Social Studies of Childhood have carried out studies on childhood and work. These include studies that take a qualitative approach and that in many cases have a child perspective in the forefront. I will not review all of these investigations here, but mention the work of four researchers, all using approaches that have been particularly important to the present study.\(^{20}\)

When looking into previous research done on working children, a starting point could be the studies undertaken in Norway by Solberg (1994). Solberg used different methodological approaches in her studies of children’s work. Her initial work was an ethnographic study in a Northern Norwegian coastal community. In this study, Solberg noticed, much to her surprise, that children were taking part in work in the fishing industry. The children worked side by side with adults on the regular labour market, performing the same tasks as adults. But children also worked outside the regular labour market, in special branches more or less reserved for children. Moreover, she found that the children in the fishing community were playing many important roles on the local labour market and that their participation was necessary for running parts of the fishing industry.

Solberg’s second study was undertaken in the Norwegian capital of Oslo. In Oslo, Solberg conducted a large-scale quantitative questionnaire study to follow up her ethnographic investigation. Through this change of

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\(^{20}\) None of the examples of previous research reported here are from Sweden or from a Swedish context. The research area of childhood and work with a contemporary focus is, I would argue, a bit undeveloped in Sweden. There are a few exceptions, such as a minor article studying children who deliver papers in Sweden (Justegård 2002). There are a few research studies that partially touch upon this field. Examples of this are Näsman and von Gerber’s (2002, 2003) research on children in the economic arena, and Johansson’s (2005, 2007) research on children and consumption. All these include parts on children’s work in contemporary Sweden.
method, she wanted to gain a better understanding of how widespread the situation of children taking part in work was in Norway. One problem, she argued, was that children’s activities are not usually counted as work. Given this, Solberg thought that it would not be particularly useful to ask children about work. Rather, Solberg decided to focus on the activities in which individuals take part. Solberg and a co-worker initiated a large time-use study in which they looked at the amount of household activity in which different individuals in families took part. Based on these activity patterns, the researchers calculated the amount of work. In this study, Solberg found that it is very common for children to take part in a substantial amount of work in the household. Solberg actually found that, after mothers, who are by far the main household workers, the children contribute the second most and the fathers were in third place as household workers.

In a follow-up study, Solberg conducted interviews with children and their families. By now, she knew that children participate to a large extent in the running of the household. At this point, Solberg wanted to gain knowledge about children’s position in the household in a broader sense than merely work in the household. Approaching the subject from a social constructionist stance, Solberg was interested in everyday negotiations of daily life and how children take part in and contribute to these. Through this investigation, Solberg hoped to get a better understanding of how children and their parents decide what it means to be a child in a family. In this part of her study, Solberg (1994:125-129) showed that children are the “new homestayers”, a process very much connected to the disappearance of housewives in Norway. Solberg argues that, when the female part of the adult population to a larger extent began gainful employment on the formal labour market, children were left alone at home to manage themselves to a higher degree. From a situation where everyday life was managed almost solely by the mother, who was at home all day, the children had to take more responsibility. When children were able to live up to these new demands, parents got a new outlook on their own children and the children increased their sphere of independence. All and all, through this process of negotiation, the idea of childhood was reconstructed and changed.

A second example of this field of research could be the research undertaken by Morrow (1994, 1996, 2007a, 2007b) on children’s work in
Britain. The 730 children in her study wrote essays on what they usually do outside of school, and Morrow conducted a small number of interviews and follow-up discussions. Morrow hoped that, by asking the children to write about their normal everyday activities rather than asking them to focus on what they do that is work, she would get past the stage where children only repeat official societal ideas about children and childhood. Instead, she took on the categorization work herself. Based on the collected material, Morrow could map different work activities that children take part in their everyday life. The children worked in wage labour, in marginal economic activities, in non-domestic family labour and in domestic labour. Moreover, Morrow showed that the children in her study fulfilled many responsible and useful roles through this work in society and in their families. In her research, she shows that children are often neither passive nor dependent, but rather competent and responsible actors (Morrow 1994). Morrow then uses these results as a critique of the “traditional” sociological perspectives on children and childhood and claims that the results “should lead us to reconsider the way we conceptualize childhood” (Morrow 1994:143).

A third example of this field of research can be found in a number of studies undertaken by Leonard (2002, 2003, 2004a, 2007a, 2007b) on children’s work in Northern Ireland. In most cases, the studies are based in Belfast. Like Morrow, Leonard has used large-scale materials. In some of her studies, she combines questionnaires with group interviews. In one study, Leonard (2002) set out to study how much children work in Northern Ireland. To measure the amount of work children do, Leonard used the official British labour law definitions. In this study, she shows that extra work outside school, either in the morning, evening or in the weekend, is part of the majority childhood in Northern Ireland. Children undertake a number of odd jobs throughout the week, but the most common job is that of newspaper deliverer. Leonard challenges the popular UK notion that newspaper delivering is the perfect job to combine with school by showing how the children are often exploited, badly paid and have to work excessive hours. Leonard calls for a change of social policy in regard to the labour market from “the passive protection of children to the active promotion of their employment rights” (Leonard 2002:202).

Moving on, in a study from 2003, Leonard documents the relationship between children, parents, teachers and employers. She documents how children’s participation on the labour market influences the
relationship between children and adults at home, in school and at work. Leonard argues that the work the children do outside the home and the access to earnings this work creates promote their sense of responsibility and their self-reliance. One effect of this is that children challenge their parents regarding the status they have as children at home. Thus, by working, the children manage to negotiate a more adult role for themselves at home, but when it comes to school, it is another matter. Leonard shows that children are aware that teachers might not appreciate their jobs outside school. To avoid problems, the children use different diplomatic skills to keep teachers unaware of their jobs, their work situation and work hours. The children do this because, as she shows in yet another study (Leonard 2004a), they want to work. On top of the fact that the work gives them a sense of autonomy and self-confidence, and that it gives them money they can use as they please, the children think the work gives them experiences that school cannot provide (Leonard 2003). As shown by Leonard (2004a), the children’s only complaint about work concerns their work situations and the fact that they are often paid less than older people are. The children want to work, but while working they would like to have the same terms as everybody else. Leonard claims that the children show a mature understanding of their position in regard to work and argues that the children’s voices ought to be heard to a greater extent in social policy work (Leonard 2004a). In this way, Leonard once again pushes for a change in social policies regarding children’s work.

A fourth and final example of this field of research could be a project conducted by Mayall (2002), in which she studied how young people talk about work. The participants in the initial project were a group of 9-year-olds attending primary school. Mayall interviewed the children in pairs. In the first part of her project, Mayall did not introduce the topic of work in the interviews, rather the children were asked, “to describe and reflect on the social positions of motherhood, fatherhood and childhood and on their daily lives (…)” (Mayall 2002:66). However, if the topic of work came up, Mayall encouraged the children to explore this further. In this part of her project, she found that the children gave very mixed messages in regard to work. Seven pairs interviewed in these open-ended interviews did not mention any connection to work in their own life or in children’s lives in general, three pairs mentioned housework, one referred to homework and three pairs said school was work. The mixed responses caused Mayall
to change her approach slightly to pursue the question of “whether young people did regard work as part of their lives” (Mayall 2002:67). In her next fieldwork with 12- to 13-year-olds in a secondary school, she included a specific question about work, “What kinds of work do you do?”, in her interview sessions (Mayall 2002:67).21 Once again, she received mixed messages from children who mentioned housework and school as forms of work. Several of the children in Mayall’s study seemed to think that work was something you do for other people, like cleaning at home, etc. For these children, school was not understood as work, as school was understood as something you mostly do for yourself. Other children, however, considered school to be work, but they underlined that it was not as hard as and took less time than adults’ work. Although several children mentioned taking part in household tasks, many of them saw these as marginal activities. Rather, the children seemed to depict childhood as a privileged period with few responsibilities.

Aim of the Study

A number of conclusions can be drawn from the presented previous research. Researchers have shown that there are children in contemporary Europe who do a considerable amount of work. Children work during the weekdays and at weekends. They take part in wage labour as well as in more marginal economic work activities, outside or on the fringe of the formal labour market. The working conditions of children, as regards work hours, payments, etc., seem to vary to a high degree from context to context. The mix of regular and non-regular work activities on the formal labour market, in the domestic arena and even in school complicate the definition of work. All these researchers underline that our understanding of children’s work is very much entangled in our preconceived notions of what work is supposed to be as well as how we perceive children, and childhood. The researchers compare their results, from their investigations of children’s everyday life, with the societal notion of childhood as a time

21 Emphasis in original.
free from work – as a privileged period free from responsibilities. The results create a mixed image. Researchers have shown that working children are competent, responsible and independent. They have shown that children negotiate with their parents as well as with other adults, and in this process change the child-adult relationship. Some researchers underline that children are fully aware of the value of their own work and want to work. Others have shown that children are somewhat unclear as to the value of their work activities, or whether the things they do are really work. These children, thus, at least partly share the societal notion of children and childhood.

Methodologically, these researchers all suggest using an open-minded and inclusive approach to the concept work. The scholars recommend that we try to leave our pre-conceived notions of children, childhood and work behind us. They recommend that we listen to children’s own ideas about their work. At the same time, they also emphasize the difficulties associated with studies of children’s work. A researcher studying children’s work who asks children about their work may risk ending up with answers containing nothing more than the predominating societal discourse on children and childhood. To find more than merely these stereotypes, they recommend that we look at what children are doing, that we take into account all children’s activities and that we extend the work category beyond activities on the formal labour market. Finally, all these researchers’ studies underline the need for flexibility with respect to research methods. By combining methods, they manage to create depth as well as breadth in their research, thereby giving a fuller picture of children’s everyday life.

The study presented in this book is a study of children, childhood and work. The aim is to explore how childhood is constructed in contemporary Sweden. I investigate this by studying children’s work. Moreover, I study children’s work from the participants’ own perspective, that is, by using a child perspective.

In the previous sections of the book, I presented scholars who have shown that children in contemporary Europe work to a certain extent. The present study focuses on working children in Sweden. But do children in Sweden work? This is one of the questions that will be investigated here. To answer this question, we need to explore what work is. The focus here is on children’s definitions, not adults’, and the aim is to investigate how
the children themselves understand the different activities they are involved in during their day-to-day life. I will take a closer look at how the children use different categories of work. I will investigate what kind of activities the children are taking part in in society, and I will investigate which of their activities they understand as work and why. Furthermore, I will study what incentives the children have for engaging in different types of work.

The concepts of children and work are, as I already pointed out, socially constructed. The meanings of these concepts are neither fixed nor absolute. The way these two concepts are perceived might change from one societal context to another. By focusing on the children and their participation in society as parts of the societal division of labour, by studying their activities and simultaneously investigating their definitions of these activities, we may be able to detect not only how the concept of work is given diverse meanings by the children in different contexts, but also and more importantly how childhood is constructed.

**Disposition**

In this chapter, I have presented the background of the research I undertake in the current study, and I have presented my theoretical starting points. Moreover, I have outlined the aim of the study. In Chapter 2, I present the methodological approach that I use in the study. In Chapter 3, I begin my investigation by examining the participating children’s definitions of work. The definitions and the four work arenas presented in this chapter are used later on in the rest of the study. Every arena forms a chapter in the rest of the study, and in the following chapters, I situate and contextualize the children’s work activities. Chapter 4 is an investigation of children’s work in the job arena. Chapter 5 is an investigation of children’s work in the domestic arena. Chapter 6 is an investigation of children’s work in the school arena. Chapter 7 is an investigation of children’s work in the arena of spare time activities. In the final chapter, the results of the study are summarized and discussed.
An Ethnographic Study of Childhood and Work

“The Field” – Ekköping and Vikåsa

The present study took place in two different communities. Community 1, Ekköping, is a rural community situated in the countryside in southern Sweden, approximately 45 minutes from the closest major city. The Ekköping community has almost 12,000 inhabitants, of which two-thirds live in the central part of the community, and the rest in different villages spread out across the countryside. In the central part of the community, most people live in private homes, but you can find residential districts side by side with blocks of flats. On the outskirts of Ekköping, in the smaller villages, the level of private home ownership is even greater, and there you can find a large number of farms. In the community surroundings, one can find arable land and pastureland as well as forests that are often connected to the agriculture business. However, historically this is an old industrial community, what in Swedish would be characterized as a “Bruksort”.22

One major industrial company dominated the Ekköping labour market under the greater part of the 20th century. Generation after generation worked in the company’s factories, and this came to shape and develop a certain kind of community spirit.23 The company and its large-scale industrial production took a downturn in the 1970s, in the general industrial

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22 For further elaborations on the concept of the “Bruksort” see e.g., Trondman (1999:238-240).
23 Generally referred to as “Bruksandan” among the community inhabitants.
recession in Sweden and Western Europe, and downsized its production substantially. The community spirit, however, seemed to live on. Following this recession, the community of Ekköping now lacks one major employer dominating the labour market, as was the case before. Today instead, three employers top the list when it comes to level of employment. Nevertheless, there is also a variety of small and middle-size companies side by side with these three larger ones. In Ekköping, my study has mostly focused on two schools, Berguvsskolan, which is attended by children in grades 1-6, and Fritjofsskolan, which is attended by children in grades 7-9. 24 Children from the central part of Ekköping as well as some children from the countryside, who commute to school by bus, attend these two schools.

Community 2, Vikåsa, has almost 8000 inhabitants. This urban community is placed in a metropolitan area close to one of Sweden’s largest cities, and it takes approximately ten minutes with public transportation from the community of Vikåsa to the city centre of the closest big city. In addition to this, there are a number of smaller suburban communities nearby. The public transportation network is well developed in the area, and it is easy to commute back and forth between Vikåsa, the surrounding suburbs and the big city nearby. The mixture of different forms of housing is not as prominent in the second community. There is a small area with terrace houses and about five private houses in the area, but blocks of flats dominate the picture here. Some might characterize this community as a “standard” Swedish suburb. However, some inhabitants rather depict it as a suburb with a substantial “village feeling”. Defining the major employers in Vikåsa is difficult given its proximity to other towns. The Vikåsa inhabitants can easily commute to one of the nearby suburbs or to the big city to work there. My study in Vikåsa has mostly focused on one school. Children from grades 1-9 attend the Vikåsa School. Most pupils who attend the school live in central Vikåsa, but there are children who commute by public transportation from other suburbs to attend the school.

I chose these two communities because to me they appeared to be

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24 As school is compulsory in Sweden up to the ninth grade, schools are good places to start when children are needed as research participants. For gathering information on how all children at a certain age, in a certain neighbourhood of a community are working and view work, a school may be a good place to start, as it may be assumed that the majority of children in the neighbourhood attend the neighbourhood school (Pole et al. 1999). For a further discussion on the compulsory Swedish school system, see Chapter 6.
two average Swedish communities. The inhabitants represent a mix of living situations; some people live in houses, others in flats, etc. The situation might be rather different in urban and rural communities as well as in sparsely populated areas, and all this might affect the children’s childhoods (James et al. 1998; Näsman and von Gerber 2002). The point of using two communities is not to make quantitative large-scale comparisons between them. By including boys and girls of different ages from two different communities, I hope to obtain breadth and variety in the material and thereby to be able to account for some of the childhood variety in the study. I do not discuss, however, the social class background or ethnicity of the children who took part in the study. Categories such as social class and ethnicity are, as Morrow (1994:130) suggests, “adult categories that children may have difficulty ‘fitting’ themselves into”. Given this, I never asked the children to define themselves along ethnic or class lines, nor did I gather any information on their parent’s ethnicity, descent or their economic or work background. There is, thus, no basis in the material I collected for drawing conclusions related to such factors. However, these factors might, as Morrow (1996) points out, very well have certain effects on what activities children take part in both in and outside the home as well as on the accounts the children give of themselves. Questions regarding ethnicity came up in the children’s accounts on a few occasions, when they mentioned their family being from another country. In one of the interviews in Vikåsa, some of the children in the interview started pointing out their own and the other interview participants’ ethnicity as well as mine. When I revealed, in response to a direct question, that my parents were born in Sweden, I was defined as a “Svenne”\textsuperscript{25}. The other participants in the interview were similarly defined along ethnic lines as being Estonian, half-Senegalese, German, Swedish and Iraqi. Moreover, the children in this interview stated that there were many immigrants in the school.

\textsuperscript{25} Youth slang term for Swedes, which can sometimes be used in a depreciatory way.
The children

In total, 100 children participated in the present study. Sixty-six of them were from Ekköping and 34 from Vikåsa. My first contact with the children was in their school. They were schoolchildren in grades 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 and 9.\(^\text{26}\) When initiating the study, I went around in the school presenting my research project to the children. I handed out a written inquiry form for them and their parents containing information on the research idea. A consent form was included that was to be signed by them and their parents if the children were interested in participating and even if they were not interested. Contact names were included in case they needed more information (see Appendix).

In Berguvsskolan in Ekköping, which is the school where I started my study, I invited all children in grades 4-6 to participate in the study. However, far from all children were interested in taking part. In the fourth and sixth grade, around 50% chose to participate. In the fifth grade, only two pupils chose to take part. Despite this somewhat meagre interest among these children, I realized that the number of participating children could easily end up being too large. I wanted to include children from two communities, and I estimated that I would have problems doing justice to the participating individuals if the number of participants were too high. Thus, in the second school, Fritjofsskolan, also in Ekköping, I changed my approach somewhat. This is a larger school, which is administratively divided into sections. Every section includes classes from grade 7, 8 and 9. Instead of approaching all the classes in the school, I approached only classes in one of the school sections. Given this, I only asked pupils from

\(^{26}\) In this study, I label the participating children as schoolchildren and as pupils by referring to the grade they attend in school. I use this classification as a tool to separate the different children from each other in the analysis and in the text. The reason for not using their biological age is that I never asked the children how old they are or when they were born. One critique of the use of school grades could be that by using what could be called a societal institutional order of childhood (Näsman and von Gerber 2003), I diminish the participants and that I should instead use “their own” classifications. I would argue that that is what I have done. Reference to school grades was a very common form of categorization also among the children themselves. They often referred to themselves and other children as “we in the sixth grade” or “they in the ninth grade”, etc. Given this, I found that the usage of school grades was acceptable, even if it is far from neutral and pinpoints the children’s place in a societal age order.
two classes in the seventh grade, and one class from grade 8 and one from grade 9 to participate. In the seventh and eighth grade, almost 50% of the pupils chose to participate. However, in this school, no ninth graders were interested in taking part in the project. Vikåsaskolan is also divided into sections. In this school, I used a similar approach as in Fritjofsskolan. At Vikåsaskolan, I asked pupils from one class from every grade 4-9 to participate. Overall, the level of interest was between 10 and 50%. The interest was somewhat higher in the fourth and the eighth grade and lower in the fifth and the sixth grade.

Some of the children who initially signed up for and/or took part in the research project chose not to continue their participation at various stages. Some children participated in some parts of the study but missed other parts due to vacations, illness absence or due to the fact that they had moved and/or changed schools. This means that the participants overall ranged in age from 9- to 10-year-olds up to 15- to 16-year-olds. There is not, however, an equal spread of children throughout the years. As mentioned, the number of children taking part in the different school grades was not even; in some grades, the interest was higher than in others. The variation between boys and girls is not completely equal either. In Ekköping, 35 boys and 31 girls took part in the study. In Vikåsa, 13 boys and 21 girls took part in the study. All this has to be taken into account when considering variations across the year groups as well as between girls and boys.

**Ethnography**

This is an ethnographic study that is grounded in a long-term fieldwork. The first part of the fieldwork, in Ekköping, was undertaken in the period of late spring 2004 to late spring 2005. The second part of the fieldwork, in Vikåsa, was undertaken in the period of autumn 2005 to spring 2006. Ethnography is not “one” method, but rather a fieldwork approach in which various methods can be used. Ethnography can be a method for collecting material as well as for analysing and writing up the gathered material. This
is how ethnography is used in the present study.

When setting out on this study, I had the ambition to base my research on children’s everyday life. Ethnographic fieldwork is often used as a methodological approach in studies on everyday life. Its participative character and the emphasis on long-term field contact are aspects well suited to studies of everyday life. Recurring meetings face-to-face between the research participants and the researchers in the research participants’ everyday settings, where the research participants live their lives, can create opportunities to get to know one another better. The ethnographic approach can thus facilitate possibilities for research participants to give their perspectives on their own lives and for the researcher to learn from them (Fielding 1982; James 2001; Nilsen 2005; Thorne 1993).

In my fieldwork, I used a variety of methods (see Table 1). I did this in an attempt to “approach the field using multiple research tactics to develop broadly sketched, multi-layered portrayals of work” (Smith 2001: 227). Various methods in combination can help in creating a multi-faceted picture of the field (Eder and Fingerson 2003). Different methods suit different fields and different research participants better than others and, by using a variety of methods, the chance increases that individual research participants will feel they are able to express themselves in the way they prefer. A combination of materials can thereby better capture the wealth of the children’s experiences (Boyden et al. 1998; Christensen 2004; Eder and Fingerson 2003; Punch 2002).

Table 1. Overview of methods and collected material

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research tools</th>
<th>Ekköping</th>
<th>Vikåsa</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group interviews</td>
<td>14 taped group interviews with children in grade 6-827</td>
<td>7 taped group interviews with children in grade 6-9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Photographs</td>
<td>224 photographs, taken with disposable cameras by children in grade 6-8</td>
<td>63 photographs, taken with disposable cameras by children in grade 6-9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questionnaires</td>
<td>66 questionnaires filled out by children in grade 4-8</td>
<td>34 questionnaires filled out by children in grade 4-9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Written essays</td>
<td>21 written essays with 21 accompanying pictures, written and drawn by children in grade 4-5</td>
<td>12 written essays with 11 accompanying pictures, written and drawn by children in grade 4-528</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

27 One of the tapes was damaged and this prohibited use of this particular interview.
Participant Observation

Research using an ethnographic approach often includes elements of participant observation. Previous ethnographic research done on work and working life, in for example anthropology, ethnology and sociology, undertaken in rather demarcated areas such as a factory or a workshop, has shown that scholars can and often do use different strategies in participant observation. One method may be “job shadowing”, which involves following or accompanying different workers during different parts of the day as they undertake different work tasks to see what they do and how they do it and to conduct informal interviews and ask questions (Arvastson 1987; Mellström 1995). Yet another method may be to secure a job at the studied factory and work side-by-side with other employees like an “ordinary” worker, thereby learning the work process and gathering information (Ehn 1981; Solberg 1994). However, there are some obstacles to using participant observation when studying children’s work in Swedish communities. One problem concerns the decision of where to study the working children, and an obstacle here is that it can be somewhat difficult to find one place, a distinct setting, in which to conduct the participant observation.

Participant observation is, as Fielding (1982:80) notes, “not a research strategy appropriate to every research problem. Like other methodologies, it suffers from defects of it virtues”. Forms of participant observation are often used to study everyday phenomena. The researcher follows, as in the work-study case above, the objects of the research, the “informants”, around while they go about their mundane lives. Given this methodological stance, researchers using participant observation often

28 One of the children in Vikåsa did not draw a picture.
focus on the micro and local level of life. In anthropology, the preferred level of analysis has long been the village. The village was considered a small enough place to be overviewed by one person, the researcher. Placed in the village centre, the researcher could follow village life as it enfolded in front of her or him throughout the day. The present study is not a village study. It is a study on children, childhood and work, and as will be shown in what is to follow, this field is not something as easily defined as a village. As it turned out, the character of children’s labour market made it difficult to use participant observation as a full-scale research method. The children’s labour market turned out to have a very informal character. Taking part in household chores, baby-sitting, selling Majblommor, and Christmas magazines or helping out in the various local athletic associations were some among many work activities the children mentioned taking part in. Other children mentioned that school and homework as well as playing football and swimming were work activities. In the present study, I let the children’s definition of work mark out the field. The children’s non-static and maybe even unconventional way of understanding work produced a widespread labour market, a labour market that was hard to follow using participant observation. Duranti (1997:89) claims that, “The observation of a particular community is not attained from a distant and safe point but by being in the middle of things, that is, by participating in as many social events as possible”. Given this, rather than focusing my attention on and participating in a few parts of the children’s labour market, I tried to move around and visit different places. Instead of prolonged and systematic long-term participation in one specific place, observations were made whenever opportunities arose, at sporting events, in market places, in classrooms as well as in other school facilities.

My level of participation differed from place to place and from occasion to occasion. When doing participant observation at a sporting event, standing in the crowds on the side of the football field, for example observing children working as ball boys, my level of participation was,
using Duranti’s (1997:99) designation, “passive”. I observed the children’s activities from a distant position and did not speak to them about this activity until later on in an interview. At one point, I took part in a meeting in a classroom in Berguvsskolan, in Ekköping when a teacher organized the selling of Majblommor (see further discussion of this phenomenon in Chapter 6). On this occasion, the teacher sat in the front of the classroom and the pupils were seated at their desks. I was the only one standing, by the wall, next to the door. I was clearly participating, I was in the room, I overheard and saw what took place, but I was not participating in the same way as the children and the teacher. The fact that I only took part in this particular class, that I was standing and that I did not actively take part in the conversation clearly points to differences between me and the other persons in the room. Once again, I would say that my participation was passive, and this is probably true of most of my participant observation. There were some diverging examples, however, where my participation was less passive. On one occasion, I took part in a Christmas market at a riding school in an area close to the centre of Vikåsa. I walked around, looking at the animals, buying homemade cakes, eating hot dogs and drinking coffee just as any other visitor. I interacted with the people working there, children as well as adults, as would any visiting customer. I asked questions about the things they were selling as well as about how much time they spent taking care of the animals. However, I never took part in the market as a salesperson, working side-by-side with the children; my involvement was restricted to being a visiting customer.

Finally, I spent considerable time in the three schools, wandering the corridors, talking to people in the hallways and in the schoolyard. These were perfect moments for participant observation. Sometimes the children came up to me when I was sitting in the corridors waiting for an interview session, and at other times, I approached different children to talk and to ask questions. In this way, I came to participate in one of the most reoccurring activities in these children’s life, the school day.

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30 Duranti makes a distinction between different modes of participant observation. At one end of the continuum he places “passive participation, in which the ethnographer tries to be as unintrusive as possible” and on the other end “complete participation, in which researchers intensively interact with other participants and might even get to participate in and perform the very activity they are studying” (Duranti 1997:99). Emphasis in original.
I used the school as an arena to make contact with children who were interested in participating in my research and started by conducting interviews. Interviews are a widely used research method in social science in general. However, many researchers have discussed the difficulties associated with conducting interviews, difficulties often based on the presumed inequalities between the researcher and the research participants. Such inequalities may be even more pronounced when interviewing children, given the age difference (Caputo 1995; Näsman and von Gerber 2002; Punch 2002). Various scholars have discussed the usage or non-usage of particular methods in research with children. Some argue for ignoring age and others for taking age into account when designing study methods (Caputo 1995, Pole et al. 1999; Rasmusson 1998; Solberg 1994). In the present case, I partially adapted to ideas about age differences when designing the study. The children in grades 6, 7, 8 and 9 were interviewed and they took photos. I interviewed the children in groups of 2 to 5, which is a recommended approach if one wishes to reduce the researcher’s power (Eder and Fingerson 2003). I was the one who put together the groups for the interviews.

The interviews lasted approximately 45 minutes. Photos were, as will be discussed below, used as stimulus material, but I also brought additional pre-prepared, open-ended questions. Given the combination of the discussions of the photos and my pre-prepared questions, I think it is fair to categorize the interviews as semi-structured. All the interviews were transcribed, analysed in Swedish and then finally translated to English. The transcription conventions used in the present study can be found in Table 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Symbol</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Xxx</td>
<td>Something was said but the transcriber could not discern its content</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>Background information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(...)</td>
<td>Edited material</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The children in grades four and five were not interviewed and they did not take photos. Instead, they wrote short essays on the topic “my work is” and drew pictures of themselves doing their work. I chose to ask these younger children to draw pictures and write short essays, as I assumed that they would be used to this kind of activity, both from home and school (cf. Halldén 2001). I assumed that the open-ended character of the essay writing and drawing would complement other methods used during the fieldwork, for example, the questionnaires (cf. Morrow 2007b). Both writing and drawing create wide opportunities for the participating children to use their own ways of expressing their ideas (Näsman and von Gerber 2002). However, both these methods assume developed capacities to write and draw, skills that not all children in grade 4 and 5 have. Some of the participating children wrote longer essays filling up more than one page, whereas others only put down a few sentences. Similarly, some children made detailed drawings on a separate paper. Yet again, others only made a small and sketchy drawing on the same paper, next to their written essay.

I was in the classroom during the writing and drawing and the children could thus direct questions to me during the sessions. Some of the children took this opportunity. Often the questions concerned what they were supposed to write about and what to draw. When starting up the sessions, I always gave a short introduction and tried to clarify the aim of the research project. Moreover, if the children asked questions during the sessions, I repeated the aim of the research project, underlined the focus on work and tried to answer their questions as clearly as possible. Although some children might have found this writing and drawing difficult, I think that the combination of methods enabled them to find some form of

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31 When designing this study, I decided not to interview the children in grade 4 and 5. Instead, these children wrote essays and drew pictures. This created an interesting material that complemented the interview material. However, the decision not to interview the younger children was based on the idea that these younger children could have problems handling the interview situation. After meeting the children in grade 4 and 5 during the writing and drawing sessions as well as when they filled out the questionnaires, I argue that these children would easily have managed the interviews. In hindsight, it is possible that the essay writing would have suited the older children in grade 6-9 better. The older children have spent more years in school and thus have greater experience of essay writing.
expression that suited their personal taste or skill.

Disposable Cameras

As mentioned, I interviewed the children in groups, which I put together, to make them feel more comfortable. Another way to create a more comfortable situation and to encourage discussion could be to use some form of stimulus material in the interview (Heisley and Levy 1991; Punch 2002). In the present study, I equipped the groups of children, whom I was to interview, with disposable cameras and asked them to photograph what they themselves saw as work as well as to photograph themselves while working. After one week, I collected the cameras and then brought the developed pictures to the interview session. My objective was threefold. By handing out cameras, I hoped to obtain good pictures to use as stimulus material. I also hoped that use of this material would create an atmosphere in which the participating children, based on their own pictures, would talk and discuss more freely. I hoped that this, in turn, would create an atmosphere different from that of a regular interview, where I as a researcher would have posed questions that they were supposed to answer (Heisley and Levy 1991; Pole et al. 1999; Rasmussen and Smidt 2003). A third objective was to give the children a chance to take a more active role in the research process as participant researchers by giving them the right to define and photograph what they thought was work and when they were working. The idea was that this might be one way of trying to transfer some power to the children, to even-up the unequal adult researcher/child subject relationship that might arise in research with children (Näsman and von Gerber 2003; Pole et al. 1999; Rasmussen and Smidt 2003; Thorne 1993; Young and Barret 2001).
Questionnaires

Interviews may be a good research method for obtaining information on children’s ideas regarding work. They are also useful when trying to obtain information on where children work – information that may later be followed up by more structured questionnaires focused on, e.g., amounts of work and places of work. This is also what was done in the present study. Several scholars who conduct research with children argue that it is important to give the participating children opportunities to choose their own ways of expressing themselves in the research. The children have to be allowed to be active participants and they have to be given the chance to bring up questions and new perspectives (Grover 2004; Leonard 2004b; Näsmann and von Gerber 2002, 2003; Pole et al. 1999; Punch 2002). Questionnaires may be a bit problematic in this regard, as they are composed of preset categories formulated by the researcher and tend to lack open-ended questions. The sole use of more quantitative methods such as questionnaires was never an option in my research. These kinds of methods, with their focus on general trends, often run the risk of incorrectly treating or even missing the individual subjective perspectives. The individual might be ascribed rough group characteristics. Thus, when only using such methods, the scholar runs the risk of objectifying the research participants (Grover 2004). My point is that the use of various other methods could give the participating children a voice and different opportunities to be more active participant researchers involved in a form of collaboration with me, the adult researcher, as well as greater opportunities to participate on their own terms. As other researchers have shown, questionnaires in combination with other methods could work well as a complement in this way (Näsmann and von Gerber 2002; Orellana 2001; Solberg 1994).

I tried to use the children’s own categories and definitions to a certain degree when constructing the questionnaire (see Appendix). The interviews, the short essays the children in grade 4 and 5 wrote and the field notes from participant observation gave background information that helped me consider what to include in the questionnaire and how to formulate the questions, the language and what definitions to use (Hull 1981). I included activities that some of the children had mentioned in the
interviews as common activities as well as other activities that I had observed during my fieldwork. I also tried to leave spaces in the questionnaire for the children to fill in activities that I had missed. Despite these precautionary measures, some of the children had problems with my formulations when answering the questions. When the children were completing the questionnaires, which took around 30 to 45 minutes, I was in the room ready to explain and to answer their questions. In some groups, the exercise ran smoothly and, in others, the children had a number of questions. By attending the questionnaire sessions, I got a chance to register the children’s reactions and queries in regard to the different questions and statements that they had to deal with. These reactions are just as much a part of the result of the study as their actual answers to the questionnaire items. These have subsequently been used in the analysis alongside the answers the children wrote in the questionnaire.

**Time Diaries**

Early in my fieldwork, I observed that the children generally indicated that they mostly undertook work at home, where they vacuum and do the dishes, what could be categorized as traditional housework or chores. These results indicate that children do not do a great deal of work at places outside their home environment. The preliminary results also indicated that most of the work the children did was of an irregular nature, a couple of minutes here, and a couple of minutes there, making their bed, walking the dog, minding siblings or mowing the lawn. To try to register this highly irregular and diverse work, I tried to use methods whereby the children themselves registered their own work.\(^{32}\) Methods such as the disposable cameras mentioned above and time diaries were used. Time diaries are often used to study the irregularity of everyday life in regard to, for example, time use, etc. (Ellegård et al., 1999; Westermark 1997). By combining notations of the times, places and the people the children were with when engaged in an activity, in a time diary, I hoped to be able to

\(^{32}\) This is in line with recommendations of, for example, Hull (1981).
draw a “map” of the children’s activity schemes. Furthermore, I hoped that these “maps” could be used in an analysis to outline the activities the children undertook and that the “maps” could be used together with the interviews and pictures. I hoped that the method in this way could work as a complement to other methods where the children themselves had greater possibilities to define and categorize based on their own perspective.

The children were supposed to fill out their time diaries throughout a one-week period. The idea behind doing this over a week is that one can get information from different weekdays as well as from the weekend. This could then illustrate the variety of activities the participants are undertaking. In the present project, however, use of time diaries did not turn out especially well. When initiating the writing of the time diaries, I held 20- to 30-minute-long meetings with the participating children in small groups. In these meetings, I explained the idea behind the time diaries in my research project. I gave a small instructive lecture on how to write time diaries, and the children had the chance to ask questions and to practice writing on separate practice sheets that I had brought with me. After that session, everyone got a small notebook to use as his or her own personal time diary. The instruction was that they were to write the diary for one week and that I then would come back and collect the notebooks. The children were to bring the diary with them throughout the days and fill in as the days evolved. Some of the children did have some questions and some said they had problems understanding how to go about writing their diary, and I tried to instruct and explain as thoroughly as possible.

When I returned after one week, the result was rather meagre. A number of children had completely forgotten the writing and returned blank notebooks. Others had remembered to write one or two days out of seven. A few had written a little bit everyday, but they had skipped most of the hours of the day. A fourth group stated that they had written but that they had forgotten the notebook at home. I came back to pick up some of these

33 In the time diaries, the children write down all the activities they have undertaken during one week, not just the activities they perceive as work. Using methods of self-reporting might open up for new methodological problems. Previous studies have shown, for example, that self-estimations often tend to be very imprecise (Leonard 2004b; Mizan 1994). Given this, the reports have to be treated as subjective, rather than objective, descriptions of reality. The time diaries are the children’s own partial representations of one week of their life and must be treated as such.
books at a later date, and some were sent to me by teachers after the children’s instructions. One of the time diaries was forwarded by e-mail to me by a teacher. The boy in the ninth grade who had sent it to the teacher had decided to do his time diary on the computer rather than in a notebook because, as he wrote in his following letter, “I was afraid I would lose the book, but you don’t lose a computer”. In the end, only 60 of the 100 children handed in a time diary and given the variance in quality in the diaries returned to me, the number of days the children had written about, the level of detail, etc., it was impossible to make a full-fledged time geographical analysis based on this material. Consequently, I have decided to use the diary entries only as background material for my other analyses (see for example in Chapter 3).

An Interpretative Approach

Ethnography is not only a collective name for various qualitative methods used to collect research material (Bjurström 2004; Duranti 1997; Willis and Trondman 2000). It is also an interpretative act used in the field, and when analysing the collected material upon returning from the field. Moreover, it is an interpretative genre for writing up an academic text. So far, I have outlined the methodological approaches used during my fieldwork. Here I would like to add a few words about the interpretative work that was undertaken in the field and while writing up this book.

The bulk of the material used in this study, as I described above, was collected through interviews, written essays, drawings, questionnaires and time diaries. A smaller part was collected through different forms of participant observation. The majority of the material was thus collected in interactions in which I asked the research participants questions, where I asked them to explain some part of their everyday life to me using spoken or written words, photos or drawings. The material created in these interactions is what has been interpreted in the creation of the book.

In an ethnographic study, the interpretive process is not something that solely takes place after the material is collected (Bjurström 2004; Pripp
On the contrary, the ethnographic study as a whole is an interpretive process from day one. Ethnographic descriptions are not descriptions of the world as such; they are not unbiased off prints or copies. Ethnographic descriptions are interpretations; they are the researcher’s experiences interpreted and translated into written text (Duranti 1997; Pripp 1999; Willis 2000). The researcher is thus one of the involved actors in the creation of the research material. The researcher, however, does not create the research material alone, ethnographic research is a collaborative process – a collaborative process involving the researcher and the research participants.

As I outlined in the introduction, in line with Giddens (1979, 1984, 1991), I understand human beings to be reflexive and knowledgeable agents. That is how I approached the children in the present study. They are agents who, during their day-to-day life, monitor and interpret their own and other agents’ actions, and their interpretations inform and direct their forthcoming actions in an ongoing flow. During my ethnographic fieldwork, I have met with these agents with the intent to study them, to analyse and interpret their activities. However, what has to be remembered is that these individuals are not merely “objects” of inquiry, but each and every one of them is a subject (Willis 1980). Given the interpretative nature of their day-to-day life, what I have studied is thus, to a great degree, their interpretations and their view of themselves and the world surrounding them (Bjurström 2004; James 1993).

I mentioned previously, when reviewing Giddens’ structuration theory, that the agents’ capacity for knowledge, according to Giddens, is mostly carried in the practical consciousness (Giddens 1984, 1991). Repeating slightly, I also mentioned that great parts of the practical consciousness are “occluded from view” (Giddens 1984:xxx) and that the reflexivity only functions to a certain extent as discursive consciousness, where the agents are able to explicitly report on their actions (Giddens 1984). However, I also mentioned that the division between these two forms of consciousness could be altered through socialization or learning experiences (Giddens 1984). The taken-for-granted parts of life become possible to express discursively. Taking part in a research project can possibly function as such a learning experience. Rabinow (1977:152) argues that the informants “learn” how to present their own life during the fieldwork. Furthermore, Rabinow (1977:119) claims that:
Whenever an anthropologist enters a culture, he trains people to objectify their life-world for him. Within all cultures, of course, there is already objectification and self-reflection. But this explicit self-conscious translation into an external medium is rare. The anthropologist creates a doubling of consciousness.

Participation in an ethnographic study, where you are repeatedly asked to explain, describe and clarify, can thus serve as a catalyst and expand the discursive consciousness among the research participants. Consequently then, the methodology used in this study, with methods such as interviews, questionnaires and essays, is not merely a way of getting to know more about children’s everyday life beyond or outside, for example, the interview setting. I argue, using a term from Solberg (1994:183), that the interviews, the times when the children filled out questionnaires, etc., were all “social encounters”. In a similar way, Atkinson and Coffey (2002:810) claim:

When we conduct an interview, then, we are not simply collecting information about nonobservable or unobserved actions, or past events, or private experiences. Interviews generate accounts and narratives that are forms of social action in their own right.

The things that the children said in the interview, stated in the questionnaire and wrote in the essays, as well as what they said while filling out the questionnaire or writing the essays, are part of the very same culture that is the focus of the study at hand. What took place in the research settings is nothing other than everyday culture in action (Atkinson and Coffey 2002).

The Significance of the Context

Several scholars argue that the researcher must be aware of how and where the research is being carried out because the social context affects the research in different ways (Bloor 1997; James 2001; James et al. 1998; Näsman and von Gerber 2002; Scott 2000; Strange et al. 2003). I share this
opinion. This is not a study of schools or school life, but the main parts of the present study did take place in schools. Schools as institutions are places where there exists a clear hierarchical and many times polarized division between the adults, the teachers and the children, their pupils (Persson 2003). An adult researcher conducting research in a school often runs the risk that the pupils will view her/him as a teacher (Näsman and von Gerber 2002). This happened to me on several occasions during my fieldwork. Over time, my presence became more familiar to the children and the teachers in the schools. Consequently, I was less often mistaken for a teacher and more often titled as “forskargubben”, the researcher man, “han som skriver den där djävla boken”, he who writes that god damned book, or simply “författaren”, the author. However, in the beginning of the study, this was not the case. When passing through the school corridors, I was approached by both children and teachers who did not recognize me and by children and teachers who thought I was a temporary teacher.

The sessions with the questionnaires, the writing of essays and the interviews took place in the children’s own classrooms or in other classrooms and adjacent group rooms during school hours. I explained several times what the project was about to the children. I explained that I was interested in their point of view, that I was there to learn from them, that this was not a test, that there were no right and wrong answers and that they were the experts in this investigation. I also explained that the study was not supposed to be about their schoolwork. 34 Nevertheless, school and school activities were reoccurring themes in the interviews, the questionnaires and in the pictures the children took. It is fully reasonable to imagine that the fact that the study was based in the school came to affect these themes (Scott 2000).

A boy in the ninth grade in Vikåsa finished his questionnaire by stating that ”I have different opinions and think a lot different when I am in school and when I am not, so if I had filled this out at home the result might have been different”. I think this boy clarifies two important points. First, the results could have been different and second, where and, I would add, how the children were asked questions affected the study in various ways. Let us begin with the latter point, I do not claim that what came out of the sessions I had with the children during my fieldwork is the final or

34 This was one of my starting points when setting out on this study.
objective truth about children’s everyday life in general. The answers are results stemming from a process of negotiation (Atkinson and Coffey 2002; Ehn and Klein 1994) and the meaning and knowledge that came out of them have to be situated in order to be interpreted (Haraway 1991; see also Solberg 1994). The reader of the present study has to know that the greater part of this study was undertaken in schools and that the results came out of interviews, questionnaires and essays initiated by me. The children’s statements are to a high extent thus reactions to my, the researchers’, questions (Atkinson and Coffey 2002; Bloor 1997).

As I have outlined above, the research process is a collaborative one and I, the researcher, was not the only actor in this process. I argue that the 100 children who participated in the study, but also the staff at the schools and the other children in the schools were collaborators in the creation of this research material. I initiated the study and I was the person who formulated the research question. The questions the participating children answered in the interviews and in the questionnaires were mine, formulated and put forward by me. I was the one who introduced the theme of work in the sessions that took place during my fieldwork. However, research sessions with interviews, questionnaires, essay writing, etc., are, as Pripp (1999) has indicated, social situations in which the people present identify each other. The researcher analyses and identifies the research participants, but the research participants also identify the researcher and these interpretations inform their actions, reactions and consequently their answers.

This can affect the research process in different ways. People in different societal contexts have different ideas about what an interview and/or a questionnaire is and is used for. In school settings, as pupils, children are used to being asked questions in various interview-like, oral and written test situations. Moreover, pupils often take part in interview-like one-on-one conversations with adult teachers when evaluating their own efforts regarding schoolwork. Furthermore, written questionnaires are
sometimes used for this. The risk that the children would mistake me, the adult, for a teacher and the research sessions for tests is evident (Scott 2000). They might thus feel inclined to give “correct” or what they imagine to be the preferred answers. All this is important to keep in mind during the analytical process in a study like this, where an adult researcher does fieldwork in a school setting.

Reflexivity

The research material, the data, which were collected during my fieldwork, is thus, as Rabinow (1977:119) points out “doubly mediated”. First, it is mediated by my own presence and then by the “second order self-reflection” (Rabinow 1977:119) I expect from the research participants in various sessions when I gave them questions to answer. Does this then mean that what is presented in this book are nothing more than distorted versions of the children’s reality instead of the actual, “real” reality existing somewhere “out there”? I argue that this is not the case. The “pure” reality, as Berner (2005), among others, has pointed out, is not waiting out there for the researcher to come and discover and study it, with as few distortions as possible, because as Willis and Trondman (2000:12) might add, “the ‘nitty gritty’ of everyday life cannot be presented as raw, unmediated data”. The material, the data used in a study such as the present one and in any social science, always depends on the theoretical and analytical perspective

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35 While doing fieldwork at Berguvsskolan in Ekköping, I was told that the children had previously filled out questionnaires. These questionnaires had been part of evaluation work at Berguvsskolan and part of an evaluation of the local school systems initiated by the Ekköping board of education. Some children at the Vikåsa School mentioned that they had also filled out questionnaires as a part of evaluations in school, and this might very well be a common praxis at the other school I visited during my fieldwork in Ekköping.
reality. It is constructed in the dialectics between theory and the interpretations of the children’s lived experiences coming together in an analytical process. A more objectivist, positivistic writing, I argue, would be impossible to achieve and it is, as Duranti (1997:85) indicates, “a questionable goal” given that such writing would not do justice to the experience of the ethnographer and thus create poor research.

However, what this calls for is reflexivity. In practice, reflexivity can be undertaken in many ways. Duranti outlines, in a few words, what I argue can be seen as a broad description of how to accomplish reflexivity in an ethnographic study. Duranti (1997:95) argues that:

An ethnography is an interpretive act and as such should be turned on itself to increase the richness of descriptions, including an understanding of the conditions under which description itself becomes possible.

Reflexivity is thus a process whereby the researcher tries to turn the analytic search light on his or her own analysis and to clarify under what conditions the finished research product was put together. The aim of the reflexive process is to broaden the analysis. One important step in this process is to convey some sense of the researcher’s personal and theoretical positions (Willis 2000). A second important step is to discuss and account for the epistemological status of the material used in the study (Rabinow 2000).36

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36 I do not think that I, as a researcher, can find or reach a privileged objective position, free from bias or prejudice outside the culture I am studying, from where I can study the world as it objectively is, in reality. Here my argument is in line with the critique of the “god-trick”, put forward by Haraway (1991:188-189), and the critique of the idea of the “bird’s-eye view”, discussed by Alanen (1992:106, 1994:36). See also Bjurström (2004), Duranti (1997:118), Rabinow (1977) and Willis (1980) for similar ideas. Some scholars advocate the use of combinations of methods and various forms of triangulation, to find out what a more correct and even a more “real” answer would be (e.g., Eder and Fingerson 2003; Lucchini 1996). I do not agree. The use of different methods does not make the result of a study more objective, valid or, if you will, truer (Atkinson and Coffey 2002). The combination of different methods in my study should not be seen as an attempt to triangulate the children’s different statements and accounts in an effort to reach beyond these to a “real” meaning. Instead, insights from different research situations have been used to illuminate other results (Atkinson and Coffey 2002; Bloor 1997). Hence, I used different methods in this study to get a varied material (cf. Leonard 2004b).
A third step can be to reflect critically on how categories and terminology are used and perceived in the field (Pripp 1999).

Yet another step in a reflexive process can, as Duranti (1997) suggests, be to let the subjects, the research participants, speak as much as possible with their own voices in the written text and thus to emphasize the dialogical and negotiated aspects of the research process. This can be a way, using Haraway’s (1991) concept, to situate the knowledge that is conveyed through the text. Haraway (1991:198) argues that:

Situated knowledges require that the object of knowledge be pictured as an actor and agent, not a screen or a ground or a resource, never finally as slave to the master that closes off the dialectic in his unique agency and authorship of ‘objective’ knowledge.

The “objects of knowledge”, in this investigation the children in Ekköping and Vikåsa, have to be given possibilities to influence actively the knowledge that is conveyed in the study. Moreover, the children have to be depicted as agents in the construction of knowledge. Furthermore, it has to be clear to the reader in what way, how and how much the children contributed to the results. My ambitions in this regard are reflected in my choice of research methods and style of writing. However, although the children and I collaborated in the creation of what will be presented in the present book, I also think it is important to underline that the children and I sometimes had different incentives for being part of this investigation in the first place.

It was clear that the participating children preferred some parts of the investigation. The children seemed to appreciate taking photos; they did not seem to dislike the interviews, even if they sometimes complained that the questions were difficult and most children marked in their questionnaire that they thought the questionnaire was okay or even fun. It was also clear that they did not appreciate all the parts of the investigation. Reviewing the meagre result of the time diary part of the project that I initiated during my fieldwork, I would argue that it was either too complicated to undertake, took too much of the children’s time, or was just too boring. I recall some of the children sighing behind my back when they were handed the notebook and when I told them that they had to fill it out for a week. I remember that one Ekköping girl in the sixth grade sighed and stated; “This is like homework”. One Vikåsa boy in the ninth grade smiled and stated;
“Now we won’t have time to do homework”. These two children thus interpreted the task handed out by me quite differently. Both realized that it would take some of their time. However, where one saw something burdensome the other one saw a possibility.

I initiated the research sessions in order to gather material for my study. My goal with these sessions was rather outspoken and clear. The children gave their consent to participate. They were taking part in the different sessions I arranged and they answered my questions. The situation might look hierarchical at first sight. I imposed an agenda and demanded different kinds of answers, and the children, without a will of their own, met my demands. However, the relationship between the researcher and the research participants almost never works like this (Duranti 1997).

The children probably had their own agendas and their own reasons for taking part in the study. Some might have found it interesting and liked it, or at least as I mentioned above, liked part of it. Others, however, seemed to have other reasons for participating. When finishing the last session with a group of ninth graders in Vikåsa, I thanked them for participating and for taking time to help out. One reply to this was: “Thank you for making it possible for us to skip class”. This answer may reveal one of the reasons to why some of the children participated.

**The Child Perspective**

Giddens (1984:288) argues that, “two types of methodological bracketing are possible in sociological research”. Focus can be placed on institutional analysis or on strategic conduct. Both approaches take the duality of structure into account. The first of these two focus on structural properties on a system level. Conversely, in the latter, “the focus is placed upon modes in which actors draw upon structural properties in the constitution of social relations” and in this type of study the analysis is concentrated on “contextually situated activities of definite groups of actors” (Giddens 1984:288).

In the present study, I study children, childhood and work using a
child perspective. This means that children and their activities are the focus of my study. This also means that I, in line with Näsman and von Gerber (2003), try to interpret and mediate how children view their world and what it means to them. The children’s perspective(s) are to be presented. The focus is then, to use Giddens’ (1984:288) terminology, on “strategic conduct”. But what more exactly do I mean by the term child perspective? I am an adult, a male, white and Swedish, middle class researcher; in what way can I claim to take a child perspective? Let me first state that I don’t think there is such a thing as “one” child perspective, just as there is not “one” adult perspective (Haraway 1991). Both these are simplified stereotypes (Näsman 1998). Childhood does not necessarily mean exactly the same thing to every child; rather there are many different childhoods. Age, ethnicity, nationality and social class background are just some factors that might affect the way different people perceive childhood and children. This is true also regarding people’s perception of adulthood and adults (James et al. 1998; James and James 2004; Rasmusson 1998).

Using a child perspective in a study on childhood does not necessarily mean that the children’s voices are what are presented in the final written text (Halldén 2003; Näsman 1998). In the present study, the participating children answered questions in interviews and in questionnaires. These questions were mine, formulated and put forward by me, the adult researcher. Nevertheless, I still argue that I use a child perspective in the present study. It is not a child perspective because the children formulated the research questions or even because the research area was of particular interest to children. The use of the term child perspective here primarily refers to the fact that different children have made contributions to the material used for the study. Moreover, I, the adult researcher, am trying to use the child perspective also in my interpretations by putting forward the children’s voices and by interpreting these voices as part of an ongoing structuration process.
What is Work?

In this chapter, I discuss different definitions of work. I present how the category work is described in one encyclopaedia and one dictionary, and in some previous investigations of children’s work. The investigation starts in this chapter, and I begin by examining how the children in Ekköping and Vikåsa chose to define work in the questionnaire they filled out during the fieldwork. The aim of the chapter is not to outline one exact definition of work, but rather to try to set out some guidelines for the rest of the investigation. To study children’s participation in work, I argue that we must first try to get some general idea of what work can be. After this, we can try to locate the work activities in various contexts and examine the category more closely.

Work at First Sight

What is work? This might seem like a very simple question that can be answered exactly. However, as Ehn (1981) has pointed out, the term work tends to become a great deal more complex, and a great deal harder to clearly define when a researcher is trying to take a closer look at the many different work activities in people’s everyday life. If we begin with explanations given in encyclopaedias and dictionaries (e.g., Nationalencyklopedin 1989; The Oxford Reference Dictionary 1990), it becomes clear that work has at least two and sometimes up to 14 different meanings. First, there is the physical meaning in which work is a measurement of the amount of energy used when a mass is moved under
the influence of a force. A second meaning of work is work as an operation or a business scheme through which a human being makes a living. In economics, work is often equated with human activity that contributes to production. This last explanation is sometimes specified, stating that work is employment, occupation or having a job. In the Swedish language, the term work is a bit complicated, as the term “arbete”, work, and the term “jobb”, job/work, are sometimes used synonymously. The Swedish encyclopaedia, used when writing this text, uses a certain amount of cross-referencing between the two terms “arbete” and “jobb” and indicates thus how they are interconnected. However, the meaning of work is sometimes stretched somewhat beyond just employment and paid activities. According to the encyclopaedias and dictionaries (e.g., Nationalencyklopedin 1989; The Oxford Reference Dictionary 1990), work can also be to make an effort, to accomplish something, to solve a problem or to be in motion. All this underlines the fact that there is no single, objective definition of the category work. Rather, as Wallman (1979) demonstrates, the definitions of work vary throughout the world, as well as between groups in the same country. Moreover, as Schildkrout (1981:93) suggests, “Definitions of work, particularly of children’s work, are highly variable and differ according to cultural and economic circumstances”.

Nevertheless, Wadel argues that the usual way of approaching work is by picturing a specific type of activity (Wadel 1984). Traditionally, the activities included in the work concept only comprise a rather narrow spectre of activities, those undertaken on the formal labour market and often undertaken by adults (and often primarily by male adults) (Wadel 1979, 1984). Wadel (1979:368) calls this “the folk or lay concept of work”. This definition of work, argues Wadel (1979:368-369) ”is restricted to activities one is paid for (paid work); such work takes place at specific places (work place) and at specific times (work time/working hours). The question ‘What’s your work?’ usually means paid work”.

In Sweden, the official Swedish statistics authority, Statistics Sweden, produces labour force surveys on an ongoing, monthly basis every year. The aim of these surveys is primarily to count and point out how many individuals in the total population are working. However, in pursuing this project, the surveys also define what is to be understood as work as well as who is to be understood as a worker. The Swedish labour force is, according to the guidelines of Statistics Sweden
made up of people who are either “employed” or “unemployed”. The rest of the population is defined as ”not in the labour force” or as ”outside the labour force”. According to Statistics Sweden, a person is counted as employed if she or he is employed and is working at least one hour during the week that Statistics Sweden conducts their survey. The person has to work either as an employed worker, as self-employed or as an unpaid assistant in a company that belongs to a member of the family in the same household as the employed person. Employment is thus a divider when it comes to defining the labour force, the part of the total population that is working. This is not the only dividing factor, however. In the official labour force surveys of Statistics Sweden, no one outside the age range of 16 to 64 years is included. Thus, age also serves as a divider when trying to identify the working part of the population in Sweden.

When inspecting the labour force surveys of Statistics Sweden, one gets the impression that it is only people above the age of 16 and under 64 who work. The picture changes somewhat, however, if we look at other investigations. A number of larger, quantitative investigations in Sweden claim that children in Sweden work. An investigation undertaken in Sweden by the Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs in 1998, looking at 13- to 25-year-olds, shows that almost 75% of the approached individuals report that they have ”jobbat extra för att tjäna pengar”, that is, they have had an extra job to earn money during the past year (Nilsson 1998:113). Those who stated that they worked the most were found in the age group 16-18 years. However, around 70% of the individuals in the younger age groups also stated that they have had an extra job to earn money. Furthermore, an investigation undertaken by the Nordic Council 1997-1998 (Rafnsdóttir 1999) shows that 4% of 13-year-olds, 5% of 14-year-olds, 7% of 15-year-olds, and 9% of 16-year-olds in Sweden work outside school Monday to Friday. According to the same study, the amount of time the children work is doubled in the weekends. The amount of work increases further during the holidays. An example of a similar tendency can be found in the investigation ”Barn och ungdomars välfärd” (The Welfare of Children and Youth) from 2001 (SOU 2001:55). In this investigation, it is stated that every fifth 13- to 18-year-old takes part in paid work on a

37 My translations.
38 My translations.
regular basis. When it comes to summer jobs, the investigation shows that 4% of 10- to 12-year-olds have such jobs, 12% of 13- to 15-year-olds, plus a total of 60% of 16- to 18-year-olds. Yet another example of the same tendency can be found in Statistics Sweden’s reoccurring investigations of living conditions and especially the part called “Barn-ULF” (Barns villkor 2005). In a report based on figures from 2002 and 2003, it is stated that half of all the children in school grades 7-9 and in upper secondary school who were questioned by Statistics Sweden claimed that they had worked to earn their own money. Statistic Sweden reports that 29% have worked sometimes, 12% have worked at least once a week and 11% at least once a month. If we look further into the same investigation, however, on a more aggregated level, we find that around 78% of the children in school grades 7-9 plus around 33% of those in upper secondary school claim that they have had a summer job the previous summer (www.scb.se/templates/Listning2____147493.asp). To sum up, all these investigations show that children work, even if the numbers in the investigations vary.

What is to be included under the category “work”, or why some activities are included or excluded, is not as clear, however. In the investigation made by the Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs (Nilsson 1998:113, 115), there is one good example of this. In this investigation, they have chosen to exclude ”att sitta barnvakt”, baby-sitting, as a form of extra work. Instead, this activity is presented separately. No explanation is given to support this categorization or to explain in what ways baby-sitting is different from the other activities included under the category work extra to make money. The investigation ”Barn och ungdomars välfärd” from 2001 (SOU 2001:55) and Statistics Sweden’s “Barn-ULF” (Barns villkor 2005) have a similar focus in that they both equate work with paid activities. In both these investigations, this is clarified by the fact that they have special sections, in which they present how much children help out at home as well as what the children do when they help out. The difference between helping out and work thus seems to

39 During 2001-2003, Statistics Sweden’s Living Conditions Survey was undertaken in cooperation with the Swedish Institute for Social Research (SOFI) at Stockholm University. The investigation SOU 2001:55 referred to here was one of the outcomes of this cooperation and can thus be seen as a pre-runner to the investigations Statistics Sweden has undertaken on their own after this.
be the payment as such. The payment defines the activity, not where, in what location one is when undertaking it, if you are at a company or home, or who undertakes the activity, if you are a child or an adult. In the Nordic Council’s investigation (Rafnsdóttir 1999), a categorization is made that is different from the ones mentioned above. In this investigation, no clear definition is made of the term work. Work is not equated with an activity that generates money. Even so, this investigation does not have a completely open focus, as it puts the spotlight on work outside school (Rafnsdóttir 1999:9). Thereby, it is made clear that the place school, and the activities that are undertaken at school, are not to be defined as work.

Studying Work in Everyday Life

As I have shown above, it is not completely clear what work is, or rather work can be many different things. This has consequences for a study such as this one. If we do not know exactly what work is, how are we to decide what to study, and where to locate the object of our study?

Näsman and von Gerber (2003) argue that children’s economic everyday life in Sweden takes place in three arenas: at home in the family, among their peers and staff at the pre-school and school, and finally with their friends in their spare time. Drawing on the research literature on childhood, Zelizer (2002) argues along similar lines, but widens the children’s economic arenas somewhat. Zelizer (2002:379) argues that children engage in economic relations “with members (including adult members) of their own households, with children outside their households and with agents of other organizations such as outside households, schools, stores, firms, churches and voluntary associations”. In the category economic relations, Zelizer includes production as well as consumption and distribution. Thus, she does not focus solely on paid activities on the formal labour market. In this wide description, Zelizer shows that almost every part of children’s everyday life potentially contains economic relations. Consequently, it would be somewhat fruitless to focus merely on the formal labour market when trying to study children’s work. In fact,
Zelizer’s description can be read as a critique of the traditional concept of “labour market” if we with this category solely focus on gainful employment or paid activities on the formal labour market. Zelizer indicates that the labour market is more widespread than that. However, even if we broaden our perception of the labour market as well as our notions of economic activities, the problem remains. How are we to separate the work from the non-work?

To solve this problem, Zelizer (2002) acclaims an approach whereby we examine children’s activities (see also Hengst and Zeiher 2000; Hutchings 2002; Morrow 1994; Solberg 1994). Let us take a closer first look at what the children in Ekköping and Vikåsa do during their everyday life. When inspecting the time diaries the children in Ekköping and Vikåsa filled out, it is obvious that their everyday life is filled with many diverse activities. The level of detail in the diaries was shifting, as can be seen in the examples in Table 3, 4 and 5 below. Some children seem to have noted meticulously, step-by-step, activity-by-activity on a very detailed level, whereas others generalized the day, mentioning three to five activities e.g., sleep, school, coming home and sleep.

Table 3. Time Diary (made by an Ekköping girl in the fourth grade depicting one day40)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What time is it?</th>
<th>What are you doing?</th>
<th>Where are you?</th>
<th>With whom are you?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>00.00</td>
<td>Sleeping</td>
<td>In my bed</td>
<td>Alone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>09.10</td>
<td>Getting up</td>
<td>In my room</td>
<td>Alone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>09.11</td>
<td>Eating breakfast</td>
<td>In the kitchen</td>
<td>The family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>09.30</td>
<td>Playing computer games</td>
<td>In the computer room</td>
<td>Alone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.31</td>
<td>Playing football</td>
<td>Outside</td>
<td>Siblings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.10</td>
<td>Cleaning the house</td>
<td>Inside</td>
<td>The family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.01</td>
<td>Eating</td>
<td>In the kitchen</td>
<td>The family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.34</td>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>In my room</td>
<td>Sister</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.15</td>
<td>Playing computer games</td>
<td>In the computer room</td>
<td>Alone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.16</td>
<td>Playing monopoly</td>
<td>In my room</td>
<td>Sister</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.30</td>
<td>Feeding the animals</td>
<td>In my room</td>
<td>Alone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.31</td>
<td>Watching TV</td>
<td>In my room</td>
<td>Alone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17.45</td>
<td>Vacuuming</td>
<td>In my room</td>
<td>Alone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18.00</td>
<td>Playing football</td>
<td>Outside</td>
<td>Sister and brother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18.30</td>
<td>Eating</td>
<td>In the kitchen</td>
<td>The family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19.30</td>
<td>Watching TV</td>
<td>In the basement</td>
<td>The family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21.00</td>
<td>Going to the temple</td>
<td>In the car</td>
<td>The family</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

40 Note that the described day is a day during the weekend.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Company</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>21.30</td>
<td>Watching the Xxx</td>
<td>In the temple</td>
<td>The family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22.00</td>
<td>Watching a movie</td>
<td>In the basement</td>
<td>The family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>00.00</td>
<td>Goes to bed</td>
<td>In my bed</td>
<td>Alone</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4. Time Diary (made by an Ekköping boy in the sixth grade depicting one day)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time is it</th>
<th>What are you doing?</th>
<th>Where are you?</th>
<th>With whom are you?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>00.00</td>
<td>Sleeping</td>
<td>Home</td>
<td>Alone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>07.32</td>
<td>Waking up</td>
<td>Home</td>
<td>Alone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>09.20</td>
<td>Having a break</td>
<td>School</td>
<td>With my friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.50</td>
<td>Lunch</td>
<td>School</td>
<td>With my friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.29</td>
<td>Test on homework</td>
<td>School</td>
<td>With my school class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.49</td>
<td>School finishes</td>
<td>School</td>
<td>With my school class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.12</td>
<td>Helping Dad</td>
<td>Dad’s job</td>
<td>Dad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.46</td>
<td>Coffee break</td>
<td>Dad’s job</td>
<td>Dad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.08</td>
<td>Helping Dad</td>
<td>Dad’s job</td>
<td>Dad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18.30</td>
<td>Eating</td>
<td>Home</td>
<td>With my family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19.00</td>
<td>Helping Dad</td>
<td>Dad’s job</td>
<td>With Dad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20.47</td>
<td>Showers</td>
<td>Home</td>
<td>Alone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21.17</td>
<td>Watching football</td>
<td>Home</td>
<td>With my family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22.54</td>
<td>Sleeping</td>
<td>Home</td>
<td>Alone</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5. Time Diary (made by a Vikåsa boy in the ninth grade depicting one day)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time is it</th>
<th>What are you doing?</th>
<th>Where are you?</th>
<th>With whom are you?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>07.21</td>
<td>Wakes up</td>
<td>Home</td>
<td>Alone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>07.25-07.38</td>
<td>Getting ready</td>
<td>Home</td>
<td>Alone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>07.43</td>
<td>Eating breakfast</td>
<td>Home</td>
<td>Dad/brother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>08.04</td>
<td>Walk to school</td>
<td>On the way to school</td>
<td>Alone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.02</td>
<td>Eats lunch</td>
<td>School</td>
<td>Friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.12</td>
<td>Walks home</td>
<td>On the way from school</td>
<td>Alone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.21</td>
<td>On my way into town</td>
<td>On my way to town</td>
<td>With a friend</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.48</td>
<td>At a friends, plays role-play</td>
<td>At a friends</td>
<td>With friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18.36</td>
<td>Going home</td>
<td>On the way home</td>
<td>With a friend</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19.11</td>
<td>Eating dinner</td>
<td>Home</td>
<td>Dad/brother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19.47</td>
<td>Chatting/writing a novel</td>
<td>Home</td>
<td>Alone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>00.00</td>
<td>Chatting/reading comics on the web</td>
<td>Home</td>
<td>Alone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>01.25?</td>
<td>Goes to bed</td>
<td>Home</td>
<td>Alone</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Although there are problems with the general lack of detail in the time diaries filled out by the children in Ekköping and Vikåsa, they still highlight important aspects of everyday life, aspects that are important when discussing work. Through their time diaries, the children display how different days in their everyday life are filled with activities. The children play games, sleep, attend school, play football, eat, watch TV and help their parents, etc. Some activities take place at home, some in school, some in other locations and some, on the way between places. Some activities take several hours, whereas others take a few minutes. The children take part in many activities, but which of the reported activities are work? Are all these activities work? If not, how can we separate the work activities from the numerous other activities that take place in the flow of everyday life?

Summing up, I have tried to show that there exist different definitions of what should be seen as work. The inclusion and exclusion of various parts of everyday life transmit very different images of the labour market and its structure. The amount of work that is undertaken depends on what we include or exclude. We get different images of what is work and this in turn generates different notions of what is a workplace as well as who could be a worker. The aim of this part of my study, however, is not to ransack through the definitions of work that have been used in previous investigations. Rather, the aim is to explore the children’s point of view on what is work. In an attempt to accomplish this, I will use the questionnaire that all the 100 children filled out during the fieldwork. The questionnaire contained one open-ended question asking the children, “According to you, what is work?”41 The answers to this question are the starting point of what is to follow in this chapter. In their accounts of what work is, the children describe activities that can be found in what I would like to categorize as, using Näsmann’s and von Gerber’s (2003) concept, four different “arenas”: the job arena, the domestic arena, school and the spare time arena. These arenas are not to be understood as clearly defined and demarcated locations; rather I have chosen to use them for reasons of visibility. As will be seen below, when we look more closely at the children’s descriptions, these arenas tend to blend into each other, making it relatively hard to state where one arena ends and another begins.

41 See Appendix. Question 9 in the questionnaire. It should be noted that the children were not asked to state what their work was, or children’s work. Rather, it was work in general that they were asked to define.
In the beginning of this chapter, I pointed out that previous investigations of children’s work have focused on paid activities, or perhaps we should instead call them professions or gainful employment, when they discussed work undertaken by children. Similarly, one of the major themes in the questionnaire answers I received during my fieldwork was that work is a “job”. In the children’s answers, it is made clear that a job is something placed outside home; it is a place to which you go. Places like the regional social insurance office, a company, ICA [a grocery shop], an office, an advertising agency, a home for autistic people and a care centre were all mentioned in the questionnaire answers. Connections were made to professions such as being a carpenter, a fire fighter, a nurse, and a cashier and to work with computers. Some children mentioned that work is a place where adults, and sometimes more specifically, the parents, mum and dad, work. In this, we can see a possible differentiation made by the children between the children’s own activities and the activities undertaken by adults.

The activity aspect generally seems to be an important factor in the children’s answers. Work was described as an activity, such as when someone produces items that are to be sold or used or to repair things, builds houses or roads as well as works in a factory, in a bank, sells advertisements or cuts hair. Even activities that are not obviously connected to gainful employment, but that still generate money, were mentioned, such as delivering papers, collecting bottles and returning them to the shop to get money.

A number of questionnaire answers presented a connection between the categories work and money and payment. In the questionnaire answers, we can find examples of children who argue that work is equivalent to activities from which you can make money. This possibly implies specific kinds of activities, as we can guess that not all activities generate money. A Vikåsa boy in the fourth grade specified the number of activities by stating that work is “when you get money” and a Ekköping boy in the seventh grade similarly stated that work is ”everything that you can get money for”. In these two answers, there are no restrictions on what activities can be included. An Ekköping girl in the sixth grade stated that work is ”when you
do something to get money”. This implies that one and the same type of activity does not always have to be work. It is turned into work if you do it because you want to make money. Yet another questionnaire answer complicates the picture further by expressing that the actual transference of money is not what defines work. Rather it is the underlying reason, your reasons for taking part in the activity, that defines the activity. This Vikåsa girl in the eighth grade argued that work is ”something you do to earn your living”. If you undertake the activity but are not a person who has to provide for yourself or others, that is, if you are not a breadwinner, it is not work, regardless of whether or not you receive money.

Thus, the transferring of money was referred to as both a payment and a salary. Both these two categories can be seen as some sort of formalization of a relation, as opposed to the less formal category mentioned before, where work is something you receive money for. One Ekköping girl in the seventh grade argued, ”work is something that you can get paid for”. This implies that what we are talking about is a certain number or a specific kind of activities. An Ekköping boy in the sixth grade stated, ”work is like when you get paid”. This last statement does not exclude any specific activities. A couple of questionnaire answers brought up that work is when you are employed and when you receive a salary. In this, we can see a connection to a more formalized work order with a possible tie to a (work) place and given this, a probable limitation on the number of activities that can be regarded as work. This is well in line with the definitions used by Statistics Sweden in their labour force surveys (www.scb.se/Statistik/AM/AM0401/_dokument/AM0401_BS_2002.doc), presented above.

Some of the children were more altruistic in their definitions of work. One Ekköping girl in the seventh grade argued that work is ”the things you do to get money and/or to help out”. This underlines that you can have several reasons for working, and that work does not necessarily have to mean that money is transferred in the form of payment or salary. Summing up, given several of the statements above, I can conclude that work is a relational category, something that takes at least two people, where one is doing something for the other one. It is this relation that defines whether or not an activity is work, rather than “what” you do (Schwimmer 1980; Wallman 1979).
The Domestic Arena

Because of the lack of payment or salary, the domestic activities children undertake around the house and at home were not counted as work in the investigations mentioned in the beginning of this chapter. Given this, I claim that we can detect a clear spatial division and demarcation of the labour market in these investigations. The children in Ekköping and Vikåsa did not fully share this idea of the labour market. Rather, some children stated, like one Vikåsa girl in the fifth grade, that work is to ”work with the house” or, like an Ekköping boy in the eighth grade, that work is when you ”work with something at home”. When inspecting the children’s questionnaire answers, we cannot be completely certain that the activities they take part in around the house and at home are work. Some of the children express a slight ambivalence. In the questionnaire answer from a Vikåsa girl in the sixth grade, we find that activities undertaken at home, like doing the dishes, cooking and cleaning, constitute “another kind of work”. Moreover, another Vikåsa girl in the fourth grade mentioned that using the washing machine at home is a ”half work”. The description of work around the house and at home as “another kind of work” implies that this is one form of work, among many different forms. Most children mentioned several different chores that they carry out in their everyday life. However, talk of “another kind of work” can also imply that there is one real form of work and then a number of diverging or subsidiary forms. The mentioning of the washing machine and the indication that it is not work in the full sense indicate that there is another activity that the washing machine is related to, an activity that is full-fledged work. What this work is, however, cannot be detected in these questionnaire answers. We will come back to this when we look at the rest of the material from the fieldwork in Ekköping and Vikåsa.

The activity aspect reoccurs in several of the questionnaire answers. When the children are to define work, they tend to mention an activity. Here we find a number of activities that can be connected to the running of the household, activities that are mostly undertaken inside. One Ekköping girl in the fourth grade stated that she ”thinks that work is to clean and to cook and to repair things” and similar activities like doing the dishes and other forms of housework came up in several questionnaire answers.
Outdoor activities, or activities that are partly done outdoors, also often came up in the questionnaires, like when you work in the garden or when you take care of a dog or a cat. Taking care of a dog or a cat may mean that you are doing this for someone else outside your own home. Similarly, activities like "minding other peoples animals, walking someone else’s dog”, which were mentioned by a Vikåsa girl in the fourth grade, probably indicate work outside your own home. However, we cannot rule out that the animals are taken care of in or at least next to the child’s own home. Moving on into the field of outdoor activities we soon notice that there is, as was also the case with the indoor activities, a focus on maintenance work. A number of questionnaire answers stated that chopping wood, as well as wheeling or throwing the wood into the boiler room, painting houses, feeding the animals and washing the bike are work. Here we can detect yet another distinction, that is, the one between care directed to the collective, or at least directed to someone other than the single individual her-/himself, and care directed to the individual her-/himself. The work with the wood, which is probably used to heat up the shared house, is then contrasted to work with the individual’s own bike. This possible opposition, however, depends on to whom the bike belongs. An Ekköping girl in the sixth grade expressed this more explicitly. She stated that work is "when you have to clean and do laundry for mum and dad". In this questionnaire answer, we see that work is a relational activity and an activity that demands more than one part: Someone orders and someone has to deliver. On top of this, we see that an activity is work when something is demanded, something that “you have to” do. The questionnaire answer may also indicate that work is something you are required to do, although you would prefer to do something else. This was more explicit in the questionnaire answer from a Vikåsa girl in the eighth grade, when she stated that work is "if you don’t work voluntarily".

One theme that came up in a number of the children’s questionnaire answers was to "help out with something at home”. Sometimes the answers were quite specific like helping out with loading the dishwasher or, as in the case of one Ekköping girl in the fourth grade, to “help out repairing water pipes”, but more often it was less specified. What we see when we examine the children’s definitions is that there is no absolute dichotomy between helping out and work. Work and helping out are not two contrasting categories. Rather, helping out is, as has also been suggested by
Ramirez Sánchez (2007), just as much work as anything else.

Some children mentioned “baby-sitting” and “minding children” as examples of work. In this, we can notice a difference in comparison with the investigation undertaken by the Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs (Nilsson 1998), which was presented in the beginning of this chapter. This investigation differentiated between “working extra to make money” and “baby-sitting”. The children in Ekköping and Vikåsa, however, made no such distinction. One can of course question whether this should be categorized as domestic work. It is not certain that the activity is undertaken on the domestic arena. Some children probably babysit younger children who are not part of their own group of siblings. Babysitting children in other families than one’s own, as well as in one’s own family, can be formalized and render payment, as has been shown in previous research (e.g., Gullestad 1992). The inclusion of money does not imply that the activity should not be placed in this section, where we are discussing forms of domestic work. There is, as mentioned by one Ekköping girl in the seventh grade, other work you can do at home that gives you money, for example “shovelling snow”.

School

Work is perhaps not the first word that comes to mind when thinking about the Swedish schools. In the investigations of children’s work that were discussed above, school was not counted as a form of work. School and education are sometimes pictured as one of the opposites of work or as preparation for a future working life (Ennew 1995; Willis 1999). The children in Ekköping and Vikåsa did not share this dichotomized point of view. One Vikåsa girl in the sixth grade wrote that:

A lot of things are work but in different ways, for example school is work for us, we get up in the morning and go to school, work, and then we go home. In contrast to my parents who get paid for what they do. They have a specific profession.
“School” was one of the children’s most frequent responses to the questionnaire item “According to you, what is work?”. Two Ekköping girls in the fourth grade responded, ”school is work for me” and ”school is my work”, and a boy in the seventh grade from the same community wrote that, ”when you are a child you go to school”. In the two first questionnaire answers, we can spot a subjective and somewhat exclusive terminology. The children claim that school is work for them. This implies that it does not necessarily have to be work for other people, and everyone need not agree with their opinion that school is work. In the third answer, we find terminology that is more inclusive. Here it is stated that school is something for the larger collective of individuals who are children. We could interpret the answer as explicitly stating that school is work for children as a group. However, it could be interpreted differently. The child might mean that you do not work when you are a child, when you are a child you go to school. Both interpretations clarify a difference between children’s and adult’s activities. The first interpretation implies a difference in regard to activities that are work for adults. From that perspective, school is categorized as a sort of workplace. Ideas like this could be found in several questionnaire responses and seem to be a widespread opinion among the children.

One Vikåsa boy in the ninth grade claimed that work is ”when you go to school and then cope there all day until the time you go to bed”. It is clear here that it is more than merely the changing of place, leaving home, the spatial aspect if you will, that makes school into a kind of work. An Ekköping girl in the seventh grade reported that work is ”work you do in school”. What is that then? Another Ekköping girl in the fifth grade responded that ”I think work is when you have to exert yourself to do stuff, for example school” and other children claimed that school is work because you work a lot there. This expresses once again that work includes things that are strenuous. What is it then that the children perceive as strenuous? The activity children undertake in school that they think is work is, as one Vikåsa girl in the sixth grade expressed it, ”schoolwork”. A number of children were, however, much more specific and explicit in their questionnaire answers and mentioned, as one Ekköping boy in the sixth grade did, ”When one moves around or works in school”, and, as one Vikåsa boy in the fifth grade said, ”school subjects” or simply classes. Here we can notice some limitations. In these three questionnaire answers, we
see that there are certain parts of the totality of school that are lifted out and mentioned as work. From the somewhat wider definition, where work means moving around and working in school, the second questionnaire answer limits the definition of work further to the school subjects and the third to the classes. Put together, all three imply that there are parts of the activities occurring during the school day that they do not consider work. Some children were even more specific when describing what work in school is, and it was mainly different school subjects that were mentioned, such as maths, science, social studies, arts, Swedish, English, ”if you have to write something” and ”when you work with a project”. Some children also wrote the word “gymnastics”. Whether gymnastics should be interpreted as an activity in school, as physical education or as a spare time activity is not perfectly clear. The word gymnastics, “gymnastik” in Swedish, is often used synonymously for the school physical education class, which can include all forms of physical exercise and sports, as well as for more specific gymnastic exercises. Thus, gymnastics can be a part of the education in school, but it can just as well be undertaken outside school in various formal and informal arrangements. This indicates a problem with clear demarcations between different arenas.

Homework was also mentioned a number of times as an example of what work is. Homework is school assignments that the teacher hands out to the pupils, assignments that are to be brought home after the end of the

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42 Maths was the subject that was mostly mentioned as a form of work
43 This might imply that also participation in my research project, where the children among other things got to fill in questionnaires and write essays, could be perceived as work.
44 “Gymnastik” in Swedish.
school day.\(^{45}\) These school assignments are usually carried out outside the regular school hours in the evenings or during the weekends. "Plugga", to study, was mentioned by two Vikåsa girls, one in the eighth and one in the ninth grade, in the questionnaires. This can probably be connected to the homework. One Vikåsa girl in the seventh grade mentioned in her questionnaire that "getting good grades" was an example of work, and one prerequisite of this ought to be that you do your homework and studies.

Another Vikåsa girl in the sixth grade stated in her questionnaire that "school is things that you have to do”, and this compulsion is then one of the aspects that make school into work. One Vikåsa boy in the ninth grade stated in his questionnaire that work is "when you do something routinely during set hours” and also here the reoccurring and scheduled school day easily comes to mind.

One Vikåsa girl in the fourth grade mentioned, "To be orderly and work” as work in her questionnaire. This may imply that a general orderliness can be work. As an Ekköping girl in the seventh grade wrote in her questionnaire, different activities are work "if you learn something from doing it (for example school)”. This could imply that all the forms of educating, reforming and socializing activities the children undertake, which prepare them for the life to come, may be viewed as work. The actual school subjects could of course be included, but the definition can also include a wider range of activities. In their questionnaires, the children

\[^{45}\text{Although connected to school, what homework is and under what circumstance it might be handed out, etc., are not outlined in the Swedish curriculum (Curriculum for the compulsory school system, the pre-school class and the leisure-time centre Lpo 94 2006), and it may not be completely clear what the term homework refers to. According to Hellsten (2000:120), "Homework is the work that is not taking place during school hours" [My translation from the original Swedish]. Here, Hellsten distinguishes between activities in school and outside school. The term homework, however, does not apply to any activity undertaken outside school. In this text, I categorize homework as “tasks assigned to students by schoolteachers that are meant to be carried out during non-school hours” (Cooper 1989:7 quoted in Cooper and Valentine 2001:145). Nevertheless, in line with Cooper and Valentine (2001:145), I want to add that “This definition does not include in-school tutoring, nonacademic extracurricular activities (i.e., clubs, sports), or home study courses offered through mail, television, or other media”. When using English, there might seem to be an obvious connection between homework and work given that both terms contain the word “work”. In Swedish, however, the word for homework, “läxa”, has no obvious etymological connection to the word work, “arbete”.}
described other types of activities that to a certain degree take place in schools, such as when they clean the school or raise money for a school or class trip.

Spare Time Activities

A number of questionnaire answers stated that it is hard to define what work is. One Ekköping girl in the fourth grade claimed that she “does not really know” what work is, another Ekköping girl in the sixth grade wrote that she “does not have a clue” of what work is, and one Vikåsa girl in the ninth grade claimed that “you cannot really describe” work. The difficulty of distinguishing and defining this category, as one Vikåsa boy in the ninth grade stated, is rooted in the fact that ”almost everything you do is a kind of work”, or as one Vikåsa girl in the ninth grade wrote, ”a lot of things can be work”. The same Vikåsa girl continued stating that ”every step you take is work” and an Ekköping boy in the seventh grade stated along similar lines that ”everything” is work. Given the latter two questionnaire answers, it is hard and almost impossible to separate specific activities.

However, the majority of children mentioned as I have described above, a number of different activities as examples of work. Several of the children’s examples challenge a dichotomized notion of what work is – a notion according to which work forms a sharp contrast to a number of different everyday activities. One example of this could be the dichotomy work vs. spare time. The children mentioned several spare time activities in their questionnaire answers as examples of work. Examples of this tendency are the Vikåsa boy in the fourth grade who stated that ”playing football” is work and the Ekköping girl in the fifth grade who stated that ”stable duty” is work. Other examples are the Ekköping girl in the fourth grade who stated that ”I think swimming is work” and the Ekköping girl in the fourth grade who stated that ”football is work for me”. The investigation, made by the Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs (Nilsson 1998) as well as the investigations “Barns och ungdomars välfärd” (SOU 2001:55) and “Barns villkor” (2005), which was mentioned in the
beginning of this chapter, are all structured according to a logic in which work and having an extra job are one thing and other spare time activities are something essentially different. According to these investigations, other spare time activities are non-work. However, according to the children in Ekköping and Vikåsa, activities in one’s spare time are nothing other than work, and they are work even though they are often unpaid and often performed in an informal fashion.

Some of the children’s definitions of work, as I mentioned before, can be interpreted along the line that work is something compulsory and something you are forced to do, something you have to do even if you would rather do something else, in another place. Following this logic, work is something boring. All work, however, does not appear to be boring. One Vikåsa girl in the sixth grade mentioned ”activities that are work in a fun way that you want to do”. The distinctions boring and fun can be found in some of the questionnaire answers. An Ekköping girl in the fourth grade stated that it is not given whether an activity is work, rather ”it depends on what you have to do. Sometimes it is boring sometimes fun. But most of the time it is quite fun”. Notice how this last example clearly marks that “it depends” on whether an activity is boring or fun. Other questionnaire answers expressed similar ideas. Some children’s questionnaire answers emphasize, in line with this, that the individual effort, the activity and the exertion are what define whether or not an activity is work. One Vikåsa girl in the ninth grade further outlined this when she stated, ”work is something you struggle with. Something you do actively”. However, none of them clarifies exactly why an activity is boring or fun. This was explored further in some of the interviews, however, and will be discussed more in a subsequent chapter.

46 Some of the Vikåsa children who participated in the study used the term ”activities” when they spoke of organized activities that they took part in during their spare time.
Concluding Remarks

The title of this chapter is “What is work?” Asking questions of “what is” character is problematic. This kind of question may mislead the reader into thinking that she or he will get “one” answer, generating the idea that there is one essential meaning of the phenomenon of work. The ambition here has been quite the opposite. To begin with, when inspecting the children’s answers, it is obvious that there is not “one”, common, single children’s point of view on what they think work is. Moreover, by looking into children’s definitions, it is possible to problematize general notions of what work is, where work is commonly equated with formal occupations and paid gainful employment. In this general notion, children’s activities are often seen as non-work, as their activities are often informal and unpaid, and because the individuals undertaking them are children. Work is sometimes depicted as an activity that occurs in places other than the home, at school or in one’s spare time. It is presumed to be an activity connected to adult individuals and maybe even an activity connected to production. The children agree that this is work, but work is also so much more than just gainful employment or activities that render payment. The children’s views on work extend beyond Wadel’s (1979:368) “folk or lay concept of work”, where work is merely paid activities undertaken by adults on the formal labour market. Work appears to be a great deal more than that. I would argue that, after inspecting the children’s definitions, we should avoid using money, payment, salary or even connections to economy in general as the single determining variables for explaining what work is.

Using the children’s definition as a starting point, we can conclude that the difference between paid and unpaid, formal and informal is very fluid. In the children’s descriptions, the dichotomies between, for example, work and spare time and between work and school are changed from sharp contrasts to areas and activities that are overlapping. I mentioned in the beginning of this chapter that the outline containing four work arenas was chosen to facilitate visibility. As we can see in the chapter, the children’s answers highlight the problem of dividing the work children do into demarcated arenas.

Based on the questionnaire answers described in this chapter, one might get the impression that everything is work. I would argue that this is
not completely correct. Summing up the children’s statements, I would argue that what we are dealing with here is a form of what Freidson (1978) calls ”subjective work”. Freidson (1978:5) points out that ”Once we forsake market exchange criteria, it is difficult to discriminate what might properly be called work and what leisure”. However, the children’s accounts, albeit subjective, are not without limitations when it comes to defining the work concept. The children mentioned and named several activities in their everyday life, which they think are non-work. This tells us important things about work. Work is not a freestanding concept beside other social activities and beyond social categorization. Rather work is a social and relational concept that may very well be included in most social relationships (Wadel 1979). We must remember, however, that “viewing work as a relational concept does not necessarily imply that we look upon everything we do as work, but there is the expectancy that work is an aspect (actual or potential) of all social relations” (Wadel 1979:381).47 Thus, everything is not necessarily work, at least not always, but every activity contains the possibility of being work. To find out the possible meanings work can have in the Ekköping and Vikåsa children’s lives, we have to situate the study in their everyday lives and look more closely at the practices in which they take part (Ehn 1981; Ronco and Peattie 1988). This will be done in the following chapters.

47 Emphasis in original.
Children and the Labour Market

In the former chapter, I outlined how the children defined work. In that chapter, we could see that the children gave a wide definition of work. In this and the following three chapters, I take a closer look at the children’s participation in the work arenas outlined in the former chapter. The aim is to situate and contextualize the children’s work activities, to further outline why these activities are work, to study what the children are doing and to outline how much they work in these arenas. I will start with the job arena and the children’s connection to the labour market. Given the children’s ideas about work, in this chapter focusing on their connections to the labour market, we have to include and study activities that might not traditionally be considered part of the formal labour market or be counted as jobs. Thus, although the chapter title contains the term labour market, the activities discussed are sometimes undertaken on the fringe or even outside the formal labour market.

The Legal Frame

A common idea in Sweden seems to be that it is illegal for children to work. However, it is interesting to note – when inspecting the United Nations Convention on Children’s Rights, the UNCRC, which was ratified by the Swedish government in 1990, as well as the Swedish labour regulations – that neither of these two documents explicitly declares that it is illegal for children to work. Article 32 of the UNCRC declares that children should be protected from “economic exploitation and from
performing any work that is likely to be hazardous or to interfere with the child's education, or to be harmful to the child's health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development” (www.rb.se/eng/ChildRights/LongVersion/). Thus, the convention does not ban or forbid children’s work.

Then, when it comes to Sweden, children are legally in their full right to participate on the labour market and take part in formal gainful employment from the age of 13, even if there are restrictions. In today’s Sweden, individuals under the age of 18 are considered minors and there are specific laws that regulate the work situation for this group (AFS 1996:1). There are different restrictions regarding work in the evenings and at night time for all minors, but the real difference is in the hours children of different ages are allowed to work during the day time. A minor is allowed to work eight hours per day and 40 hours per week from the age of 16, after the person has finished the nine-year compulsory school. For younger children, working life is further regulated. People in the age range 15 to 16 years are allowed to work eight hours per day and 40 hours per week during vacations. Those under 15 are allowed to work a maximum of two hours per day and all and all 12 hours per week while the school year is still going on. During vacation time, this group is allowed to work seven hours per day and 35 hours per week (AFS 1996:1). The regulation also states that work undertaken by children in these age groups should be “simple and harmless” (AFS 1996:1 9 §). For children under the age of 13 years, work is prohibited. Again, there are exceptions. A person under the age of 13 cannot be employed but is allowed to do simpler, lighter work in the family business. Individuals under the age of 13 are also allowed to do easier agricultural work if the farm or the market garden is managed by a member of the child’s own family. Furthermore, children under the age of 13 are allowed to sell Majblommor and Christmas magazines and to take part in similar temporary work that is characterized as being of “hobby nature” (AFS 1996:1 10 §), under the condition that the minor herself/himself decides the time, place and extent of the work effort (AFS 1996:1).

48 My translation.
49 My translation.
50 I will come back to, and further explain the phenomena of Christmas magazines and Majblommor later in this chapter and in Chapter 6.
As we can see, the labour regulations stipulate different restrictions that delimit the work children are allowed to undertake and participate in at different ages. The labour legislation was obviously once introduced to protect and prevent children from being exploited. Nevertheless, an effect of the legislation has also been that children’s access and possibility to participate in work has been reduced (Fyfe 1989; Leonard 1998; Näsman 1998). In a way, the labour regulations are created as a linear development ladder or perhaps instead “a ladder of increasing ‘adulthood’” (Näsman 1994:170), along which children gradually can transition into working life. From a starting point, being under the age of 13, children can get their first contact with and participate on a low level in working life. Throughout the years, they can then move further and further into this territory, gaining increased independence, finally able to participate fully after their eighteenth birthday. The working life of people under the age of sixteen is in some ways depicted as a protected training and socialization period for the real deal: independent adult working life (Alanen 1994; Morrow 1994; Schildkrout 1980; Sjöberg 2007). However, despite the variety of restrictions I have shown above, the children who took part in the present study all have the legal right to work to some degree. The question is whether we can find children in Ekköping and Vikåsa on the labour market?

**Tracing Working Children**

During my time in Ekköping and Vikåsa, I posed the question “Do you work?” to the children in a questionnaire. Fifty children out of 100 answered “Yes” to this question. Forty-five children answered “No”.51 The answers show that slightly more than half of the children regard themselves

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51 See Appendix. Question 18 in the questionnaire. Three children answered both “Yes” and “No” to this question. These three are counted as both in the numbers presented above. One child answered “almost” and another child answered “sometimes”. Neither of these two answers are included in the numbers presented above. Three children put their mark between the alternatives. These three answers have also not been included in the numbers above. Finally, three children did not answer the question at all.
as working. The follow-up question was “If yes: Where do you work?” In response to this question, only nine of the children mentioned places that I would argue are “normally” part of the formal labour market where people have gainful employment. The examples in the two communities were: “my father’s job”; “taking care of invoices at an accounting office”; “cleaning a day-care centre, it is a job”; “my father’s job”; “in a restaurant”; “in my father’s barber shop answering the phone”; “helping my dad in his company”; “at home in my mother’s block of flats” and in “Estonia [where relatives of this boy have a farm]”. Except for these nine examples, given the children’s answers overall, the children seem to have a very weak connection to the formal labour market.

Instead of places on the formal labour market, the children’s answers to the question “Where do you work?” described places such as sport clubs, at school and activities undertaken around the house where the children live (inside as well as outside). The children who described places around the house mentioned that they clean the house, help out with chores, do the laundry, do the dishes, cook, shovel snow and help out with renovating the house and putting up wallpaper. Some children were less specific about the places where they work in their follow-up answers. Instead of places, these answers contained statements such as: ”Not a real job, takes care of bunnies and washing machine”, ”Almost”, ”It is not really work but I walk the neighbours’ dog”, ”No, only on summer vacation”, ”No, not at the moment”, ”Sometimes at weekends with pony horse riding”. Ingenhorst (2001:145) argues, in a study from Germany, that “Child labour represents a broad range of activities, intensities and forms, which is very difficult to put into clearly defined categories”. This was the case here as well. We can see in the examples above that the children seem to have a weak connection to the formal labour market. However, more importantly, the children’s statements illustrate that they seem to be somewhat unsure as to whether their activity really is work or what work is. Although the children use a wide definition of work in the questionnaire answers presented in Chapter 3, they still do not appear to be completely certain that their own activities actually are real work. This has to be kept in mind when interpreting the children’s answers.

Some scholars argue that modern childhood has gone through a process of insularization, that modern childhood is taking place on
“islands” spread out in society (e.g., Qvortrup 1994a; Zeiher 2003). These islands are the modern institutions created for children, such as school, preschool and so on, where children spend their days while their parents and other adults are away taking part in society, working (Zeiher 2003, 2007). At first sight, the children’s answers support this image. When they described their own work activities, few children described regular jobs and regular workplaces on the formal labour market, places where adults have their gainful employment. This could be a partial explanation for why the children do not seem sure as to whether they themselves are working. They do not perform their activities at a traditional workplace. However, the children’s hesitance, their un-willingness to describe their activity as work in the questionnaire, also points in another possible direction. The problem might not only be that they are doing their activity in the “wrong” place, but rather that the children do not perceive children to be working.

Before further pursuing the question of the children’s possible hesitancy to perceive themselves as workers, I would like to present one more example that gives indications of the children’s ideas about their place on the labour market. In the following part of the questionnaire used during my fieldwork, I asked the children “How often do you work?”, “How many hours do you work on average?” and “How many hours can every single workday amount to for you?”.

Twenty-seven children did not answer these questions. All but one of these 27 had already stated that they did not work and consequently they skipped the part about the amount of work and the estimated time use. Going through the children’s answers, the first thing that strikes me is that there is great variance in their answers. Looking at the group of children as a whole, we can conclude that the children estimate that they work anywhere from once a week to seven days a week. The variance in the answers indicates differences in what kind of labour market the children take part on. Thus, it tells us something valuable about children’s work. However, I would also argue that part of the explanation for the difference in the answers could be found in the way the question was understood. This gives us an idea about how the children view the activities they take part in and thus how they view themselves. This also tells us something about childhood.

52 The term “insularization” goes back to the German word for “island”, “Insel”. In German, the described process is called “Verinselung”.

53 See Appendix. Questions 19, 20 and 21 in the questionnaire.
Some children wrote explanatory remarks on the blank space next to their estimations of how many times they work every week. Among the Ekköping children, one boy in the fourth grade added that the three times he had mentioned referred to things done during the summer. One Ekköping girl in the fifth grade wrote “I help out” instead of writing a time estimation, and a Ekköping boy in the seventh grade wrote that he only works twice every other month. Some of the Vikåsa children added similar explanations. One girl in the fifth grade added that the number of times she works every week only refers to every other week [when she lives with her father who has a detached house]. Two boys in the seventh grade wrote that their estimations of work refer to work undertaken during the summer holiday, away from school. Another girl in the eighth grade wrote, "I work every day at home" as an answer to how often she works. Yet another girl in the eighth grade wrote, "it differs, some Saturdays 4-5 hours. Some evenings 2 hours. Most of the time I don’t have the energy" as an answer to how often she works. Finally, one girl in the ninth grade wrote, "whenever I feel like it". Taken together, these answers give us an indication of how the answers vary owing to differences in the children’s labour market. The answers mentioning the summer holiday indicate that some children’s work habits changes from season to season.

The answers, however, also need to be interpreted in another way. During the questionnaire sessions, in the children’s classrooms, I was from time to time asked how the questions on work and time use were to be understood. Some children were unsure of how to handle these questions and asked me if they needed to fill this part out even if they did not work. I explained to them that they could skip this part if they did not consider themselves to be working and move on to questions that they thought they could answer. When examining the answers, it becomes clear that a few children chose to answer these questions although they had previously stated that they do not work. As mentioned above, 45 out of 100 children wrote that they do not work, but only 27 out of 100 chose to skip the three questions asking how much they work.

A number of children wrote that they work on average 1-3 times per week. There are no major differences to be found between girls and boys or across the age spectrum here. There were, however, some extremes. One Vikåsa girl in the seventh grade said, while filling out the questionnaires, that:
My workday is only a couple of minutes now and then. About twenty minutes to go to the supermarket. A couple of minutes from the sofa to take out the trash. No more than twenty minutes a week.

When inspecting the completed questionnaires, I found that one Ekköping boy in the seventh grade had written that he works seven days a week and that his workdays can be anything from eight to fifty hours long. Similarly, one Ekköping girl in the fourth grade had written that every workday could be “several days and nights around the clock”. If we ignore the fact that no day is longer than 24 hours and that the above-mentioned Ekköping boy exceeds this by 26 hours, I argue that his answer still stresses a very important issue. As mentioned in the previous chapter, given the children’s subjective idea of the work concept, every activity contains the possibility of being work. This boy’s answer indicates that, from time to time, his whole day is filled with work. In a similar way, the above-mentioned girl’s answer indicates that her feeling is that her work stretches out and takes a lot of time, dominating every part of the 24-hour day.

In the previous chapter, it was claimed that school could be viewed as work and when asking the children where they work, school was often brought up. Inspecting the answers to the question “How many hours do you work on average?”, we can see that this idea reoccurs also here. Several children reported that they work five times a week. In response to the question “How many hours can every single workday amount to for you?”, a slightly smaller number of children answered that they work between 30 and 41 hours per week. When inspecting the answers further, we find that the same children answered that every single workday can amount to between five and eight hours. Coincidently, this is the same number of hours as a normal school week and school day in Sweden. Given this, it feels safe to assume that these children view school as their work and estimate how many hours they spend in school per day during their five-day-long school week when answering.

Some children chose to give longer written statements that tell us a little bit more about what kind of work their answers might refer to, as well as where their work is taking place. I did not ask the children to make these kinds of comments in this particular question, but the children chose to use the empty space to clarify their answers further. Two Vikåsa girls in the
fourth grade wrote that the amount of time put into the work “depends on what I do” and that “it depends on if I clean, cook or something like that”. One Ekköping girl in the sixth grade wrote that she works “when I am home”, and a boy in the seventh grade from the same community wrote that he “only work in the garden or clean my room”. These answers all connect the category work to a setting outside the formal labour market with occupations and gainful employment as well as outside school, placing it at home in the domestic arena.

Are Children Workers?

An example of the children’s rather weak connection to the formal labour market might be questions regarding summer jobs. In Sweden, summer vacation is the longest period away from school for children, ranging from June to August. Regarding work and having a job, this could hence be considered the most suitable time of the year. Having a summer job could demonstrate one’s connection to the part of the labour market with formal, paid, gainful employment. In the questionnaire, I asked the children “Did you have a job for which you earned money last summer?”. Out of the 100 children, 60 answered “No” and 26 “Yes”. There was no follow-up question, asking the children where they had been working. However, in the interviews, places like “a café”, “an apple farm in Estonia”, “a restaurant”, “a golf-club” and “selling strawberries outside a supermarket” were brought up. The many “No” answers further illustrate a weak connection to the part of the labour market with formal, paid, gainful employment. Later on in the questionnaire, I asked the children what they had planned to do the upcoming summer. The alternatives were “Get a job outside the home”, “Work with something at home”, “Be away from

54 See Appendix. Question 27 in the questionnaire.
55 Fifteen children did not answer the question. One person answered both Yes and No and is counted as both. The level of summer jobs turned out to be slightly higher in the lower age groups, but in general it was around 20 to 30% across the age groups.
56 See Appendix. Question 28 in the questionnaire.
the family, in another place” and “Something else”. In the last alternative, the children had a space where they could add information about what they had planned. The answers varied across the age groups, although the older children seemed to mark that they would try to get a job outside the home to a higher extent than the younger children did. This was clear in both the communities, where very few fourth and fifth graders marked that they had planned to get a job outside the home. In all, 38 of the 100 children answered that they had planned to get a job outside the home next summer. Proportionally, this was closely followed by the alternative where individuals answered that they would work with something at home. Thirty-three children marked this alternative. As mentioned above, few of the children had had a summer job where they had earned money last summer. Conversely, regarding their plans for the upcoming summer, we can see that a larger proportion of the children, and especially children in the older age groups, were planning to get a job outside the home.

In the introduction of this chapter, I discussed the Swedish labour law and argued that it is formed as a ladder, allowing children to transition gradually into the formal labour market. There are a number of major age thresholds defining the number of hours a person is allowed to work. The passing of the age thirteen, fifteen, sixteen, and eighteen are the major thresholds concerning children and entry into the formal labour market. However, as Sjöberg (2007) argues, Swedish labour legislation as such does not completely stop people in the age range 13 to 18, or I would argue even younger children, from working. From a legal point of view, quite a few of the children in the present study are allowed to take part in the formal labour market, although under some restrictions. Nevertheless, if we interpret the children’s answers as their understanding of their possibilities to enter and get a job on the formal labour market, we can see that they understand the situation differently. In their interpretation, the labour regulations are a major factor inhibiting their participation on the labour market. The fact that they did not plan to have a job may of course have many explanations. I will return to this, but their answers could indicate their opinion that age, and in this case their low age, works against them in

57 The children were invited to mark more than one of the alternatives if needed.
58 Twenty children did not give an answer to this particular question.
59 Two of the children who answered that they would get a job outside the home added ”Maybe” next to their answer.
a structural way when it comes to entering the formal labour market. When inspecting the interviews, it becomes clear that many of the children do not seem to recognise that it is even possible for them to have a job. For example, Fredrik, an Ekköping boy in the sixth grade, argued that it is forbidden for children to have summer jobs before the age of 16. Similarly, Dan, a Vikåsa boy in the seventh grade, explained that he had refrained from applying for a summer job as a dishwasher in a restaurant due to the legal regulations. According to Dan, a person at his age is not legally allowed to work in such a place due to safety regulations. Thus, Fredrik, Dan and the other children do not recognise that they can be workers according to the law, and this in turn, I argue, effects their approach to the formal labour market. The children perceive the law as a constraint on their job chances. From a structuration perspective, however, it is important to note that the constraint is put into effect by the children’s own active involvement. This then is an example of the role the law plays in preserving the boundary between adulthood and childhood (James and James 2004). Moreover, it is also an example of the role the children themselves play in the structuration process (Giddens 1984). I will soon come back to the interview material. Before doing this, however, we need to take one more questionnaire item into consideration.

**Work and Job**

The questionnaire used for the present study contained a question asking, “What job would you preferably like to have?”60 The interesting thing about this question is not necessarily the many different answers the children gave, but rather the way some of the children reacted upon first seeing the question. I was, as mentioned, in the classroom when the children filled out the questionnaire. Some children answered the question without any noticeable reaction, but quite a few of them raised their hands to get my attention and to ask questions, or simply shouted out. They asked questions such as, “do you mean what job I would like to have in the

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60 See Appendix. Question 31 in the questionnaire.
future?” and “do you mean now or in a couple of years?” Moreover, they asked, “do you mean as a part-time job or so, or do you mean what my dream job is in the future?” and finally, “do you mean something realistic for a fourteen-year-old?” Summing up, the thing bothering the children was whether I wanted to know what kind of job they wanted to have in the future, as adults, or whether I meant now, which did not seem to make sense to some of the children, and the jobs they wanted and could possible get as children. Although all the other questions in the questionnaire concerned the children’s life here and now, in the present, it was not obvious to these children how this particular question could relate to a phenomenon in their everyday life. It was not obvious how jobs could have anything to do with people of their age, how the question could have anything to do with children.

This was clearly illustrated by one Vikåsa girl, in the eighth grade. She had signed up for this research project on childhood and work. She had taken photos, had been interviewed and was now filling out a questionnaire. Before finishing her questionnaire, she wrote in the questionnaire that she thought it was hard to understand the questions and added that she thought it is ”just a little bit strange, most people at our age do not have a job” 61. What is interesting about the same girl is that she, before concluding her questionnaire with the statement above, gave an account where she describes numerous activities she performs at home “helping” her parents. She writes that “I work everyday at home” 62 and that “I have to do the dishes, wash up, clean and cook some days”. She also states, “I think the things we do in school are work”.

Here we have a situation that might appear somewhat paradoxical. This girl’s story illustrates a day-to-day life containing a number of different activities, at home and in school, which she herself regards as work. However, she still thinks it is an odd research project, studying children’s “work” because children do not have “jobs”. This discrepancy is interesting. According to Schwalbe and Wolkomir (2003:68), “Behind (...) discrepancies are often the doorways through which we must pass to figure out what is going on in a setting”, and I argue that this discrepancy gives us an important insight into how children categorize themselves and their childhood. I would argue that this discrepancy puts forward a paradox that

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61 Job is translated from the word ”jobb” in Swedish.
62 Work is translated from the word ”arbetar” in Swedish.
is symptomatic for many of the children. They do not have a “job” but they do “work”. The work activities they undertake do not really fit into their idea of the jobs people do on the formal labour market. They engage in various activities, and some of these might be like a “job”, but the children do not see themselves as “workers” or their activities as “jobs” as such.

Here, I am then implying that many of the children I met during my fieldwork made a distinction between a job, some form of profession and employment taking place on the formal labour market, and work, which is a more diffuse category. I will discuss the differences and similarities between these categories more later on in the book. Let me just say that I use this distinction in an attempt to put forward, what I claim is, the children’s definition. This was, however, not a definition shared by all the children, and I am quite certain that several of them never differentiated between the two terms, but rather used them synonymously. Some children used the terms job and work in a contrasting way to what I have done in this text. During a questionnaire session, I had a discussion with an Ekköping boy in the sixth grade. He had called on me because he had some problems. The question to be answered was whether he knew any other children who are working. At that moment, I could not really see what could be the problem. Consequently, I simply read the question aloud to him and asked him if he knew any other children who work. He thought for a while before answering that, “Well no, not that work, but they do jobs”. Similarly, in an interview with three Ekköping girls in the seventh grade, we discussed the difference between activities in the household and the more formal working life. I asked them if they thought that cleaning and cooking at home was work, and they answered that:

Eveline: No.
Mette: No, but it is a job.
Eveline: Yes but that is the same thing.
Mette: No, I don’t think that is the same thing. Because work, well then you do things, or no. Work is when you kind of do something at

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63 Now, when I inspect the material after the fieldwork, it becomes obvious that I, too, use these terms interchangeably and synonymously from time to time.
64 See Appendix. Question 22 in the questionnaire.
65 In Swedish: “Nej inte arbetar, men jobbar gör de ju”.
66 Initially five girls took part in this interview, but two of them had to leave the interview after a short while and thus missed the greater part of the interview session.
home. And a job, then you should have a job, like.
Eveline: No, the other way around.
Anja: Yes, the other way around.
Mette: But I don’t know.
Eveline: Job is hard work and work is like, kind of a work, I mean like you do, well like being a boss and things like that.

The excerpt illustrates the dynamics of the interview session. It shows how the children, and the researcher, even if the latter is invisible in this particular excerpt, negotiate how a category is to be understood. The result of this negotiation between the three girls seems to end up in a definition that is the exact opposite of my definition. It appears to be more in line with the notions of the Ekköping sixth grader mentioned just above, where job is a diffuse category and work an activity undertaken on the formal labour market, where you are paid a salary. Despite this, I still think there are similarities in the way the terms are discussed. We all seem to agree that one of the categories is mainly a definition for professions undertaken on a formal labour market with gainful employment, whereas the other category is wider and includes different forms of activities. Moreover, the excerpt underlines that there are no clear-cut, evident, natural or absolute definitions. Rather, the definitions are the results of negotiations, and as such, they can be re-negotiated and changed.

Children’s and Adults’ Work – Same or Different?

During my fieldwork, I handed out disposable cameras and asked groups of children in grades 6, 7, 8 and 9 to take photos of things they think are work and/or of themselves working during a one-week period. I wanted to use the photographing activity to try to start a reflexive process among the children. Later, when the photos were taken and developed, the children and I sat down in interviews to discuss the pictures they had taken. In one

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67 As already mentioned, no Ekköping ninth graders took part in this study.
such interview, with Dan and Tor, two Vikåsa boys in the eighth grade, we were going through their photos when a photo of a parking lot and a bus appeared among different pictures from their school, from their neighbourhood and of themselves. The interview had more or less just begun and I asked the boys to try to tell me what they saw in the photos. Dan and Tor explained every photo to me. The photo of the parking lot and the bus was presented to me as work, because, as Tor said, “people drive to their jobs in their cars. They park. And then there is a bus”. After their presentation, I asked them to compare the activities in the photos. The boys had shown me photos from school and I asked what the difference is between school and the work done by the person in the car, the presumed owner of one of the cars on the parking lot, and the bus driver. The answer came immediately. Tor stated that, “things like that, [the work of the car owner and the person driving the bus] that you get paid to do”. During the interview with the two boys, in our discussion on what work is, the focus on payment occurred several times. I asked Dan and Tor what they think about when they hear the word work. They answered, in sum, that they think of something you are paid to do, something you have gone through an education to do, something you do more or less everyday, where you get up and go to work, work and you receive a salary for this. When asked this question, most of the children in both Ekköping and Vikåsa seemed to share these notions and mentioned various professions, work undertaken by adults (cf. Johansson 2005). They mentioned activities where you go away in the morning, come back in the evening, and are paid. Thus, here in the interview context, the children are very close to “the folk or lay concept of work” (Wadel 1979:368).

Yet again, other children mentioned something you do full-time, or mentioned that they primarily came to think of something you have to do and something strenuous when they hear the word work. This implies wider definitions of work. In an interview with three Vikåsa ninth graders, one boy and two girls, where we were discussing many different kinds of activities and definitions, it was put forward that:

Erik: In fact, everything, exactly everything you do is work. If you were so spoiled that you only had to sit in bed all the time, you could have a butler like, yeah. Tell him to do something! Then you still work, you tell someone, that is still work.
Lisa: You are sitting!
Erik: Yeah! But maybe you are telling someone to do something.
Lisa: It is not the same kind of work.
Erik: No but, there are many kinds of work, right?
Sally: Hm, hm.
Erik: That’s what’s so, weird you know.

Erik developed this line of thought a bit further later on in the interview and added at that time that “work is a general word for everything. Work can contain a number of different other you know genres, yeah things”. His interview companions, the two girls Lisa and Sally, did not fully agree.

Lisa: But you mean that work you know, is like, I mean, like this, if I should do like this [changing position of her arm] then it is work for my arm, I am working now. But I am thinking more like work, that you do a job.
Erik: Hm.
Lisa: That is, you are doing something and get something for that. Not that you sit and wave, that it is work for your body, rather it is more, hm, hm. If you know what I mean?
Sally: I agree with both of you. Because you can go deeper into what kind of work one is referring to. If one talks about professions that is, or if you mean physical work, when you are doing things or.
Erik: Yeah.
Sally: You know mental.
Erik: Fun work.
Sally: Yeah. I mean it depends completely on what kind of work one is talking about. But the first thing that comes to mind for me is having a profession and stuff like that.

What is shown in these two excerpts is that the meaning of work cannot be taken for granted. Work is a category with many meanings, or using Erik’s words “genres”. Some meanings are mutually exclusive, whereas others seem to be more inclusive. Erik seems to lean more towards an interpretation of work as a physical activity, whereas Lisa, and to a high degree Sally, think of professions, having a job. Now these two understandings are not mutually exclusive, and they kept coming back in combinations throughout my fieldwork. In the children’s way of using the category work, we can see how they combine different understandings of the category, trying to pinpoint the meaning of a particular activity. This underlines that there is not one sole determinant of work, or rather work is not one thing. Moreover, this underlines the need to try to contextualize the
definitions of work presented in Chapter 3.

The two Vikåsa boys in the eighth grade, Dan and Tor, who, as I claim above, adhere to the lay or folk concept of work, did not restrict the category work to comprising people undertaking their trained profession, such as the bus driver. Neither did they restrict the category work to comprising only activities undertaken by adults. They did make, however, a distinction between adults’ and children’s work. Discussing the bus driver as an example, the boys argued that there are some obvious differences between the work children and adults do. Adults are better paid, they do harder jobs, they do them every day for several years, and they are often dependent on the money they make for their survival (cf. Näsman and von Gerber 2003; Mayall 2002). Children, they argued, work a bit now and then, maybe once a week, they can choose to work if they like to, if they work it is only for making extra money, because they do not need money to pay the bills, their parents do that. When making similar comparisons with the other children, they mentioned similar differences. Some mentioned that adults’ work often involves longer planning, whereas children tend to take the day as it comes, and that adults at least claim that they take more responsibility. Others, like Frida, a Vikåsa girl in the sixth grade added, on top of the things brought up by the boys above, that “there is no money in the job you do as a child, most of the time”. Two things are notable here. First, we can see that the children make connections between the distinction job-work and the distinction adults-children. Second, I argue that in these distinctions, where children are portrayed as generally working less, as doing less hard work and as doing easier work, the children are depicted not simply as another kind of worker, but as a less competent one (cf. Näsman and von Gerber 2003).

The question of the difference between children’s work and adults’ work was something that came up in several interviews. Faced with this question, Emil, an Ekköping boy in the sixth grade, answered, ”Hm, yes. There are some countries where it is not like that”. When I asked him what he meant he continued by stating that:
Well, I mean there are like in other countries, like for example in Africa and so. Then they [the children] work, you know, just as much as. Some maybe start working. They don’t go to school, they work instead, like all the other adults and so. Like in mines and everything. Xxx. That is forbidden here in Sweden, but it’s not forbidden everywhere.

In his description, Emil uses examples from another part of the world, where many children work doing exactly the same jobs as adults instead of going to school. Emil is using this negation when trying to characterize the situation in Sweden. Children in Sweden have, as Johansson (2005) points out, access to stories about the evil childhood, a childhood that is located somewhere else, in far off places. These stories, argues Johansson, create a useful contrast to the children’s own everyday life. Moreover, these kinds of stories can be used to give meaning to the life children live in Sweden as well as to the work activities they undertake. In his statement, Emil describes childhood in Sweden as different from childhood “in other countries, like for example in Africa”. Emil also clarifies that whatever work children are doing in Sweden, it is different from the things adults do. Furthermore, in his explanation, Emil refers to the law, “it is forbidden”, when trying to explicate why there is a difference between children’s and adults’ work in Sweden. This is, I would claim, another indication of how legislation plays an important part in the social construction of childhood (cf. James and James 2004; see also Hengst and Zeiher 2000).

Ennew (1986:17) argues that there are two main characteristics of modern childhood. To begin with, in society there exists “a rigid age hierarchy which permeates the whole of society and creates a distance between adults and children”. The difference in status between people in these two groups is reinforced by special separating arrangements, such as special books for children, special movies, etc. (James 1993). The second trait of modern childhood is “the myth of childhood as a golden age” and the notion of childhood as a time of happiness and lack of responsibility (Ennew 1986:16). To enhance this notion of childhood, children have to be further distanced from the demanding and corrupt adult society. The legal system is one way to create such a distance (James and James 2004). In the Swedish labour regulations, people under the age of 18 are, as mentioned above, treated as special cases, and their relations to the labour market are handled in separate laws. Näsmann (1994:169) argues that, “When children
are made visible in legislation as a special category of citizens because of their young age, they are, to a considerable extent, (...) identified as fundamentally different from others”. Thus, one effect of these special laws is that children are marked as different from the normal, real worker, the adults. Children are distinguished as different, a different kind of worker or even as non-workers, and it is a difference based on notions of age.

Difference is, as Strandell (2007:54) suggests, however “not only separation, it is inferiority as well”.68 The industrial part of the world is, as scholars have pointed out since the nineteenth century, a “work society” (e.g., Beck 2007; Hockey and James 1993; Kohli 1988).69 Kohli (1988:380) argues that:

In the work society, work is relevant not only in terms of the organisation of economic production but also in cultural terms. It provides (some of) the basic standards for defining what is culturally acceptable and worth striving for.

In such a society, a profession and a job are not merely something that brings you a salary every month. The job and the profession are part of the personal identity, they to some degree define you as a person. By “the work society” standards, a whole and qualified individual is someone who has gainful employment, a job (Beck 2007; Hockey and James 1993, 2003; Kohli 1988). In such a society, personal worth and social status are tightly connected to participation in the formal work process, having gainful employment at a job. Consequently, an individual without a job is not fully qualified (Kohli 1988).

Returning to the legislation and the way children are positioned, children are not only depicted as different through this separate legislation regarding work. The children are, according to Näsman (1994:169), also placed in an “underdog” and even “subordinate position”. Adults’ close connection to the formal labour market and gainful employment is what forms their dominant position in society (Hockey and James 1993, 2003). Childhood is ideologically created in opposition to this, constructing the child as the other. Following the children’s statements, we can see how this “othering” develops into a process of subordination and devaluation

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68 Emphasis in original.
69 Some sociologist, as Kohli (1988) suggests, even use the terms “work society”, “industrial society” and “capitalistic society” synonymously.
(Närvänen and Näsman 2007). Children are not only a different kind of worker, they are not really workers at all, and their activities are not real work (Fyfe 1989).

The distinctions made by the children between adults’ jobs and their own work and the emphasis on adults as more responsible convey, as has been suggested by Mayall (2002:69), the impression that the children “regard themselves as separated out from the world of serious, responsible work (…)

Nelly, an Ekköping girl in the sixth grade, described in an interview how “[I] help my dad in his small shop”, something that she thinks, “is fun”. I asked:

Tobias: So what do you do then?
Nelly: I get to use the cash machine when someone is buying something.
Tobias: Do you do that a lot?
Nelly: Noo. I don’t know, two, three times a week.
Tobias: In the evenings or?
Nelly: No, in the daytime when I come home from school.
Tobias: Do you get paid for that to?
Nelly: Noo, then I get candy.

[Later on in the interview]

Tobias: Nelly then, when you work in your father’s shop.
Nelly: Then he is usually there with me and helps me.
Tobias: Yeah, and why do you do this?
Nelly: It is fun. But then I usually do it when friends or old ladies are coming.
Tobias: And then you get salary or you get candy when you work?
Nelly: But that will of course be at the end of the week.
Tobias: Yeah, that’s right.
Nelly: Or some ice cream or something.

Nelly helps her father when she is not in school. She is in school the greater part of the daytime during the week. The time she can spend in the shop is thus limited. Given this, one could argue that school limits children’s possibilities to take part in different work activities and thus excludes them from parts of the labour market. Notable in the excerpt is Nelly’s way of describing her activity in the shop as helping, distinguishing it as
something different from regular work. She also describes how her father helps her, supervising her activities. There is never any doubt when reading this excerpt that the father is the main worker, or real worker if you will, and Nelly more of a person helping out and having fun when her friends and old ladies come by to do some shopping. The fact that she is paid in kind by her father, getting a treat at the end of the week, rather than in cash, further underlines this difference. Thus, even though they are both at the workplace, in the shop, performing what seems to be the same activity, we get the feeling from Nelly’s description that they are not both workers in the same sense. Nelly’s activity is not real work. In her description of the activities at the shop, Nelly not only reduces her own contribution. In fact, in her description of her own and her father’s activity at the shop, Nelly constructs her own lack of competence and dependence on her father. The fact that Nelly only comes to the shop a couple times a week after school, and the fact that her father, according to Nelly, works there every day of the week, could of course be an important difference that helps explain this. I would argue, however, that this has less to do with amounts of time or what work they actually do. Rather, it is connected to the cultural notion of children as non-workers and childhood as place of non-work.

Taking Part and “Helping out”

Ulrik is an Ekköping boy who attends the seventh grade in Fritjofsskolan. My first contact with him was when I interviewed him and two other pupils. I came to develop a particular interest in Ulrik because his narration of his everyday life and his work in many ways diverged from most of the other children I came across during my fieldwork. When I, in the interview, asked the children how often they work, Ulrik first mentioned that he works when he wants and later on added descriptions of how he kept himself busy most of the day doing various work tasks. He described how he works on his grandmothers’ and grandfathers’ farm, how he gets up at half past six to do the barn. He also described how he used to work together with his grandfather in the grandfathers’ floor heating company and how he
and a friend, when they felt like it, cut down a whole forest by hand, transporting the timber with their four-wheeled motorbikes. None of the other Ekköping children had mentioned anything like this, and I decided to take a closer look.

I paid a visit at Ulrik’s home. There I meet him, his parents, sisters and grandparents. Ulrik and his family, mother, father and two younger sisters live in the countryside about half an hour from the main community of Ekköping. To get to their place, one has to turn off from the main road, travel on a small road for approximately four kilometres and on a gravel road for two more. They live on a farm, in a house side-by-side with the parents of Ulrik’s mother. Ulrik’s parents work full-time away from home, but the grandparents work on the farm area by the houses. The grandparents have a farm with cattle for meat production, which is managed, by the grandmother, and a firm, managed by the grandfather, that assembles and sells systems for floor-heating. Both these businesses are located in buildings just next to the two houses, where Ulrik and his family and his grandparents live. There is thus no great spatial division line between working life and the family life outside work.

During my visit to this family, it struck me that all of them, adults and children, talked about the children’s contributions in the day-to-day life as “helping out”. I was told that Ulrik and both his sisters help out and do odd jobs in the grandparents’ businesses. The children, and above all Ulrik, help the grandfather in his workshop, putting together floor-heating shunts in their spare time. The children drive tractors, shovel snow, plough the fields and help out with various other chores. This is often on the children’s own initiative. The grandmother told me, repeating what Ulrik had already told me during the interview, that Ulrik and a friend had asked if they could help out in the forestry. She had showed them how to thin a forest with handsaws and after this, the two boys thinned a part of the forest on their own. The boys used the trees that they cut down to build their own tree-huts.

I was told that if the children come home early from school, they stay with the grandmother or grandfather. The grandparents argued that because the children were around it is only natural that they get to take part and help out. Given how far it is to town and to the children’s friends, the parents often tell the children to “go and see what grandmother and grandfather are doing” instead of driving them to a friend. The mother
explained that the children often spontaneously go over to the grandparents on their own initiative and stay with them for a couple of hours, helping out, if they are bored. In this family, working together is a way of spending time together (cf. Song 2001).

Ulrik’s mother told me that she seldom has to ask the children to help out with some work task. Ulrik remarked that the only one who tells them to do chores is his mother. Ulrik mentioned as an example, “if a tractor is parked where it shouldn’t be or in the way somehow, you shout ‘Ulrik come and move the tractor’”. Ulrik’s mother admitted that this is the case, and added that she herself does not drive the tractors. Ulrik had already explained to me before, in the interview, that he, during weekends and holidays away from school, often gets up early and goes down to his grandparents, takes care of the work in the barn and then stays with his grandparents until dinnertime. Ulrik’s argument was that “it is safest to be at grandmas and grandpas place and not go home. Because then you are just told to do a lot of other stuff that you have to do. Like cleaning my room. That’s dead boring”. At the grandparents’ house, he can choose what work to take part in, whereas at home with his parents, he might be told what to do and assigned chores that he does not like.

During the visit, I was told that the children have different levels of interest in what is going on at the farm area. Ulrik and his youngest sister are the ones most interested in technological things and they help out with tractors and in the grandfather’s floor-heating business. The older sister prefers to help her mother and grandmother in the garden. When I asked if the adults pay the children for helping out, the mother explained to me that they do not pay them in the sense that they get a salary in the form of money. However, if they help out they get better, more expensive, birthday gifts from the grandparents. This applies, according to the mother, first and foremost to Ulrik, who is the one who helps out the most.

So a natural question at this point is: Are Ulrik and his sisters working? The three children in this family take part in many different activities at home, at the grandparents, at the farm and in the grandfather’s company. When I explained in a few words what the project as a whole is about, that is “children who work”, the adults in the group remarked that one of course could ask how work should be defined. One of the grandparents said:
Well then, is the question what you mean by work? If they are with us when we are doing something and you need help with something, well then you say hold here. So by being around it becomes natural that they help out.

This comment pinpoints one of the important questions of the present study as a whole: What is work? Do the children’s activities constitute work? One could of course argue that the children merely help out, that the adult is the main worker, that the child is the helping assistant, and that the children’s contribution is no more than symbolic (cf. Sjöberg 1996). However, in the family’s description, it seems as if the children make a valuable contribution to the adults’ work. When it comes to driving tractors, Ulrik, the child, seems to be more competent than his mother is. We can see how different activities are intermixed. The boys’ activities in the forest, I would argue, contain elements of both work and play. The time the grandparents and grandchildren spend together seems to be as much a social activity as work. The distinction between formal and informal work is blurred in this family. To a certain degree, the family seems to function as one interdependent work unit, where everyone makes valuable contributions (cf. Morrow 1994, 1996; Song 2001). The system involving extra or more expensive Christmas gifts from the grandparents, as thanks for a job well done, illustrates that we are somewhere in the border-land between paid and unpaid work, depending on how one defines payment. The activities undertaken by the children and the adults in this three-generation family show that it is very hard to say when anyone is really working. This also illustrates the difficulty of clarifying what exactly a labour market is, where this begins and ends, because as Ulrik himself put it in the interview I conducted with him and his school friends at Fritjofsskolan, “you basically work all the time”. Being part of a family can mean more than simply being part of a social unit, or a unit for consumption. Rather, what Ulrik and his three-generation family underline is that a family is also a production unit (cf. Bey 2003; Sjöberg 1996; Song 2001). It is a production unit working together, where every member has a part to play. However, although the adults in the family depict the children’s contribution as valuable, the children’s work does still not seem to count in the same way as the adults’. The children are, merely, helping out.
Children’s Jobs

Let us return to the question of where children work. As I have described previously in this chapter, the children in Ekköping and Vikåsa seem to have a weak connection to the formal labour market. They are rarely ever employed in the same jobs as adults. This part of the labour market seems closed to most of them. When I asked the children why they did not have a summer job, they often referred to labour regulations. They argued that they were either too young to work at all or that they were not allowed to work in some specific, particularly dangerous workplace due to their age. The children mentioned being under the age of 16 as a problem when trying to get a summer job. The children had thus identified their young age as the problem (cf. Hockey and James 1993).

Instead of more formal jobs, the children seem to take part in less formalized and more temporary arrangements to make money. This corresponds with general trends in Sweden as well as in other parts of Europe (Mizen et al. 2001; Pole 2007; Söderlind and Engwall 2008). However, some of the older children, in the seventh grade and up, did have work plans for the upcoming summer. Some children mentioned relatives, mum and dad or their friends, an uncle or their grandparents as contacts who could help them to get hold of a job. A few children mentioned already having spent a couple of days helping out at their father’s workplace, mowing lawns, carrying boards, etc. Yet again, others mentioned that there are some smaller jobs out there, selling papers, handing out commercial leaflets, that they could imagine applying for and doing during the summer. Several children mentioned that relatives could provide them with some odd jobs on the periphery of the formal labour market or outside it. Examples of this could be Tor, a Vikåsa boy in the eighth grade who mentioned, “I help my granddad with stuff so I get some money (…)”. Another example is Ola, an Ekköping boy in the eighth grade, who “usually hangs out with a guy [a farmer] that my granddad knows in [name of another town in Sweden] and help them a little like this”, “to drive the tractor”, “carry fire-wood” and usually “I get, you know, money and so at Christmas and things like that”. Another example could be Leo, an Ekköping boy in the sixth grade who explained that he, “last summer Xxx helped my dad at his work. And then I got 50 crowns
“[SEK] per day”, “he is the janitor at the hospital”. Similarly, Peggy, an Ekköping girl in the eighth grade explained, “[I] usually clean the stairs in my parents set of flats and then I get some money for this”. These last examples of work seem to take place solely during long weekends and longer breaks from school. Some children also described in the interviews how they make money, mowing lawns during the summer when they are away on vacation at their summerhouse, visiting relatives in another part of the country. For some of the children, particularly those living in Vikåsa, opportunities for this kind of work do not exist in their home community, living in an area of blocks of flats with no gardens or lawns in sight.

As mentioned in the introduction, approximately 100,000-120,000 children sell Christmas magazines in Sweden every year (Roxvall 2006), and quite a few of the children in Ekköping and Vikåsa are among them. Three major Christmas magazine companies send out leaflets to children by mail in the early autumn every year. They offer children in the age range 9 to 14 years the opportunity to sell Christmas magazines from September up to Christmas time, for which the children receive premiums in the form of money and various other gifts, depending on how much they sell. The persons doing the selling walk around with a magazine displaying the different books, comic books and magazines that the company has for sale. They take orders from customers, report back to the company and then distribute the ordered papers to the customers when the goods have been received from the company. The ordered Christmas magazines are supposed to arrive to the customers just before Christmas.

This is a form of work in which many children take part. As one Ekköping girl in the seventh grade stated in her questionnaire, “it is hard to find a summer job and other jobs. The result is that I often sell Christmas magazines”. The selling of Christmas magazines can thus be a form of compensation activity, which gives the children money, as a substitute for other jobs. In the interviews, the children described selling Christmas magazines as work. They argued that it is work because you sell things, you have to work to get something and you receive payment for your work.  

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This is often anything from a teacup or a CD up to electronic equipment such as Mp3 players, clock radios and mini-fridges as well as bicycles and computers. For more examples of this, see Schmidt and Olsson (2004) and Roxvall (2006).
The children, however, did not define all activities generating money as work. In the end, overall, the money seems to be one important incentive for children to sell Christmas magazines. The need to raise money to be able to buy Christmas gifts was mentioned in some interviews. There are of course other reasons for selling these products than the money, the premiums and the lack of other jobs. Lukas, an Ekköping boy in the sixth grade, mentioned that he sells Christmas magazines because he “have nothing else to do so I do it just for fun”. Work can thus be a spare time activity, something you do to keep busy and kill time (cf. Invernizzi 2007; Mizen et al. 2001; Solberg 1994). Herein, we see an example of how work can be a liberating activity, and I will soon come back to this.

When talking about the Christmas magazines, in the interviews, the children mentioned that they often sell for more than one company at the same time. They are trying to maximize the chance of making money and getting hold of a good premium by presenting their customers with a wide variety of books from three companies. The children also mentioned that they often go together with a friend or possibly with a sibling, if the siblings are close in age. The children mentioned that it often is dark and cold when they go around trying to sell these products in the autumn time. According to the children, it can be a great support to go in pairs. Having to walk around, from house to house in the dark evening can be a bit scary and a friend can be a good support. Being two also makes it a bit easier to knock on unknown people’s doors and it makes it less boring to have to walk around in the neighbourhood the whole evening. To make it easier, some children only sell to their relatives, friends and closest neighbours. Some children also told me that they usually ask their teachers if they want to buy. A common strategy seems to be that the parents bring the catalogues to their work, trying to sell to their colleagues. Having to handle the papers, ordering the right books for the right people and taking care of the money were mentioned by some children as things that could be boring, and some said they usually let their mother handle these parts of the work. Selling Christmas magazines can thus be collaborative work involving the

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71 The children, however, did not define all activities generating money as work. In the interviews, some children described how they used to walk around in their neighbourhood at Easter time and at Halloween, knocking on the neighbours’ door, singing, and trick or treating and maybe handing out home-made cards. At these occasions, the neighbours gave the children candy as well as money. These activities were presented by the children as non-work, as “only begging”, as something opposite of work and as something other than work even if it can generate money.
whole family (cf. Roxvall 2006; Justegård 2002).

The Incentive to Work

In this chapter, we can see that, by and large, the children in the two communities do work. The children might have a weak connection to the formal labour market, the level of employment among the children might be low, but they take part in many forms of less formal work. Whether these activities should be called jobs is debatable. I am not sure if all the children would agree to such a categorization, but the activities are rather job-like. These job-like activities are often paid in cash, in kind or through a mix of the two.

What I have not looked at yet to any high degree is why the children work. Various scholars argue that a desire for independence can be an important motivation for work (e.g., Ingenhorst 2001; Leonard 2004a; Mizen et al. 2001). A number of scholars have shown that children’s work provides them with their own money, which they can use as they wish. The work thus gives the children money that in turn creates autonomy (Justegård 2002; Leonard 2003). I mentioned previously, when discussing why some children sell Christmas magazines, that work can be a liberating activity. Similarly, we can see yet another example of how work has a liberating potential in Ulrik’s descriptions of how he sneaks out in the early morning to work at his grandparents. Ulrik described how he would rather spend the day working in his grandparents’ business companies than at home. At his grandparents’ house, he can choose what to do, and thus pick his favourite work activities, but at home he might be told to do work he does not like. Ulrik depicted both the activities at home and at his grandparents’ house as work. Being able to choose or being told to do something did not seem to affect this, but Ulrik seems to prefer being able to choose for himself. His work at his grandparents’ place gives him such opportunities, so he chooses, if possible, to work there.

Ulrik’s description of how he, if he stays at home, will be “told to do” things tells us something important about children’s everyday life. The
phrase, to be “told to”, encapsulates, as James and James (2004) argue, the authority parents and adults generally have over their own child and over children as a social category (see also Schildkrout 1980, 1981). Parents and adults, in general, influence children’s everyday life. They do this by making different decisions and by imposing these decisions on their children, by telling their children what to do. Parents and adults thus try to control children and this structures the children’s childhood to a certain degree. Ulrik acknowledges this structure. However, what Ulrik also shows very clearly in his description is that he is an agent able to exercise his agency and make choices for himself. Ulrik chooses to go over to his grandparents’ house, where he gets to choose for himself what to do and can influence his own work to a higher degree. Childhood is not simply an effect of the adults’ ideas, wishes and aspirations. Rather, childhood is constructed in a dialectic process in which children play an active part, as has been suggested by Corsaro (1997) and James and James (2004).

The questionnaire completed by the 100 Ekköping and Vikåsa children in the fourth to ninth grade during my fieldwork contained the question “Why do you have a job in addition to going to school?”.72 The children were presented with four alternatives: 1. I need money for my daily expenses (pocket money), 2. I save money for something special, 3. The work is relaxation from school/I think it is fun to work73 and 4. I want to support myself, as well as spaces where they could mark their answer.74 There was also an open-ended alternative, where the children could add any other incentives they may have had or formulate their own answer. The children’s answers can give some indications of why they work. The children could, if they wished, mark several alternatives, and some of the children used this possibility. This underlines, as has also been suggested in previous research, that there can be mixed motives for working (Ronco and Peattie 1988; Solberg 1994). Alternative three, where work is characterized as relaxation from school and/or as something fun, was marked altogether 16 times in the children’s questionnaires. The relaxation or fun factor came

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72 See Appendix. Question 25 in the questionnaire.
73 Notable here is how Alternative 3 is formulated. I have unfortunately formulated the alternative in a way that emphasizes a dichotomy between school and work.
74 Eight children added various written explanatory comments next to the pre-arranged question and answer alternatives. Twenty-six children did not give an answer to this question.
up in the interviews from time to time and is thus not without importance. Furthermore, this factor has been commonly found among other children in previous research (Hungerland et al. 2007a; Ingenhorst 2001; Justegård 2002; Mizen et al. 2001; Solberg 1994). Nevertheless, a far more common reason to work seems to be money. Alternative one was marked 21 times, alternative two 37 times and the fourth alternative was marked 5 times. All these answers stress that money is an important incentive explaining why the children in Ekköping and Vikåsa work. Seventeen children used the open-ended alternative and gave their own explanation for why they work. Three themes predominate here. First, there were children who stated that they work because they have to; they are forced to work for some extrinsic reason. Second, there were children who stated that they work to help out; for altruistic reasons, they work to give something back to their parents. Third, there were children who stated that they work to make money; they need or simply want more money. Several previous studies on working children indicate that money is a major motivation for work among children (e.g., Frederiksen 1999; Hungerland et al. 2007a; Ingenhorst 2001; Justegård 2002; Leonard 2002; Mansurov 2001; McKechnie and Hobbs 2001; Mizen et al. 2001; Pole 2007). Similarly, the results from the present study show that at least the majority of the children in Ekköping and Vikåsa are working primarily to earn money. However, as we will see in the following chapters, the children take part in many activities that they define as work that are not paid in cash.

Given that such a large proportion of the 100 children who filled out the questionnaire seem to have money as their main incentive for working, I find it surprising that the children do not work more. One easy answer could be that the children do not need the money. The general, but given the result presented above somewhat contradictory, image I got from talking to the children in Ekköping and Vikåsa is that they, with a few exceptions, get enough money in their weekly or monthly allowance to
cover their expenses. In the interviews, none of the children mentioned anything about not having enough pocket money, and very few children seemed to have any well-considered ideas about how to raise more money to increase their present cash flow.

Children are from time to time described as small entrepreneurs, as economic agents that, time after time, create ingenious schemes and self-employment to make money (Mansurov 2001; Roxvall 2006). This was not the overall picture I got in Ekköping and Vikåsa. I gave the children a hypothetical scenario during the interviews. I asked them if they had any idea of how they, if they needed it, could raise 200 SEK in a week. Answering this, most children simply explained that they very seldom need more money. Moreover, if they do need more money, they would probably just ask their parents. If the cause was good, they argued, their parents would probably give or loan them more money. Some children suggested that they might undertake domestic activities, like cleaning the whole house or the whole apartment or doing some work in the garden, maybe washing the car or possibly helping out at their parents’ job. Nevertheless, when I asked them, it turned out that these work schemes were often just as

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75 This might create the suspicion that Ekköping and Vikåsa are communities where particularly affluent families live. That, I would argue, is not the case. I would rather argue that these are two Swedish average communities when it comes to the variety of inhabitants, regarding for example social background, economic wealth, etc. I would also argue, without being able to prove this statistically, that this variety is represented among the children who took part in this study. Nationwide studies, undertaken by “Institutet för Privat ekonomi” at the Swedish bank “Swedbank” (previously named “FöreningsSparbanken”) with children in Sweden in 2001, 2003 and 2006, show tendencies similar to those presented in the current study (Samuel 2001, 2003, 2006). In 2001 and 2006, schoolchildren in grade 1 to 6 were asked questions about their allowance. In 2003, children in upper-secondary school were asked questions about their private economy. According to these three studies, the majority of children in Sweden receive enough money through their allowance and the children seldom need more money for their consumption (see also Justegård 2002). If the children need more money, the most common strategy is to ask their parents for more or possibly to borrow money from their parents. According to these studies, getting an extra job in order to obtain more money is rather unusual among children in Sweden.

76 Note that, even if we did speak about pocket money during the interviews, I never asked the children directly if they think they have enough pocket money. This statement is my interpretation and summation of these discussions. Furthermore, with regard to the methodologically, one could question whether a child would feel comfortable enough to admit that he or she does not have enough money or need money in an interview with 2-5 of her/his school friends and an adult researcher.
hypothetical as my question. Very few of the children had actually ever
done something similar with the specific aim to raise money. The children
who, at least on some occasions, had done some chores like this to raise
money explained that chores such as cleaning the bathroom, mowing the
lawn and shovelling snow, etc., does not pay very well, and that it might,
given this, be hard to find enough chores to gather 200 SEK in this short
time.

Other explanations, regarding the question of why the children do
not work more, could be that they are lazy and not interested. This may
seem crude and harsh, but some of the children actually did explain their
lack of a job using exactly these words. However, most of them had
somewhat more sophisticated explanations. I asked the two Vikåsa boys in
the eighth grade Dan and Tor whether they wanted to have a job in their
spare time.

Dan: Yeah, maybe.
Tor: Yeah.
Dan: It depends on what kind of job it is.
Tor: Yeah, exactly.
Dan: If it is something stupid, selling papers and making 20
crowns [SEK] a week, there no use I think
Tobias: No?
Tor: Noo. Noooo!
Dan: But maybe, I mean, well, it depends if, if it is 50 crowns
[SEK] it is quite all right. But, it depends, I mean if it is well paid and
if it does not take too much of your spare time.

Similarly, other children mentioned that jobs like delivering newspapers
seem to be extremely boring, it is a heavy work, it takes a lot of time from
schoolwork and it is very badly paid. Some of the Ekköping children
mentioned that they had been selling Christmas magazines but had stopped
because it was not enjoyable. Some of the Vikåsa children mentioned that
they had been delivering newspapers, alone and in pairs, but had stopped
because it was hard and underpaid (cf. Leonard 2002). Although they
thought the work was underpaid, some of the children, as for example
Jasmine, a Vikåsa girl in the ninth grade, argued, “I would really like to
have such a job, for the sake of the money. You still get something but I
don’t have the time”.

Here, Jasmine, and to some degree Dan in the excerpt above,
highlights a time conflict that we will return to later on in the book. The children mentioned that their everyday life is filled with a number of activities that they prioritize higher than an extra job. They mentioned that school takes a lot of time and is a high priority, but they also take part in, what they define as, other “activities” (see Chapter 7) and they hang out with friends when they have time. As it is, they hardly have time for their present engagements, and if they did have more time, they would as Ralf, a Vikåsa boy in the ninth grade, puts it “use it to be with my friends not to deliver mail or things like that”. This time conflict, trying to balance school activities, friends and family came up in several of the interviews with the Vikåsa children.

Wera, a Ekköping girl in the sixth grade, mentioned in an interview that she had been “thinking about handing out commercial leaflets, but I did not want to do it” because, as she explained, ”maybe I will get tired of it after a while and then it might be hard to say that you don’t want to”. Thus, rather than signing up for such a job, not knowing if she will actually like it and have the energy to do it every week, come autumn wind and rain and winter cold and snow, and then possibly have to quite it, Wera refrains from taking it up at all. Carin, another Ekköping girl in the sixth grade, mentioned that she was not going to sell Christmas magazines this year because her “mum thinks it is so boring”. Carin explained that she herself goes around taking up orders, but then her mum is the one who gets to sort out all the money and order the books. Now her mother was finally fed up with this work and had stopped Carin from selling. The examples above show us that work does not always have a liberating effect and that work does not necessarily create an autonomous space for the children. Rather, the work is done in close cooperation with the parent who takes over the responsibility. The parents participation also structures the child’s work possibilities by deciding for the child and by vetoing some work schemes.
Concluding Remarks

The aim of this chapter was to take a closer look at the children’s participation on the job arena, to try to find out if the children in Ekköping and Vikåsa participate on the formal labour market. In the chapter, I situate and contextualize the work activities the children outlined in the previous chapter and inspect further why the children think that activities on the job arena are work.

As I show in the chapter, the children in the two communities have a weak connection to the formal labour market. When describing where they work, few children describe regular jobs. The situation appears to be the same even if the children are out of school at weekends or during the long summer break. Instead, the children mention sport clubs, school and activities on the domestic arena. They rarely have jobs and appear to think that they are not even allowed to have a formal job. According to the children’s interpretation of the labour regulation, it is illegal for children to have a job and to participate on the formal labour market with gainful employment. That is an arena for adults. The children, however, do claim that they work. As I show in the chapter, the time spent on work differs from child to child. Some of the children’s workday does not even amount to an hour, whereas for others it amounts to several days a week. As I show, the children’s work time statement depends largely on how they define work. A more inclusive definition of the term work obviously extends the amount of activities defined as work.

One point that is interesting to note here is that the children seem to be somewhat unsure as to whether their activities constitute work in a real sense, whether what they do is real work and what work really is. The fact that they rarely have jobs and the fact that they think it is illegal for children to have jobs might affect their perception regarding children as potential workers. Another point that is interesting to note is that the children make a distinction between jobs and work. In most children’s statements, the former term describes formal employment, the productive activity undertaken by adults during the day, while they are away from home. The term work, however, can be used to describe many different activities: some paid others unpaid, some formal and others informal. It is also interesting to note that the difference between these two concepts is
tightly connected to the difference between adults and children. Having a job is something for adults. Adults’ activities are jobs because they are better at what they do, they work more, their activities are full-time, they work harder and they take more responsibility. Categorizations such as these imply that children work both less, and less hard than adults do. Thus, there are qualitative as well as quantitative differences between the adult worker and the child who works. Herein, the children are not merely depicting themselves as different from adults, but rather as less competent. In the chapter, I have shown how this idea is supported by and developed in relation to labour regulations.

Labour regulations play an important part in the creation of distance between children and adults. They do not completely exclude children from the world of work. However, special labour regulations regarding children mark them as different from the regular workers, the adults. Sweden is to a high extent a “work society” – a society where having a paid job and being a working person is something that is culturally defined as a goal, something to strive for. Having a job defines an individual as productive, useful and competent. This puts an individual who does not have a job in an awkward position of inferiority. Using the same logic, an individual without formal paid employment can be seen as unproductive and as lacking in competence.

The children undertake various kinds of work, but they describe the work they do as different and are disinclined to describe their own work as real or themselves as real workers. Instead, the children describe their own activities, no matter what they actually do and even if they appear to be doing the same work activity as the adults, as helping out. This is a process of “othering”. In this, the children both reflect and partake in the very constitution of the difference between adults and children.
Children’s Domestic Work

In the former chapter, I demonstrated how the children, in their descriptions of their participation in work, extended the labour market. Instead of having formal jobs, the children described how they participated on the fringe of the formal labour market, how they were helping adults with different work. I showed that the children made distinctions between adults’ jobs and their own work, distinctions based on both quality and quantity. Moreover, I discussed connections between labour regulations and the children’s notion of themselves as “other” when it comes to jobs and the formal labour market. In this chapter, I take a closer look at the children’s participation in the domestic arena. I will describe what the children are doing in the domestic arena and discuss why these activities are work. Furthermore, I will outline how the children’s participation in this arena and their descriptions of their participation contribute to the constitution of children as “not real workers”, but instead as “helpers”.

Mixed Messages

As I have shown in the previous chapters, the children in Ekköping and Vikåsa defined activities undertaken in the domestic arena as work. In this way, they broaden the definition of work to comprise activities also undertaken outside the traditional formal labour market. To some degree, they leave Wadel’s (1979:368) “folk or lay concept of work” behind and increase the possible meanings of work. However, when inspecting the children’s answers and comments, we find somewhat mixed messages.
I mentioned in the previous chapter that I asked the children in a questionnaire whether they work. In response to this question, 50 out of the 100 children answered “Yes” and 45 answered “No”. Almost half of all the children answered that they do not work. However, in other parts of the questionnaire, a majority of the children in both Ekköping and Vikåsa mentioned numerous forms of reproductive activities in the domestic arena that they take part in during their everyday life. In the questionnaire I asked, “Do you usually help out at home (look after younger siblings, buy groceries and so on)?” and more than three out of four (77 of 100) of the children answered “Yes” to this question.77 When we further inspect the children’s questionnaire answers, and take into account their answers to other questions, it is noticeable that almost 100% of the children mention either that they help out at home or that they undertake certain tasks at home. What varies between the children is the number of tasks they mention. The tasks can be anything from cleaning, doing the dishes, running errands, washing the car, working in the garden, baby-sitting, or collecting bottles and cans that can be returned for money.

Domestic work is not only “one” thing; it is a collective category for a number of activities taking place in the domestic arena.78 As I showed in Chapter 3, the children as a group generally used a very wide and inclusive definition of work. Domestic work in all its variations would certainly fit in there. However, there could be individuals in the group of children as a whole who do not acknowledge this wide definition. I will try to illustrate such differences throughout this book. However, even more important is to highlight that the very same individual might shift positions and use different ways of categorizing from time to time. Positions can change during a questionnaire session or during an interview just as positions change in different settings throughout everyday life. An individual’s level of consciousness can change, as I outlined in Chapter 1 and 2, due to various learning processes. Through participation and reflection in a research project, the individual’s practical consciousness can

77 See Appendix. Question 12 in the questionnaire.
78 This collective category could be divided into several smaller subgroups. Morrow (1996:59), for example, explains that what she calls “domestic labour” can be divided into three interrelated categories: childcare and other caring activities, housework, which includes various everyday routine tasks necessary when running a home, and finally household work, which involves maintenance tasks, repairing the house, fixing the car and growing vegetables, etc.
become part of the discursive consciousness (Giddens 1984). Therefore, through this new awareness, the individual might actually change his or her position.

As my fieldwork progressed and I learned more and more from the children in my research project, my way of looking, listening and asking changed. I was not, however, the only thing that changed. It is, as Rabinow (1977) has pointed out, reasonable to believe that also the research participants change during the research process. Fieldwork is a dialectic process, “because neither the subject nor the object remain static” (Rabinow 1977:39). The researcher learns more about the culture in question, develops her/his way of asking questions, and the research participants learn how to inform (Rabinow 1977). Being part of a research project may thus change the researcher as well as the research participants and the field as such.

During the fieldwork, I was often surprised. The children’s descriptions of their everyday life did not correspond with my assumptions. For example, activities carried out in the domestic arena often came up in the questionnaires and were discussed in the interviews. Conversely, the children took comparably few photos of domestic work. This surprised me. My presupposition was, coloured by memories of my own childhood experiences and by previous research (e.g. Morrow 1994, 1996; Solberg 1994), that children generally do a great deal of work in the domestic arena. A few children’s photos depicted some activities that I, given my presupposition, recognized as domestic work. I imagined that the children would be very engaged in various forms of domestic work. The number of photos depicting such work does not fully reflect this.

There were photos of kitchen sinks, photos of children doing the dishes, cleaning plates, children with a dishwashing brush and a dishcloth, photos of a dishwasher and photos of children emptying the dishwasher. Moreover, there were photos of various vacuum cleaners, photos of children vacuum cleaning, sweeping floors, minding younger siblings, pruning fruit trees, cooking and setting dinner tables. In the interview sessions, the children explained when we were discussing their photographs that they do take part in some domestic work. I was curious, and asked why the children had not taken the opportunity to take even more photos of these activities.

The lack of photos could mean, hypothetically, that the children are
not doing this kind of work. For a few children, this appears to have been the case. According to some children, there is another explanation for the lack of photos. Domestic work is, as Boris, a Vikåsa boy in the seventh grade, said, “boring things that you don’t want to do”. Sanjie, a Vikåsa girl in the seventh grade, added, in the same interview, that “those are boring things that you don’t want to take photos of”. Thus, the boring, unexciting and routine everyday status of these activities appears to have hampered the children’s interest in documenting them. The statements underline an important methodological point. The children’s photos should not be understood as objective windows into their reality, describing every aspect of their day-to-day life. Rather they are partial representations, where the children themselves have chosen what they wanted to present, include and leave out. Given Boris and Sanjie’s statements, the lack of photos on domestic work seems to reflect the children’s feeling about these activities. It should possibly be understood as an example of this rather than an indication that this arena of everyday life is an arena of non-work, or an arena in which only small amounts of work are undertaken.

Is Domestic Work Real Work?

As I depicted in the previous chapter, many children had a notion of real work as something you are paid to do and something you have gone through an education to do. Moreover, real work is something you do more or less everyday, it is something you do full-time, where you get up and go to work, where you work and receive a salary. The children also mentioned various professions, work undertaken by adults, when asked what they think of when they hear the word work. These descriptions seem to place work on the formal labour market. I had, as I indicated before, a wider notion of work and wanted to know what the children thought about activities outside the formal labour market.

Several children described, as will be illustrated further in this chapter, that they take part in different chores in the domestic arena. The work concept was, as was also mentioned in Chapter 3, stretched by the
children to include these kinds of activities as well. According to what some of the children wrote in the questionnaire, domestic work is work. But, were the children who stated this referring to activities in general that are work or to activities they themselves specifically do that are work? Sometimes, it is clearer what the children mean. When finishing up her questionnaire, a Vikåsa girl in the fourth grade stated that ”I only work at home with cleaning”. Similarly, a Vikåsa girl in the ninth grade stated, ”I only work at home with things like cleaning and I receive small amounts of money for this and often nothing”. The two girl’s statements make a connection between their domestic activities and work. Furthermore, their statements emphasize some of the children’s weak connection to the formal labour market, where people are employed. The ninth grader’s statement, where she mentions that she sometimes receives money for her work at home, gives us an indication of something that will be discussed further below. It indicates that the work undertaken at home can be paid.

However, not all the children were as clear as these two girls were. When inspecting some children’s interview answers, their interpretations and definitions are a bit vague and almost a bit slippery. When some children were asked whether and more importantly why an activity they had presented on a photo is work, they argued that it could be work, or that it is work because some people do it for a living. Neither of these two answers really explains if it is work for them personally, if it is work when they themselves do the activity. What is notable, when inspecting the children’s accounts, is, as I mentioned in Chapter 3, that they seem to make a distinction between, or even grade different forms of work. Work in the domestic arena was described, as “a kind of work” as Dan, a Vikåsa boy in the eighth grade, put it. Similarly, Kajsa, a Vikåsa girl in the eighth grade, said that, “It is more like helping”. Several children in both communities made similar distinctions.

In the interviews I asked the children to compare some activities, activities that I imagined would be an everyday feature also of their day-to-day life. I wanted to know what they perceived the difference to be between the various forms of work. I asked three boys and one girl in the eighth grade in Ekköping about this during an interview.
Tobias: How do you view things that you do at home, like cleaning and doing the dishes and washing and cooking and so on? Is that work in the same way as she has done in a factory [referring to an example brought up by the children previously in the interview]. Well, or in an architectural office like you said before.

Victor: No, it is not in the same way. But it is something, yes, to have things nice at home you know. You don’t do so well if you are going to buy fast food all the time for example. If you don’t clean it is not particularly healthy to be home either, if you have dirt everywhere.

Tobias: What do you think, what’s your opinion Kim?

Kim: I don’t know. It’s not the same thing in any case.

Sebbe: I think it depends if you live there or not, there are some people who have that as a job, cleaning and cooking and stuff like that.

The work undertaken at home is not the same as work in a factory or at an office; it is a different kind of work. It is also different if you merely do the work for yourself, if you clean your own place, or if you work, cleaning someone else’s home. The connection to a profession, that the activity is like a real job, is also important. Domestic work is thus work because as John, an Ekköping boy in the seventh grade, put it in another interview, ”There are, the really rich ones, they employ people, cleaners and people like that”. The logic seems to be that if someone has an activity as a job, it has to be work, and it is still work even if someone else, for example, one of the children in this study, is undertaking the activity outside the formal labour market. Thus, doing work, being a worker, is not something reserved for adults, as we could see already in Chapter 4. To clarify this point, I asked Betty, Greger and Ulrik, one girl and two boys in the seventh grade in Ekköping, the following:

Tobias: So who is working in your family, does everyone work in the family?

Ulrik: Yeah.

Greger: Yeah, my little sister also does chores to get her weekly allowance.

Tobias: Okay.

Greger: Or, she also gets a monthly allowance.

Tobias: But your brother Betty, what about him and work?

Betty: He doesn’t do very much.

Tobias: Noo. And he still gets the monthly allowance?
Betty: Yes.
Tobias: So his homework [referring to a previous discussion regarding Betty’s brother and his parents demands on him to do his homework]?  
Betty: Hm, hm!
Tobias: Do you think that’s work?  
Greger: Yeah, it’s work for school, that’s what I think.  
Ulrik: Yeah.
Tobias: But is it work in the same way as Betty who is busy cleaning [referring to a previous discussion where Betty’s cleaning was brought up as work]?  
Greger: No. Noo.  
Ulrik: No.  
Tobias: Why isn’t it?  
Greger: Then [when doing homework] you are, then you sit, then you might lie still at home and read or maybe write something, it’s like, or watering the plants, that’s something completely different than cleaning your room, it’s like, completely different kinds of work.  
Tobias: Yeah. How do you mean, completely different kinds of work?  
Greger: I mean it’s like distinguishing between a mailman and someone who drives a race car or something. It is completely different kinds of work.

As we can see in the excerpt, all the family members work, even if they do different kinds of work. We will come back to the difference between various kinds of work (in this and the following chapters). When discussing Greger’s little sister, we see how the work status of her chores seems to be tied up with her allowance. She receives money for doing chores, which means that she works. Although the children acknowledge differences between various forms of work and between the work adults do and the work children do, they still interpret all these activities as work. Despite the differences, they focus on the similarities in their interpretations. For example, the children interpret their activities as work because they receive money, in the same way as an adult gets paid for doing his or her work at his or her real job.

In this way, the children, I argue, are upgrading their activities. As I presented in the previous chapter, the children do not consider themselves as real workers doing real work. Adults do real work. Adults are the real workers. Adults have jobs. I showed how this devaluation of children’s activities is an effect of a structuration process in which children
themselves play an important role. As I outlined in the previous chapter, there are a number of ideas circulating in Swedish society regarding children and work, and children’s relationship to the labour market. There are, as I mentioned, special regulations for children when it comes to the labour market, regulations that collectively mark children as a special kind of being. This is a process of exclusion and inclusion, whereby the identified group of individuals is rounded up (Pripp 1999; Young 2000). As Hungerland, Liebel, Milne and Wihstutz (2007c:11) point out, “(…) children do not exist aside from the society that surrounds them, with the ideologies that predominate in it (…)”. By participation in society, the children are “constrained by the existing social structure and by societal reproduction” (Corsaro 1997:18). The children, who are all part of the Swedish cultural routines, are compelled to relate to the way children are perceived in the surrounding society when describing children and childhood, and they have problems freeing themselves from these notions when presenting themselves in, for example, an interview, a questionnaire or an essay. Other people’s ideas and notions about them round them up. The children use these notions in their interpretations. Given this, the children’s replies to a question in an interview, a questionnaire or in an essay can be seen as both a response to me and a comment on these societal notions that round children up (cf. Corsaro 1997; James and James 2004; Pripp 1999; Young 2000).

The children’s self-presentations of themselves as people who do not really work fit into this picture. However, the children are presenting themselves as a kind of working person and their activities as work. This is a somewhat contradictory process to the rounding up presented above. Giddens (1984:377) argues, as I mentioned in Chapter 1, that structures contain both “rules” and “resources”. Here we can see examples of both of these. The children’s action here could be seen, as suggested by Närvänen and Näsman (2007), as a form of non-compliance with, or even protest against, a condescending and devaluing surrounding. Pripp (1999) argues that this is a common trend found all over the world where a dominating category of people imposes negative, condescending and degrading value judgements on another social category. This way of approaching

79 Pripp (1999:43) uses the Swedish term “omslutning” to describe this process of exclusion and inclusion whereby the identified group of individuals are rounded up.
80 Emphasis in original.
condescending and devaluing judgements can be described as a form of strategic amalgamation (Pripp 1999)\textsuperscript{81} and as “acting up” (Hockey and James 1993; James 1993). Regarding strategic amalgamation, the marked and exposed social categories in society use positive contrasting images when describing themselves. What is more, they amalgamate parts of the dominating group’s, in this case the adults, own positive self-description in their own presentations (Hockey and James 1993). In my study, we can see how the children resist the limiting part of the childhood category by putting forward their own activities as similar to or even the same as the activities undertaken by the dominant group in society, the adults. Herein the children act up; they act as if they were the equals of adults (cf. Hockey and James 1993). Noticeable is how the children appropriate a work concept normally only used to describe adults’ activities. We can also see how the children strategically amalgamate the work concept so that also their activities are included and thus upgraded.

### Division of Domestic Labour

As I mentioned in the previous chapter, the children often used the term “help out” when depicting their own work. This might create the suspicion that they do not actually think that they work. As I have already shown, this is not the case. The children argue that they work when they help out. But it is a different kind of work. Johansson argues that use of the term “help” implies that the people helping, the helpers, “contribute to someone else’s project. Helping out is per definition not to have the responsibility” (Johansson 2007:95). Thus, defining your own contribution as helping out may be somewhat devaluing (Qvortrup 1994b). You are merely a helper. You are not the one in charge. However, it may also imply that you actually do less than someone else. It may mean that someone else does a greater amount of work and that you, the helper, only help out a little bit. To clarify how the amount of work is distributed in the family, I asked

\textsuperscript{81} Pripp (1999:44) uses the Swedish term “sammanflätning” to describe this phenomenon.
Antonia, Kajsa and Mika, three Vikåsa girls in the eighth grade, the following:

Tobias: Home, back in your family then, does everybody work an equal amount there or is there anyone who works more or so?
Mika: Cleaning or so, or helping out at home, or work?
Tobias: Well, yeah, I was thinking at home.
Mika: Hm.
Kajsa: I don’t know. Noo, my father is away quite, or in the evenings he is away sometimes, plays the drums and so. But he helps out when he is at home.
Mika: My parents are also, or they are at home quite a lot except when my dad is away rehearsing, and he works some evenings also. But not so often, but they both help out an equal amount, but it’s a bit different between the two of them and me and my little sister, there, we don’t help out like they do. But that’s understandable, they are adults. That’s their, or I don’t know, but that’s the way things turn out.
Tobias: That’s their?
Mika: Yeah.
Antonia: Responsibility.
Mika: Yeah, exactly. Or I mean it is mostly their responsibility, and the older you get the more you are supposed to help out. But it is, basically it is the parents’ responsibility most. At least if they are at home to clean and get stuff in order and so. We help out, of course you are supposed to do that but they are still the ones who get the thing going.
Tobias: Okay, what do you think?
Antonia: Well yeah, my parents are really away a lot. So, weell, the one who cleans the most, we have a cleaning lady and her name is Carmen, she is very nice and good at cleaning.
Mika: Hm, hm, hm.
Antonia: And she cleans our place. Yeah, but mum also helps out and dad when he is home.

Several important things can be noted here. Firstly, it is notable that Mika does not understand my initial question. She is unsure of what my somewhat inexact question about work is referring to and asks me to clarify. Do I mean “[c]leaning or so, or helping out at home, or work”? Again, this illustrates how multifaceted the meaning of the category work can be. Mika is not questioning whether one of these three could really be work, but rather presents them to find out which one I wanted to know more about. Methodologically, this underlines the negotiated aspect of
these interviews, how the results of the interviews are a collaborative effort between the children and me. Secondly, concerning the division of labour in the family, this excerpt clarifies something that was also brought up in the other interviews. When it comes to the domestic arena, parents as well as children are described as helping out. This could imply that this is work undertaken by equals. Nevertheless, at the same time, the parents are put forward as the people with the main responsibility, and the children are portrayed as their helpers. Herein, the children show that they are aware of their place in the age hierarchy and present themselves in terms of the developmental paradigm.

An age hierarchy appears to be important here. The parents are, as the children put it, adults, it is their responsibility. Some children even depicted their parents as having more of a supervisory role in the domestic work, checking up on the children when they are cleaning their room (cf. Berggren 2001; Frederiksen 1999). This further emphasizes the age hierarchy and underlines that age difference is used as a basis for power relations. Note that what we are discussing here is age as “a situated doing” (Närvänänen and Näsmann 2007:230). The children and their parents are “doing age”. They are constructing an age hierarchy, age differences and adult dominance in their organization of everyday activities based on differences in chronological age. I will discuss this kind of negotiation further later on. At this point, I want to make clear that “doing age” is not something that only occurs in the family setting. Examples of the children “doing age” can be found in the interviews I conducted during the fieldwork. The children’s descriptions in the interviews could be interpreted as an example of how children themselves contribute to the constitution of the existing hierarchical difference between adults and children, and thus to their own subordination. However, as Giddens (1984:16) suggests, “all forms of dependence offer some resources whereby those who are subordinate can influence the activities of their superiors”. The children’s descriptions could also be interpreted as a form of resistance. Hockey and James (2003:129) argue that, “Not being ‘big enough’ or ‘old enough’ both excuses and sets limits on children’s actions (…)”. Given this, one could argue that the children are using an “infantilization” strategy, highlighting their own age-bound incompetence and dependence on adults, thus trying to avoid unwanted responsibility or excusing their own lack of participation.
The hierarchical difference between parents and children, between adulthood and childhood, is not the only difference of importance. Age differences among siblings seem to be equally important when deciding how much and what domestic work children have to do. The children in both Ekköping and Vikåsa explained that the workload put on different siblings was highly dependent on age. Their younger siblings did not have to do so much at home, whereas they, being older, have to do more, take more responsibility, take care of their younger siblings and generally set a good example. The children thus grow into more and more responsibility. But being the older child does not only mean that you have lived more years. The children explained that a number of qualities are connected to age in their everyday life. I asked Antonia, Mika and Kajsa, three Vikåsa girls in the eighth grade, whether there is any difference between what they and their siblings do at home:

Tobias: Do you and your siblings do the same amount of things, or is it?
Mika: Noo.
Kajsa: Noo, we, I do more things.
Mika: I also do more than my younger sister. But maybe that’s not so strange because I didn’t do so much when I was like her [at her age] either, but, because she is four years younger than me. But still, I think I do a little bit more than her, or actually I really do more than her. But I suppose that’s just how it is automatically. Because when you are older, you should be able to take more responsibility than when you are younger.
Antonia: You also manage to do more things you know.
Tobias: Yeah, how do you mean?
Antonia: Well, you maybe are taller, you could be taller. And then maybe you understand how things work, maybe you haven’t learned that [when you are younger], you are more mature [when you are a bit older].

As we can see in the excerpt, according to the children, older children are not only more responsible, they are also more mature, have more knowledge of how things work and are generally taller. The question of size came up in several interviews. The children’s small size was put forward as an obstacle to doing some chores. Wera, an Ekköping girl in the sixth grade, argued, “I mean if I have a brother who is, only five Xxx. Maybe I empty the dishwasher and he does not, because he cannot reach
the things”. Thus, according to the children, lack of maturity is not the only thing that makes it difficult for children to do domestic work. Being shorter and having a shorter reach further limits their possibilities to take part. Interesting to note in the statements of the Vikåsa children Antonia, Kajsa and Mika, in the previous excerpt, is that they refer to their division of domestic labour as natural, “that’s just how it is automatically”; it is natural for younger children to work less than older children do. I should add that children in Ekköping expressed similar things in the interviews I conducted with them. As we can see here, domestic labour in the family is not only divided generationally in different ways, between parents and children, but there is also a division between siblings in the family. The children use age, knowledge, experience, maturity and size to explain how labour in the family is divided. In this, we can see that the children have accepted their parents’ authority. Notable is also that the children have accepted the notion of age as a basis for determining competence and responsibility and, as a consequence, the notion of themselves as less competent (cf. Näsman and von Gerber 2003).

In these descriptions, we can see similarities to the Swedish labour regulations. I mentioned in Chapter 4 that the labour regulations are created like a linear development ladder, or using Näsman’s (1994:170) words, as “a ladder of increasing ‘adulthood’”. As we can see in this chapter, the children’s participation in domestic work is organized in a similar way. Children grow into responsibility. I argue that it is important to take laws into consideration when investigating the construction of childhood. This does not mean that there is an absolute correlation between the children’s and their parents’ ideas and practices and the labour regulations. The similarities that can be found here are interesting in another way. The laws are important in the construction of childhood, but they also reflect already existing notions regarding children and childhood (James and James 2004). The similarities here underline how widespread these developmental, or socialization, notions of children are. Children are “human becomings” (Qvortrup 1994a), growing into maturity and responsibility, and “not yets” (Näsman 1998), people still not full or real members of society. Moreover, we can see in both these examples that the children have acknowledged that children’s principal way to gain more status and possibilities to participate on various arenas in Swedish society is to simply grow up.
Monetization

In the previous chapter, I showed that the children in both Ekköping and Vikåsa mostly work on the periphery of the formal labour market. As mentioned, this weak connection to the formal labour market and the children’s lack of employment does not mean that they never work. The activities undertaken in the domestic arena are work, but another kind of work. A traditional way of separating different kinds of work and/or work undertaken in different spheres of life is to characterize work as formal or informal (Harding and Jenkins 1989; Leonard 1998). Formal and informal are often presented as dichotomies. The former is attached to the job arena with formal employment, formal employment contracts and formal salaries and the latter to almost all other arenas of life. Consequently, work activities undertaken in the domestic arena are depicted as informal. These archetypical categorizations imply that the division of labour in the domestic arena should lack formality. Previous research on working children has challenged this static idea (e.g., Gullestad 1992), and my results further questions such a clear-cut division.

Furthermore, the children’s weak connection to the formal labour market and their lack of employment does not mean, as has also been shown in previous research (Johansson 2005; Näsman and von Gerber 2003), that they never earn money or that they are being out of bounds with the monetary system. I gave some explicit examples of how the children make money in the previous chapter and I underlined that my general impression from both Ekköping and Vikåsa is that the children felt they could get hold of economic assets if needed. When inspecting the questionnaires, we find that only eight children out of 100, four in each community, stated that they never make money. Given this, I would argue that the children live their everyday life in something of a monetary system. However, it is a monetary system outside the formal labour market. Moreover, I argue that this system is a highly formalised one. This illustrates that the idea of a clear-cut division between formal and informal is obsolete (Harding and Jenkins 1989).

Some families in these two communities seem to have a formalized

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82 See Appendix. Question 13 in the questionnaire.
system with a schedule stating who in the family is supposed to do what, every day, with respect to domestic work. In many cases, completing these activities gives children money, and some children told me that they had a price list in their family, which stated how much the children could receive for undertaking different household tasks. I had heard about such systems in some of the interviews and subsequently, asked Ada, an Ekköping girl in the sixth grade, whether they had a system like this in her family. Ada explained that her mother had created such a system during the summer. Her mother had written a list including a number of chores. Next to every chore on the list, she had written what the children would get if they did the chore. Ada explained that “For example if we mowed the lawn, we got 3 crowns [SEK] and if we trimmed the hedges we got 5 crowns [SEK]”. The list contained 10 chores and they were all in the domestic arena.

In the questionnaire, I asked the children if they make money doing various activities.83 The children got to choose from a prearranged list. The children pointed out indoor household chores, such as cleaning and vacuuming, doing the dishes, emptying the dishwasher and taking out the garbage as activities that could generate money. Furthermore, more outdoor activities, such as running errands and doing the grocery shopping, doing garden work, shovelling snow, washing the car, throwing firewood into the boiler room and taking the dog for a walk, were also mentioned as activities that they could be paid for. The children can make money doing these things. However, when examining the material collected during my fieldwork, it soon becomes clear that the form of payment can vary. One Vikåsa girl in the fourth grade wrote in her questionnaire that she wanted to mention, “That I take care of a rabbit and have one myself and that I do not get money. When I looked after the rabbit for two months I received a cup and a bracelet [from her parents]”. Similarly, Emil, an Ekköping boy in the sixth grade, explained that he ”also baby-sit, once I baby-sat almost a whole week, my little sister, because they [his parents] had to leave in the morning every day. And you know, do some work. And then, after a week or so, I got a movie because I had been so good”. Other children mentioned how they received candy or even new jeans as salary for various work activities they had undertaken. Payment can thus be made in kind just as well as in cash.

83 See Appendix. Question 13 in the questionnaire.
What we see here could be interpreted as a step in what Ziehe (1993:19) has called the increased "monetizing" of childhood. Ziehe argues, in a book that was originally published in the seventies, that he could see an increased tendency in which the communication in the family often takes the shape of economic transferring (Ziehe 1993:19). Economic transferring, in the form of cash or goods, argued Ziehe, is used to show appreciation for a job well done and for good behaviour. Following Ziehe’s argument, the monetary flow from parents to children should be understood as part of a parental, pedagogical project or even as a sign of the parents’ bad conscience, as the parents’ way of trying to replace closeness, affection and time spent together with money. It is, using Ziehe’s perspective, questionable whether the monetary flow should be perceived as the parents paying their children a salary for their work. Rather, the flow of cash and goods should be understood as an allowance or gifts. However, this explanation is based on a parental perspective and we cannot be certain that the children share this perspective.

Allowance is an often-connected or built-in part of this more or less formalized system of reciprocity between parents and children that can be found in both Ekköping and Vikåsa. Sixty out of the 100 children stated that they receive a monthly allowance and fifteen that they receive a weekly one. Twenty children stated that they receive neither a monthly nor a weekly allowance. However, some of the children who answered “No” added explanatory statements next to this. A Vikåsa girl in the fifth grade stated that she does not get any allowance at her mothers, but "I get a sing-mouse once a month (at my dad’s)". Other children added statements like, “sometimes” and "when needed" next to their “No", implying that they do occasionally receive money, but not regularly or systematically.

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84 See Appendix. Question 10 in the questionnaire. Some children stated that they receive an allowance on both a weekly and a monthly basis, and marked both these alternatives in their questionnaire. These children are not included here. Given this, the numbers summed up does not even up. Some of the children taking part in this study alternate their living between their mother’s and father’s place. One explanation for these children’s double answer concerning allowance could be that they receive different forms of allowance from their different parents. Overall, a notable age difference can be found in the answers; the younger children receive a weekly allowance and the older receive a monthly one.

85 The girl had previously stated in her questionnaire that she shared her time between her mother’s place and her father’s place. When I asked this fifth grader what a "sing-mouse” is, she explained that it is a small statue of a singing mouse that she collects.
Put together, this illustrates that, for the majority of the children, the domestic arena is some kind of a monetary system.

On a societal level, an allowance is sometimes depicted as a gift or as part of a parental pedagogical project, where parents are trying to teach their children the value of saving or handling their own money (Näsman and von Gerber 2003; Hungerland 2007; Johansson 2005, 2007; SOU 2001:55; Söderlind 2007; Zelizer 1994). Similarly, in the children’s descriptions, we can also find indications of the allowance being part of a pedagogical or socialization project. Malin, a Vikåsa girl in the eighth grade, argued that:

I mean, I get my monthly allowance but then they reduce it if I have done something, you know. If I haven’t done, I mean if I come home late or if I, you know, if they [her parents] found out that I have done something. Or, you know, if I don’t do my schoolwork and things like that, then I get a reduction in my monthly allowance.

As we can see in the excerpt, Malin gets her allowance without any formal demands to work in the domestic arena. In her case, there is no connection between her participation in domestic work and her allowance. She only has to take care of school and behave well. Several other children in both the two communities mentioned similar demands. Nevertheless, more than 50% of the Ekköping and Vikåsa children, who stated that they receive either a monthly or weekly allowance, also reported in their questionnaire that they have to meet some kind of demand, produce some kind of service to receive their allowance. This could be smaller chores, like in the case of Mona, a Vikåsa girl in the eighth grade, who stated, “I have to clean my room once a month to get my monthly allowance”. Other children, like Dan and Tor, two Vikåsa boys in the eighth grade, however, had to meet more obligations to get their allowance.

Tobias: I know, in some other interviews I’ve done, they have mentioned that maybe they have a monthly allowance and it was, well for the monthly allowance I have to do this and that.
Dan: Yes, that’s how it is for me. I have to pick up my little sister, help out with laundry and cleaning and stuff like that at home.
Tor: Yes, that’s how it is. I also have to clean and run errands. Buy stuff for the house.
Tobias: Has it ever happened that you didn’t get your monthly
allowance?
Tor: Yes, it has happened.
Tobias: Because you didn’t do enough or?
Tor: I mean, I suppose it has happened. I usually get it most of
the time. But sometimes I get it a bit later, because I haven’t done. So
then I have to do something after.
Tobias: Okay.
Dan: When it comes to me, I’ve gotten a reduction because I’ve
done something stupid or something like that.
Tobias: Do you pick up your little sister everyday or?
Dan: Almost.
Tobias: Is she in a day-care centre or?
Dan: It’s a school, it’s for six-year-olds.
Tobias: That’s also a school?
Dan: Yeah, it is over there. Xxx.
Tobias: Yeah.
Dan: Xxx.
Tobias: So you have to take care of her until your parents come
home?
Dan: Yeah.
Tobias: Do you have any siblings?
Tor: Yes, I have a sister, but she is eleven years old. So I don’t
need to pick her up. Yes, sometimes I have to be home and cook for
her and things like that.

The two boys give examples of caring work, washing, cleaning, running
errands, buying things for the house, picking up younger siblings from
school, minding and cooking for a younger sibling. As has been shown by
various scholars, older children taking care of their younger siblings is a
common feature of many cultures and societies (e.g., Gullestad 1992;
Orellana 2001; Punch 2001a; Rindstedt 2001; Solberg 1994). I do not have
an exact number of how many of the children in Ekköping and Vikåsa
actually do baby-sit, but this chore often came up in the interviews, and 77
out of the 100 children, as mentioned before, marked in the questionnaire
that they “usually help out at home and look after younger siblings (…)”.
Baby-sitting and looking after younger siblings implies, as Morrow
(1994:136) has argued, that the children in fact are ”taking over the role of
’parent’ for a period of time though they are not technically ‘in loco
parentis’ in the eyes of the law”. One could thus argue that the children are
doing the same work, taking the same responsibility as the parents. The
children, however, do not seem to agree.
The children portray their work as different from adults, and at least when it comes to domestic work, as “half” and something different from real work. I have mentioned that this distinction is used to mark a hierarchical difference between children and adults. I would argue that distinctions like these are part of the process of structuration of childhood in children’s everyday life. In the excerpt above, we can see an, unfortunate, example of this taking place also in the interview. As we can see, when Dan tells me that he has to pick up his sister when her school finishes, I comment on this by implying that he has “to take care of her until your parents come home”. This shows how I jump to conclusions. Moreover, my comment reveals my presuppositions, my, up to that point implicit, notion that children are not fully competent to take care of small children, being nothing more than a temporary solution, a stand-in for the real caregiver, the adult. In this, I play an obvious part in the larger structuration process that constructs the child as a different domestic worker, a more subsidiary person, the adults’ helper. What is important is Dan’s reaction to my suggestion. He does not react at all. The parents are naturally the ones who are supposed to look after the younger children. This hierarchical notion is, I argue, important to have in mind when trying to understand why this caring work, undertaken by the children, is not viewed as real work, as the same as parents’ work. This goes back to the notion of parents as the caregivers and children as the recipients of care. It is the parents’ duty to be the caregiver (Morrow 1996; Wadel 1984).

Scholars have argued that adults, when talking about children’s activities, often use words other than work. Rather than depicting the children’s care-giving activities as for example work, or real work, adults often use words that have strong moral and judgemental connotations (Johansson 2005, 2007; Wadel 1984). Wadel (1984) argues that, when children provide care for adults, do favours for adults or just simply do something that adults think is positive, the children are often renowned as being “nice” or “good”. If the activity undertaken is perceived as negative, the children are generally renowned as “bad” or “rude”. The good behaviour and the moral quality of the person undertaking the activity are thus accentuated rather than the actual activity (Wadel 1984). Examples of this can be found in my material from Ekköping and Vikåsa. In this chapter, we have seen how the Vikåsa eighth grader Tor receives his allowance later, because he has not lived up to his parents’ expectations.
Lack of payment is thus first and foremost the parents’ method of correction or punishment. Tor does not get any money because he has not been good. Moreover, as I have mentioned, the Ekköping sixth grader, Emil, received a movie from his parents because he had “been so good”, after baby-sitting his little sister for almost a whole week.

Being “nice” and having done something “good” appear to be important words in the hierarchical relation between children and adults (Johansson 2005, 2007). Use of these words hands over the preferential right of interpretation to the adult, and “it is the adult who decides if the child has been ‘good’ and deserves a reward/payment” (Johansson 2007:95). The parents’ payments in the form of, for example, an allowance or gifts to the children, for doing chores in the domestic arena, can support this hierarchical construction, as has been suggested by Brembeck (2004) and Johansson (2005, 2007). Johansson argues, for example, that the money parents give their children for doing forms of domestic work, doing the dishes in Johansson’s example, “serves the purpose of legitimatising the adults in their parental role” (Johansson 2007:96). Children’s work activities, argues Johansson, need to be camouflaged to uphold the parents’ leading role as sole caretaker. According to the modern idea of the family, parents should take care of their children both emotionally and economically. If parents were to fail to live up to these standards, society might step in, take over and declare the parents incompetent. Children needing to work for their family’s well-being threatens this family ideal. Consequently, children’s input is hidden in a pedagogical and/or a downplayed rhetoric in which children are depicted as objects of socialization, as learners, and/or as helping out. The money paid by the parents to the children is incorporated into the same rhetoric (Johansson 2005, 2007; Zelizer 1994). The money paid is thus not a salary or payment, but rather a gift or reward.
The Child as a Substitute

In one part of this research project, I asked children in grade four and five to write essays and draw pictures on the topic “my work is” and to draw pictures of themselves doing their work. I explained that I wanted to know what they do when not attending school, with a preamble explaining that the project was on work. In the essays produced by the children in the fourth and the fifth grade, there are several examples of, what I would summarize as, reproductive care work. As I already mentioned, in the general societal discourse, children are not perceived as carers (Morrow 1996; Wadel 1984). As a rule, children are, as Morrow (1996:68) has pointed out, “almost invariably perceived as the recipients of care rather than care-givers”. The essays challenge these ideas.

When discussing domestic work some scholars make a distinction between self-care and care for others or family care (e.g., White and Brinkerhoff 1981; Brannen 1995; Brannen et al. 2000). We can find examples of both these forms of care in the children’s essays. Some children mention self-care activities in their essay. They write that they clean their own room, make their own bed and that they clean after themselves when they have finished eating. Other children widen their circle of care and give examples of how they take care of the family’s, or their own, pets. Some are quite general, like an Ekköping girl in the fourth grade who states that she “feeds the animals”. Others are more specific. They state that they feed, play with and walk the family’s dog, that they feed the cats, give them fresh water and clean the cat litter tray. Moreover, they mention that they clean their aquarium, feed their fish or clean their guinea pig’s cage. Care for others also includes other human beings. One Ekköping girl in the fourth grade mentions for example that she cleans her own as well as her sister’s room.

Notable in the essays is the use of the word “helping”, which is often employed by the children when describing their activities around the house and at home. This often came up in other material that I collected in my fieldwork (see Chapter 4). In the written essays, when the children mention different chores they are undertaking in the domestic arena, they often state that they “help” one of their parents, and the most often
mentioned parent they help is their mother. The children mention that they help their parents cook, set the table, bake bread, load the dishwasher, do the dishes and dry the dishes. They also mention that they help their parents vacuum, do the dusting, clean the bathroom, take out the garbage, do the laundry, fold laundry, buy and put the groceries away in the fridge. Moreover, the children mention that they help their parents make a fire, fetch the paper, clean the yard, mow the lawn, rake the garden and carry firewood and help out in the barn. As mentioned above, these are things the children often do together with and to help their mother. Explicit examples of things they do with their fathers are fewer, and such examples can only be found among the essays from the Ekköping children. One boy in the fourth grade mentions that he helps his father cook dinner. Another boy in the fourth grade mentions that he helps his father with the car when it is broken. A girl in the fourth grade mentions that she takes in firewood to her dad and one boy in the fourth grade, finally, mentions that he and his father sometimes cut down lumber.

Previous research implies that there often exists a gender difference when it comes to the level of care for oneself versus care for others among children. The difference is then that girls are more involved in care for others, on top of the care for themselves, than boys are, boys being more focused on just caring for themselves (White and Brinkerhoff 1981; Brannen 1995). However, such clear-cut differences between girls and boys cannot be found in the essays written by the fourth and fifth graders in Ekköping and Vikåsa. One general trend can be noted, however, among all the children I meet during my fieldwork. The mothers seem to be the children’s most common co-worker in domestic work. This could be a consequence of the gender stereotypic division of labour among adults in the family. Previous research has shown that there often exists a gender-based division of labour in families (Thrall 1978). There is the classical division of labour between the male breadwinner, working outside the home, and the female homemaker, working in the home. However, there is a division of labour also in households where both parents work outside

86 Mentioned here should be that I myself used the term “help” when formulating questions in the questionnaire that was used during the fieldwork. Three of the questions contained the term “helping out”. See Appendix. Questions 10, 11 and 12 in the questionnaire. From a reflexive point of view, this might be important. It is notable, however that the children wrote their essays before filling out the questionnaire.
home. In this division of labour in the home, females often take the main responsibility (Ahrne and Roman 1997; Stanfors 2007). Notable differences can also be found as regards time use (Ahrne and Roman 1997; Solberg 1994; Stanfors 2007). Solberg (1994) demonstrated, in a Norwegian study, that mothers are the ones who take care of the majority of the domestic work with some minor help from their children (see also Hungerland 2007; Morrow 1996; Reynolds 1991). Solberg’s study also showed that fathers often do less than the children and sometimes little or no domestic work at all (Solberg 1994).

According to the children, their contribution can be undertaken as a helping co-worker or possibly as a substitute for another family member. A Vikåsa girl in the fourth grade describes such a situation when her “Mom has pain in her back. She had it for two months. So she can’t do the things she usually does. The things with the washing machine. Then I do it sometimes. It is not so fun but not so hard either”. The children can thus function as a replacement for an injured adult and take care of the activity that person would normally handle. Moreover, they can take the adult’s place, when the adult is busy, has a full schedule and does not have the time to do what is actually his or her work. Nelly, an Ekköping girl in the sixth grade, explained that she “helps out with the wood at home and making the bed in the morning. In case mum needs something from the Internet, I usually help out with that”. Nelly explained that she also helps her mother by “checking her e-mails” “when she is busy, she is studying”. Anders, an Ekköping boy in the sixth grade, also mentioned this as a reason for working. He explained, when describing his domestic work, that he has to do some of this work if his dad or older brother does not have the time. The children can in this way function as a labour reserve.

I asked Bert, an Ekköping boy in the sixth grade, to speculate somewhat on why he has to work in his family’s garden and prune back the apple trees. Bert answered, in a way that struck me as somewhat jokingly, that the reason might be that his parents “do not want to” do this work. Another explanation, said Bert, could be that the parents simply are “too tired” to do this work. Bert’s explanation for why he has to do the garden work might very well be correct, even if Bert might have meant it as a joke. I will, later on in the book, show that, due to time pressure, the children in both Ekköping and Vikåsa spend a great deal of time every week organizing and planning their days. The time pressure makes it necessary
for the children to choose between different activities. It seems reasonable to assume that adults have to make the same choices in their day-to-day life. Asking the children to do a chore instead of them might be a result of such time management.

When inspecting the children’s interview accounts, we can detect a connection between the societal division of labour and the domestic division of labour, between the adults’ jobs and the children’s work. Uno, an Ekköping boy in the seventh grade, described how he and his older sister take care of the dogs in the family’s dog-breading business during their school summer break. Uno explained that, “my sister and I get money for taking care of them [the dogs]. Because our parents can’t do it, they work”. The adults in the family have full-time, eight-hour-a-day jobs and work during the greater part of the year. Children under the age of sixteen, in Sweden, have to spend around 190 days a year in school. The compulsory school system, in combination with the labour regulations (see Chapter 4), thus hinders children possibilities to take on a full-time job during the school year. On the other hand, during the school year, the children usually have a school day that is a somewhat shorter than the working day of adults who work full-time. Given this, the older children can, as in the above-mentioned case of Dan, the Vikåsa boy in the eighth grade who picks up his younger sister after her school finishes, fill in and work as replacements for the adults.

Furthermore, schoolchildren in Sweden have an almost ten-week-long summer vacation between June and August every year. During this time period, they can also fill out and take care of domestic work that their parents do not have time to do. In this way, the total societal division of labour, manifested in labour regulations and the educational act (see more on this in Chapter 5), which places people under the age of 16 outside the formal labour market, also creates a labour reserve (cf. Zeiher 2000). This labour reserve is ready to dig in and lighten the burden of the domestic work when adults are unable to do “their work”. Sjöberg (1996) argues that children’s role as a substitute for the real, adult worker goes back a long way in history, particularly with regard to agricultural labour (see also Reynolds 1991; Schildkrout 1981). Furthermore, Sjöberg and Dahl (1999) even argue that the summer vacation in the Swedish school system as such was once created to meet the needs of the more labour-intensive periods in the agricultural sector. The total number of farmers has decreased
substantially in Sweden during the past fifty years, and my guesstimate is that rather few of the children who took part in the present study live in families bound up in agricultural labour. Nevertheless, as was already shown in the previous chapter, the children still generally seem to substitute for adults to some degree and they still appear to view adults as the real workers and themselves as substitutes, as helpers, who are working, but doing another kind of work, not real work. From a structuration perspective, we can note that the labour regulations and the educational act play a part in the construction of the children as helpers, by creating this time space.

**Negotiations**

Why then do children work in the domestic arena? To ask “why” children work implies that they have an actual choice. In the introductory part of the book, I argued that children are agents and I outlined that this agency is primarily based on a possibility to act and choose (Giddens 1984; Giddens and Pierson 1998). This was one of the ontological starting points for this investigation. The fact that children act and make choices in their everyday life, however, does not imply that they live their lives without restrictions and boundaries. Nor does it mean that they are free to make completely unconstrained choices. The children’s choices are socially structured in many ways (Alanen 1992).

There are considerable differences in the way the children live, with regard to housing, in the communities where this study was undertaken. In Ekköping, a vast majority (57 of 66) of the children stated that they live in terrace houses or detached houses. Only a few (11 of 66) stated that they live in apartments. In Vikåsa, the majority of the children (28 of 34) stated that they live in apartments and the number of children (8 of 34) who stated that they live in terrace houses or detached houses is rather low. Some of

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87 Notable here is that some of the children who took part in the study commute to the schools’ where the study was undertaken and thus the numbers presented here may not represent the area where these particular children live.
children’s parents do not live together. Some of the children with parents who do not live together gave examples of variations in their work patterns depending on which parent they are living with. Sometimes the parents have different demands or needs when it comes to the children’s work. These different demands were, according to the children, often connected to whether one of the parents lives in a detached house, with a garden. According to the children, structural factors like these also affect their possibilities to engage in domestic work to a certain degree. When I asked the children in Vikåsa about work outside the house, garden work, shovelling snow and so on, I often got replies such as the one given by Tor, a Vikåsa boy in the eighth grade, who explained that “Well, we live in an apartment so there aren’t so many things like that. I usually help out at home vacuuming and things like that”. Similarly, Malin, a Vikåsa girl in the eighth grade, explained that, “I mean we don’t have – there is nothing like that to do here, you know. I mean, if you live in a detached house, then you can go for walks with dogs, you can mow lawns. But here there are no such things to do you know”.

Moreover, when inspecting the children’s accounts, it is clear that the parents play an important part in the structuration process taking place in the domestic arena. The parent is both a partner and a co-worker, but also a demanding authority telling them what to do, and a person with whom the children negotiate in different ways. The parents affect the children’s possibility to choose and thus also their choices. I asked Jörgen, Noah, Ada and Carin, four Ekköping sixth graders, two boys and two girls, “Why they choose to help out at home?” The sixth graders answered that:

Carin: I have to do it.
Tobias: And what about Ada?
Ada: I don’t get to choose if I should help out or not, because if I don’t want to help out mum will be angry.
Tobias: So you can’t simply decide on your own?
Carin: No.
Ada: Noo. Not me.
Noah: I get to do that. They ask if I want to help out and so on. If I

88 Some of the children alternate their living between their mother’s and father’s place. Sometimes the parents live in different communities and the living conditions of the parents may differ. Consequently, some children stated that they live in both an apartment and a house.
Participation in the domestic work is not a given, but a negotiated process between family members (Ahrne and Roman 1997; Antoniou 2007; Solberg 1994). However, as we can see in the last excerpt, different children experience that they have very different scope for negotiation. One of the boys, Noah, appears to have more possibilities to decide himself what he wants or does not want to do in comparison with what the girls, Ada and Carin, seem to have. The second boy, Jörgen, presents us with a middle position. He can sometimes choose to do something else, but more often he cannot. Similar differences were also outlined in other interviews. Furthermore, some children argued that their possibility to choose depended on the kind of chore that was under discussion. Bert, an Ekköping boy in the sixth grade, argued for example that making your own bed was non-negotiable and that, in general, some chores seem to be more negotiable than others are.

Some children use several negotiating strategies in their attempt to avoid the work they are faced with (cf. Näsman and von Gerber 2003; Punch 2001b). Some sixth graders in Ekköping gave examples of how they use stalling as a strategy, trying to postpone the work the parents have told them to do. The sixth graders explained that they leave the house, go for a bike ride or simply try to convince the parent that they will do it later. Often, they still eventually end up doing what they have been told to do. Completely negotiating oneself out of a given work task appears to be almost impossible. If you stay away you might not have to do the chore, but instead your parents will be upset and angry. The only way to really get out of doing a specific chore, without negative repercussions, appears to be doing something else instead. However, just doing anything you wish is not okay. You cannot just say “no thanks” and, as Mika, a Vikåsa girl in the eighth grade, explained, “just go and sit by the computer”. You have to do something that the parents value. I asked Kenny, Hans and Märta, two boys and one girl in the seventh grade in Ekköping, “Why they help out at home?”. 
Kenny: Because you have to help out.
Tobias: You can’t get out of it?
Kenny: Yeah, you can always get out of it. But then mum gets really mad, or you don’t get your monthly allowance.
Tobias: Okay. Is there no standard trick you can use? Hans?
Hans: Noo, I don’t think so.
Märta: He, he [giggles].
Kenny: Yeah, there is one. I did my homework!
Tobias: Okay.
Kenny: That is more important.

Summing up, one important explanation for why the children actually do work in the domestic arena is that they are told to do so by their parents. The children do not seem to think they can get out of this work whether they like it or not. This gives us an idea of the construction of children and childhood as a structural site. The children do not think they can disobey their parents, and thus they do not feel that they can get out of these chores completely. In this way, they not only simply succumb to a pre-existing hierarchical power structure, they also actively pay tribute to the existence of the very same hierarchical construction through their action and the choices they make (Giddens 1984). Solberg argues similarly, that “It is the organization of daily life, the dividing up of tasks between family members, and the laying down of rules of conduct that implicitly determines what it means to be a child” (Solberg 1997:126). Thus, what it means to be a child is something that is negotiated between different actors in the organization of everyday life, in everyday situations and interaction over, for example, household rules, who is to mow the lawn, vacuum the floor, etc. (Punch 2001b; Zeiher 2001). When dividing domestic work among them, the parents and the children decide on the limits of the various family members’ capacities. These decisions are often based on notions of what kind of responsibility a parent can take and should take and what responsibility a child can and should take. The decisions are based on and reflect notions of adulthood and childhood. At the same time, the

89 Similarly, several researchers (e.g., Ahrne and Roman 1997; Gullestad 1992; Rosengren 1991) have shown that negotiations between men and women on work tasks are a common phenomenon in day-to-day life. These researchers’ argument is that such negotiations and the division of labour between men and women include questions concerning what it means to be a man or a woman.
parents’ and the children’s decisions contribute to the existence of these notions. The term “negotiation” reflects the children’s active participation in the construction and reconstruction of their own childhood (Corsaro 1997; Punch 2001b; Solberg 1997; Zeiher 2001). In their negotiations with their parents, the children thus co-construct a parent-child hierarchy as well as their own inferior place in this hierarchy.

**Reciprocity and Moral Duty**

One reason for taking part in the domestic work seems to be the simple fact that the children like the work, they think it is fun (cf. Brannen et al. 2000). Several children mentioned this. However, other reasons for taking part in the domestic work can also be found among the children. One common incentive for doing domestic work is money. I have displayed above how the domestic arena is a monetized sector of everyday life. In some households, the children’s allowance is tightly connected to and regulated by the children’s achievements in domestic work. In other households, this seems to be more of an open ongoing negotiated process, in which the children and their parents bargain. Different Vikåsa children explained that their mothers offered them twenty-five to fifty crowns [SEK] to do the dishes, one hundred to clean the apartment and one hundred to take in one of the family’s horses. These children explained that they would never do these chores if the parents did not offer them money.

This, however, does not apply to all the children. Some children mentioned almost altruistic reasons for doing domestic work. Kajsa, a Vikåsa girl in the eighth grade, argued that she does this work to be “nice”. Similarly, other children mentioned that they do the work to please their parents. The children argued that their parents get in a good mood if they come home from a long day at their job and find their home tidied up and in order. Then the parents do not have to clean. Conversely, if the parents come home from a long day at work and everything is in a mess, this makes them angry. However, the altruistic arguments can be turned over into arguments that are more outspokenly instrumental. Ralf, a Vikåsa boy
in the ninth grade, explained that there is a similarity between domestic work and more formal employment, a job. The reasons for taking part are very similar according to Ralf. He argued that “(...) it is just like at adults’ jobs. Because you show that you can take the responsibility and can clean, and then you get to stay out longer and you get a larger monthly allowance and stuff like that”. Doing domestic work can thus give direct effects on the children’s spending power and give them more autonomy. Moreover, praise from their parents can give them a sense of acknowledgement. Both these factors might in turn, “encourage them to work more and undertake additional responsibilities within the household, or simply to continue participating in housework” (Antoniou 2007:17).

Some children brought up a moral dimension when explaining why they do domestic work. One Vikåsa girl in the eighth grade argued for example in her questionnaire that, “Helping out at home is a duty, nothing you get paid for”. Here, she brings a moral dimension into her explanation of why she works. Other children discuss helping out at home along similar lines and add that this is something that their parents demand, explicitly or implicitly. Uno, an Ekköping boy in the seventh grade, explained in an interview discussion on domestic work that, “I have things that I do – that I have to do without getting money for doing them. Things that everybody in my family has to do, no one gets paid to do them”. Notable here is that not only the children have to do these chores. “[E]verybody” in Uno’s family has to do his or her part. Several children in both communities mentioned that the whole family works together and that everybody takes part in domestic work. Similarly, several children also mentioned that the point of this work is not to make money. Rather, as one Vikåsa girl in the ninth grade stated in her questionnaire, helping out is “a part of life” and thus it is not something extra for which you should receive money. Another Vikåsa girl in the ninth grade writes in her questionnaire that “we all [referring to her own family members] help out at home and that has nothing to do with money”. In this way, she underlines that the family is a unit that works together. A number of Ekköping boys also mentioned that they felt that it is not okay to charge their parents for work at home. Some children argued that they felt it is wrong to get paid to make their own bed or to clean their own room. Other children argued that they get so much stuff from their parents anyway, and then it feels wrong to charge the parents, to demand money for the work.
In all these statements, we can see indications of explicit and implicit systems of reciprocity in the family. This complies with what has been shown in previous research (e.g., Bey 2003; Brannen et al. 2000; Justegård 2002; Leonard 2007b; Morrow 1996; Ramirez Sánchez 2007; Schildkrout 1981; Song 1996, 2001). Every member of this entity, the family unit, seems to be potentially useful and can contribute. As Morrow (1994, 1996) argues, the family members could be perceived as interdependent. The children’s accounts, where they argue that they “have to” help out, point in the same direction. The children’s contribution is thus not just desired by parents, or expected due to duty, it is in fact needed. However, the argument that the work is needed seems to be of lesser importance to the children. Returning to the children’s arguments, some children think it is only right that they do some domestic work to pay their parents back. What is more, the children also outline a view of domestic work as a moral duty (cf. Brannen et al. 2000; Song 1996, 2001). Sometimes the parents explicitly demand that the children help out; the parents give explicit orders concerning what should be done by the children. But more often, the children seem to take it upon themselves to help out. The children outline a moral code in their accounts, a moral code stating that everyone in the household has to do their part for the common good. The children also show that this code is not simply imposed by the parents; they impose this moral code upon themselves and choose to conform.

Concluding Remarks

The aim of this chapter was to take a closer look at children’s participation in the domestic arena. I have shown in what ways the children participate, what kind of domestic work they do, and have outlined further why they think the activities in the domestic arena constitute work.

There are similarities between the activities in the domestic arena and activities in the job arena. Activities in the domestic arena are sometimes paid in some way, and the organization of such activities as well
as the family division of labour can be formalized in various ways. Payment and a formal structure are features normally connected with the more formal labour market. The children’s descriptions of their domestic work situation challenge this. The similarities between the activities in the two arenas are not without importance in explaining why activities in the domestic arena are in fact work.

However, work in the domestic arena was described as “a kind of work” and as more like helping. Both the children and their parents work in the domestic arena. Nevertheless, as we could see already in the previous chapter, the children describe their own work as helping out. I argue that we can see two concurring processes in the children’s descriptions. On the one hand, the children upgrade their activity. They use the similarity between the activities they undertake and those adults do and the similarity between some activities done in the domestic arena and job activities to upgrade their activities. In the work society, having a job – that is, formal gainful employment – and thereby contributing to productivity is what gives an individual his or her value in the eyes of society. By underlining the similarity between the valued activities and their own, the children try to upgrade their own value. On the other hand, the children devaluate their contribution. In Sweden, children are generally not perceived as workers. In this chapter, I show that they have problems freeing themselves from existing cultural notions of children and childhood, but instead use such notions in their explanations and descriptions of their own activities. Hence, adults are depicted as real workers and children as helpers.

I argue that the distinctions made by the children in the interviews are their way of “doing age”, their way of constructing an age hierarchy between adults and children. This is something done during the interviews, but also something the children, their parents and other adults do in various negotiations during their everyday life. Through their doing of age, the children contribute to the age hierarchy and, what is more, to their own subordination. However, this may not necessarily impact negatively on the children’s everyday life. The children’s doing of age may be part of an “infantilization” strategy. The children may highlight their own age-bound incompetence and their dependence on adults to negotiate their way out of and to avoid activities or chores that they do not want to take part in.

I show that the children have different incentives for taking part in domestic work. Money is a common incentive here as well as in the job.
arena. Another reason for doing this work is that the children actually like it. They also mention reasons of reciprocity and duty when explaining why they undertake domestic work. One important reason for why the children do domestic work is that they are told to do so by their parents. As I show, the children do not feel they can disobey their parents or negotiate their way out of this work. They describe some forms of stalling techniques. However, the children argue that, in the end, they still have to obey their parents. This is an example of how children not only succumb to a pre-existing hierarchical age-bound power structure, but also actively contribute to the existence of the very same hierarchical construction.
6

School Work

In this chapter, the focus is on children’s activities in school. Several children reported that school was their work, and I analyse the reasons for this in the chapter. I continue to analyse this broadened definition of work, as presented by the children, and discuss similarities between the children’s school activities and activities undertaken by adults on the formal labour market. I also discuss time use and attempts to clarify whether these are the aspects that, in the eyes of the children, render school activities a work status. Moreover, I analyse the role the school institution, and the ideas about children and childhood conveyed in this institution, plays in the constitution of the child as not a real worker when it comes to having a job, but as a kind of worker when it comes to other forms of work.

Similarities

The focus of the present research project was initially on children’s work outside school. I made this clear to the children when initiating the different
parts of the ethnographic study. When I asked the children to define what work is and where they work, however, school was mentioned repeatedly. As I have already mentioned, I asked the children to take photos during my time in Ekköping and Vikåsa. These photos were later discussed in interviews. When going through the photos, I noticed that several of the pictures were taken inside or just outside the school building. When I asked about this, some of the children explained that they had not gone anywhere else to take pictures. The camera was given to them in school and that was where they had taken the pictures. Some children said that they had forgotten to take the camera home and they consequently had no pictures from other places. Answers like these are important methodological reminders. As pointed out earlier, the children’s photos should not be viewed as windows into their objective reality, a reality beyond human bias and interpretation. Rather, the children chose what to present and what not to present. The photos are partial descriptions. They do not necessarily give us the full picture, but they can guide us in our interpretations and perhaps give us a hint of what to take a closer look at.

Some children claimed that the photos of school were taken to describe their work. In an interview with Fredrik and Livia, one boy and one girl in the sixth grade from Ekköping, we were going through some
photos that the children had taken. The photos were all taken inside, or just outside, the school building. The photos depicted different pupils taking part in classes, sitting with schoolbooks and paper in front of them. A few photos depicted pupils posing in front of the camera in various group constellations. Unsure as to whether this was work, or why, I asked the two sixth graders to explain:

Tobias: Quite a lot of you have taken pictures of school and stuff like that.
Fredrik: Mm, mm.
Tobias: How can that be?
Fredrik: I think it is working. I am in school.
Tobias: Yes.
Livia: School is our work, like if you know what I mean.
Tobias: How do you mean?
Livia: Because we work here. Xxx.
Fredrik: We are here in the daytime, as adults are at their jobs, if you know what I mean.

[Interruption. Non-research participants enter the room for a minute]

Tobias: Ok, right, like when adults are at their job. How do you mean then?
Fredrik: I don’t know, you know, we learn stuff that we will use later on when we are adults Xxx.
Livia: We educate ourselves here to be able to work later.

In sum then, school is work because children work there and because children spend the daytime there just as adults do at their jobs. In this argument, Fredrik makes an analogy and uses the similarities between what children and adults do during the weekdays, both groups being away from home in the same way, to explain why people from both groups work (cf. Hutchings 2002).

The children describe school as their workplace, and perhaps this is not so surprising. When inspecting the interview discussion, we soon find work activities matching those the children undertake in the previous two arenas. In all the schools I visited during my fieldwork, the children sell flowers, lottery tickets and other articles and arrange markets together with
their classmates to raise money for school trips. These kinds of activities seem to be part of a larger trend in Sweden as a whole. An investigation by Majblomman’s Riksförbund (2004), based on a questionnaire involving 416 principals at different schools in Sweden, shows that these kinds of activities take place in a vast majority of the schools they contacted. The schools contacted by Majblomman stated that they raise money for common activities by selling various products. The schools arrange activities that are aimed at amusing the children as well as raising money, they sell products that the pupils have produced and they do work in the school or in the surrounding society (Majblomman’s Riksförbund 2004). Some scholars and journalists might depict this as part of an even larger trend throughout the industrialized world. Liebel (2007) and Klein (2000) give several examples of how the boarders between school and the labour market, between learning and business, are blurred and/or erased in today’s society.

The Swedish charity organization Majblomman’s Riksförbund has been actively working since 1907 with projects to help children and youth living in Sweden who suffer from illness, handicaps or social problems. Children gather money for the organization through their sale of the Majblomman products. This money is then used to help other children. Majblomman’s Riksförbund gives monetary support to individual children as well as to school projects and research on children. On top of this, the organization runs a children’s holiday camp. They also put some money into influencing public opinion to enhance the situation of children in Sweden. The organization’s main products are Majblommor, which are different sized artificial flowers to wear as a pin. According to Majblomman’s Riksförbund’s own statistics, two-thirds of all schoolchildren in Sweden sell Majblommor every year (www.majblomman.se).
The selling of Majblommor is a particularly interesting activity, as it, although administrated through the school institution, is one of the work activities mentioned in the Swedish labour regulations as particularly suitable for children under the age of 13 (AFS 1996:110 §).

Going back to the excerpt presented above, the children seem nevertheless fully aware of the fact that there may be differences between what children and adults do at their work. The similarities to and connections with work in other arenas outside school that I have highlighted here are not, I argue, unimportant factors when trying to understand why children think school is work. Still, I do not think this is the complete explanation.

The Time Factor

When we discussed why so many of the photos of work displayed activities in school, Sean, an Ekköping boy in the seventh grade, explained that they [he and other children like him] “are not doing anything else” and John, an Ekköping boy in the seventh grade, stated that, “it feels like school is the only thing that matters”.

In the two previous chapters, I have shown that the children take part in various forms of work activities in both the domestic and the job arena. Although the amount of time put in varies somewhat from child to child, Sean’s claim that they “are not doing anything else” than school does not correspond to my general impression of the situation in these two

94 The children who sell Majblommor get to keep for themselves ten percent of the money they gather. They can also, if they chose to do so, use the money together with their school class. There is also an additional motivational factor in the sale of Majblommor. The twenty children who have raised the largest amount of money at the school or in the organization can be nominated to a certain winners’ group. When nominated they take part in a national competition. Here the children who have sold for large amounts of money can win trips and gift certificates. They can also be elected to become Majblomman ambassadors and thereby have the opportunity to travel to the Swedish capital and receive a diploma from the hand of Her Majesty the Queen (www.majblomman.se).
communities. I am not going to claim that my interpretation of Sean’s everyday life is the correct one. I do think, however, that the discrepancy between our interpretations is important. My guess is that John’s statement at least partially can guide us in our interpretation of Sean’s statement. John bases his explanation on a feeling: “it feels like school is the only thing that matters”. I discussed already in Chapter 4 how some children seemed to, given their statements on time used for work, feel completely occupied by their workload at school.

School takes a great deal of children’s time. Sweden has a school system that is regulated in accordance with the Education Act (SFS nr: 1985:1100). All children in Sweden have to take part in education from their seventh year and up until the end of the spring semester, the year they reach the age of sixteen. The school week follows the general five-day workweek and runs from Monday to Friday. The number of hours children are obliged to spend in school every day varies throughout the country, but no child is to spend more than eight hours a day in school and the school year is not to exceed 190 days (SFS nr: 1985:1100). On top of this, the children have homework. The time for homework is not regulated in the Education Act. Time-wise, the school limits children’s possibilities to actually do something else, for example to take a paid job during the day. Moreover, schoolwork is in many ways an intellectual, thinking activity, and this does not necessarily end when school finishes for the day, but can extend into the weekends or vacations. Given the amount of time children have to spend in the educational system and the compulsory aspects, we can possibly start to imagine why Sean and his school friends depicts school as the only thing they are doing. On the other hand, as I mentioned above, many children actually do work other than their schoolwork. So why is Sean not counting this, and why is it, as John puts it, only school that matters?

I would argue that part of the explanation can be found in the way children perceive themselves. From a societal perspective, children are primarily supposed to attend school. Children are not perceived as workers, but first and foremost as schoolchildren. Schoolwork should be their first priority and any activity on top of schoolwork is perceived as extra-curricular and somewhat insignificant (Leonard 2007b). The children themselves relate to this societal view of themselves and their activities. Even if they do different forms of work outside school – and as we have
seen they often do – or even have a job, they still, as Leonard (2007b)
suggests, tend to categorize themselves in terms of their school identity.
Moreover, in the excerpt above, with the two Ekköping sixth graders
Fredrik and Livia, we can see that the children are presenting themselves as
not just part of an educational project: They are projects themselves.
Paraphrasing Livia, they educate themselves. Herein, the children display
themselves as agents in their own learning. At the end of the excerpt above,
we see indications of how the children perceive themselves, as learners, as
future orientated, and as people still preparing for life as an adult, so they
are, using Livia’s words, “able to work later”. Thus, schoolwork is
considered an important and necessary step in the working life (cf.

Is School Children’s Work?

Several scholars argue that the compulsory school system is important in
the construction of modern childhood (Persson 2003; Qvortrup 1994b;
Sjöberg 2005; Zeiher 2007). It is important because it contains processes of
separation and homogenization. To start with, the compulsory school
system emphasizes childhood as a separate societal category. The school
system separates childhood from adulthood (Näsman 1998; Qvortrup
1994b; Zeiher 2007) and from the family institution, locating it to an
educational institution specifically constructed for children in a certain age
span (Persson 2003; Wadel 1984). As I have already mentioned, childhood
is sometimes described as taking place on islands secluded from society
(e.g., Qvortrup 1994a; Zeiher 2003). The prolonged school attendance,
throughout the world, has reinforced the separation of children from the
world of adults and the official labour market with paid, gainful
employment (Qvortrup 1994b; Sandin 2003; Wadel 1984; Zeiher 2007).
This has strengthened the notion of adulthood and childhood as distinct and
separate phases and in turn contributed to children’s status of “otherness”
(Zeiher 2007; see also Näsman 1998).

Moreover, scholars argue that the compulsory school system and
the fact that all children have to go through the different grades in school at the same speed are homogenizing the period of childhood and youth (James et al. 1998; Persson 2003; Qvortrup 1994b; Sandin 2003; Sjöberg 2005; Zeiher et al. 2007). Through the compulsory school system, where all people between seven and sixteen years of age are treated in the same way and homogenized into one group, a new group of people are created in society: schoolchildren (Persson 2003). As an effect of this, the period of childhood and youth acquires a similar content, and in this way, school creates a timetable for normal childhood (Persson 2003; Sandin 2003; Sjöberg 2005). The children’s school period is ordered as a developmental ladder, a ladder related to chronological age (Närvänen and Näsman 2007). For every year that passes, the older the children get, they collectively get to take one step after another on this ladder. In this way, “Schools provide an ordered temporal passage from child to adult status (…)” (Strandell 2007:55).

In effect, as Persson (2003:121) points out, this timetable contributes to a temporal organization between the different phases in an individual’s life trajectory, in which you first attend school and educate yourself and then work. This is thus a timetable for social life as a whole. As I already discussed, with reference to labour market regulations and domestic work, growing up means increased participation in work. The grade system in the compulsory school, in Sweden ranging from grade 1 to 9, where a pupil is moved up as he or she grows older, and the timetable for life further emphasize and strengthen the importance of age.

In school, schoolchildren are taken care of by a number of professionals trained to take care of them. The adult professionals take care of and educate the children, take care of and clean the school premises, cook and serve the children school lunches and handle school administration. While in school, schoolchildren take part in formalized classes, classes structured in accordance with the curriculum (Curriculum for the compulsory school system, the pre-school class and the leisure-time centre Lpo 94 2006). The schoolchildren are educated in a variety of subjects, such as languages, social and natural science, mathematics, physical education, home economics, handicraft, music and art. All this is of course standard procedure in most schools outside Sweden as well, but in what way is this connected to Sean, who stated that school is the only work they do? Why is this schoolwork children’s work? How one answers
this question may depend on what perspective one takes.

Some sociologists (e.g., Mayall 2002; Qvortrup 2000, 2001; Wintersberger 2000, 2005) have argued that children contribute to the societal division of labour through their education. In fact, some have claimed that children were never separated from the work sphere of life. One effect of increased schooling during the 20th century was that children changed their workplace from the factory to the school (Sandin 2003; Wintersberger 2005). However, this does not necessarily mean that children stopped working, but instead that children’s school attendance is work. Children’s education is their contribution to the societal division of labour. At their work, in the educational system, children produce the human capital needed for producing other goods, because “they actively take part in processing themselves (…)” (Qvortrup 2001:100; see also Persson 2003). In this way, Qvortrup argues, children play an indispensable role for the continued existence of our society (Qvortrup 2000, 2001). Therefore, from these scholars point of view, children’s educational activities in school could be viewed, from a societal perspective, as work in the same way as adult’s activities: formal paid employment on the labour market. But what about the children’s point of view?

A Different Work Concept

In the two previous chapters, I have shown that the children in both Ekköping and Vikåsa have a weak connection to the formal labour market. Few of the children have jobs. According to the children’s interpretation, labour regulations disqualify them, as minors, from holding, using their own terminology, a “real job”. They are thus not real workers. They do undertake, however, some kind of work.

In the questionnaire, I asked the children if it is possible to work without being paid.95 A vast majority of the children (88 of 100) argued

95 See Appendix. Question 16 in the questionnaire.
that it is.  One Ekköping girl in the seventh grade stated next to her “Yes” answer that, “It depends on which jobs”. Similarly, one Vikåsa girl in the fourth grade stated next to her “Yes” answer that, “It depends on what kind of work you are doing”. Finally, another Ekköping girl in the fourth grade stated next to her “Yes” answer that, “It depends on whether you work seriously”. When examining the children’s statements, we can see that they claim that they work, by helping out in the domestic arena as well as in the job arena to some degree. In their descriptions of their everyday activities, they reinterpret and broaden the definition of work beyond the formal labour market containing gainful employment and formal paid jobs. Thus, although the children do not recognize themselves as real workers in the same sense as adults, they still work. The question here then is whether the children’s description of their activities in school should be interpreted in the same way.

When speaking to Eva-Britt, a teacher at Berguuvsskolan, one of the Ekköping schools where I started my fieldwork, I mentioned that the children often brought up school as work. Eva-Britt mentioned that she shared this view. She told me that she herself often tells the pupils that the “School is their work” and that they have to manage it as if it were a job. “You call it schoolwork”, the teacher explained to me. When summing up her explanation, Eva-Britt added that ”In a way I suppose they have been indoctrinated”. Eva-Britt’s suggestion, that she had been indoctrinating the children, is not completely farfetched. The children spend several hours, five days a week in school with their teachers, who play an important role in their learning process. However, we should not forget that the children play an important part in their own learning, choosing what to pick up and what to disregard. Thus, it is questionable whether socialization functions as straightforwardly as Eva-Britt imagines (cf. Corsaro 1997; Giddens 1979; Ziehe 1993). Nevertheless, rather than speculating on possible indoctrination, done by one single teacher, we have to acknowledge that Eva-Britt’s ideas are merely one small example of a larger societal ideology – an ideology that structures society and children’s everyday life. Eva-Britt’s comment is an important reminder of something that has to be kept in mind when trying to interpret the children’s photos and answers.

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96 The tendency was the same in both the communities and among children in the different age groups. Two children did not answer the question. One child marked both “Yes” and “No” and is counted as both.
The present research project was largely undertaken in different schools, and I have already highlighted some of the effects this had on the gathered material, for example on the number of photos taken in the school environment. I would argue, however, that the influence is greater than this. The teachers were never physically present during the interviews. Nonetheless, when inspecting the children’s replies to my questions, it seems sometimes that the answers were aimed at a teacher or perhaps a parent rather than at me, the researcher. I have already portrayed how I, in the initial phase of my fieldwork, was mistaken for a teacher, and such a misunderstanding might account for some of this. I would argue, however, that the children are relating to something else, or someone else. Something or someone not physically present during the interviews. Pripp (1999:43) calls this “The third party present”\textsuperscript{97}. What was present was not an actual person. Rather, the presence was made up of the many notions circulating in society and in school regarding children and childhood. These notions, as I already mentioned, round children up and constrain them (Pripp 1999). These are, thus, notions of which children are well aware. These are notions that children have read and heard about in their education and that they use in their interpretative reproductions (Corsaro 1997). The children have acknowledged the information that is circulating, they have interpreted it and appropriated it and they use it in their interpretations and self-presentation.

\textbf{The “Professional-Client” Relationship}

In some cases, for example when I asked a follow-up question, it was easy to trace the children’s answers back to something outlined in their education. In some interviews, the children returned to the idea that child labour is illegal. They often mentioned that child labour is illegal in Sweden, but also that this is not the case in all countries. When I asked how they knew this, they all referred to having been told so in school or having

\textsuperscript{97} My translation from original Swedish. Pripp (1999:43) uses the Swedish term “Den tredje närvarande” to describe this phenomenon.
read it in a schoolbook. On other occasions, I did not ask this kind of follow-up question, but I would still argue that at least some of the roots of the children’s answers can be found in their education and in how they are positioned in the educational system (cf. Lee 2001; Leonard 2007b).

The teachers and the pupils all spend their day side-by-side doing their work. But, do they do the same kind of work, or rather are the activities they take part in work in the same way? In an interview in Ekköping, I asked Victor, Sebbe, Kim and Peggy, three boys and one girl in the eighth grade, about this.

Tobias: Is it you Sebbe that has photographed these things too?
Victor: No, I have taken those. That is Sebbe’s help-person [assistant], then he [Sebbe] is working one hundred percent.
Tobias: Is it the help-person that is working or is it?
Victor: No Sebbe also.
Sebbe: Both.
Tobias: Is that then the same kind of work, the work Sebbe and the help-person are doing and the things they are doing in the school dining hall [referring to a picture of the staff working there, who were discussed earlier in the interview]?
Victor: No, he is working with, he is busy learning stuff, so that he can work like in the future.
Tobias: Okay.
Sebbe: In a preventive way.

In the discussion about Sebbe and his help-person, working side-by side, it becomes clear that they are both working. Both the teaching (by the assistant and the teachers) and the learning (by the child/pupil) are work. The teacher and the pupil are working together. Thus, Sebbe is just as much an agent in the educational work as the teacher is. However, even if both these activities are work, the two activities are different kinds of work. All the children were very clear on this point. In the excerpt above, it is clear

98 On one occasion, I asked the Ekköping teacher Eva-Britt if they talk a lot about child labour in the education. Eva-Britt explained that they often discuss this when they study life in other countries and talk about children’s life in these countries. Among other things, she mentioned that they speak about streetchildren and the strategies these children have to use to survive. Moreover, Eva-Britt mentioned that they talk about children working in the carpet industry where children are chained to the machines. On a later date, when I went through some of the schoolbooks the children use in their education, I found that child labour to some degree is a theme also there. I found such examples in schoolbooks used in the subjects’ social studies and geography.
that Sebbe’s learning is something he is doing for his own sake, and children’s schoolwork was outlined in similar ways in many other interviews. School is something the children do for their own sake, for their own good. The teachers are helping the children. Herein, we can again see tendencies towards a process of othering, in which the children define their own work as something different and themselves as something other than real workers. I argued in a previous chapter that one cause of this was the description of children in the Swedish labour regulations. I would here like to add that the compulsory school system reinforces this constitution.

The compulsory school system does not only exclude children from the formal labour market by placing them in school. What is more, by defining them as schoolchildren, as people in need of education, the school system underlines their status as future members of society (Lee 2001; Zeiher 2007), as “becomings” (Qvortrup 1994a) and as “not yets” (Näsman 1998). Thus, the children’s position in the compulsory school system corresponds with the status children are given in the labour regulations, where children are collectively marked as a special kind of being (see Chapter 4). I mentioned in the last chapter that children are often perceived as recipients of care. In the family, parents are caregivers and children are cared for. The parents are the active subjects and the children the passive objects. This familial system is transferred to the school system (Wadel 1984). However, in school, professional caregivers take over the parents’ role. A “professional-client” relationship, the relationship between the teacher and the pupils, is built into the school system. This relationship could be one important factor in trying to understand why the children present themselves as “not real workers” and school as their work. Wadel (1984) argues that one of the features of the “professional-client” relationship is that the professional is working and the client is receiving. What distinguishes a client is thus that he or she is the recipient of work, not a worker (Wadel 1984). The difference between these two, the professional and the client, is based on competence, which the first one has and the other lacks. Moreover, another difference is also important. The professional helps others in his or her work, but the client’s activity is only done by the client for him- or herself (Wadel 1984).

In their explanations, the children adhere to this difference. The learning done by the pupil, Sebbe, is portrayed as something different from what the teacher is doing. They do however not rule out Sebbe’s or their
own learning activities as non-work. Teachers and pupils do different work. Moreover, the outcomes of their work are different. When I asked Lisa, a Vikåsa girl in the ninth grade, why she thinks school is work, she replied that:

Why I think that it is like our work? It is because we have to go there. You know, it’s like for example the teacher. They have to work, to earn money and so that, so that we can be taught by someone. And we are forced to go there, and it's a must. Otherwise, we can’t educate ourselves. Then we can’t become adults and work for real. That’s why I think it is like our work.

According to the children, the outcome of their work is learning. In this way, the answers given by Victor and Sebbe have some similarities to those given by Fredrik and Livia above. The children’s work in the present, their learning, is a preparation for the future (cf. Hengst and Zeiher 2000). Lisa’s statement is somewhat similar, but she underlines what is at stake if the children do not educate themselves. This was outlined further in the interview with Lisa, by her school friends Erik and Sally. In the interview with the three Vikåsa ninth graders, they argued that:

Sally: You know. School is our workplace after all. Because it is here we spend the day from eight in the morning until.
Erik: The afternoon.
Sally: The afternoon sort of. So I mean, it’s just like our workplace, as much as it’s the teachers. It is just that they get paid to be here and we learn stuff. It.
Erik: We learn stuff to be able to make money later.
Sally: Hm, hm.
Erik: To able to get jobs and be able to earn our own money.
Sally: Hm, hm.
Erik: To be able to become adults.

Looking at their statements, we can see that the children put forward arguments that are in disagreement with what a group of 9- and 12- to 13-year-olds put forward in a study undertaken by Mayall (2002) in England. According to Mayall (2002:68), the children in England argued that the “school activity is not work because it is for yourself, to learn what you need to know for future life, including a paid job”. Mayall argues that this is a sign of how these children view childhood. She argues that the children
she interviewed saw childhood as “a privileged period with relatively few responsibilities, and a period where you can expect protection and provision, and should have free time” (Mayall 2002:69). Here we can see some differences from the ideas of the children in the present study. Most of the children in my study depict childhood as an important period of preparation, a period where responsibility is of great importance. Childhood is a transition period, but not necessarily a time for play and free time. It is a time that has to be structured, planned and spent wisely given that the children’s own personal futures are at stake (cf. Zeiher 2007). The present time of education and preparations makes it possible for the children to become adults.

Notable in the last two excerpts is the children’s argument that school is “like their work”. It is similar to adults work, but not necessarily the same. Herein, the children make an analogy and use the similarity between what they do in school and what the teachers do when explaining why their school activity is work (cf. Hutchings 2002). I have already discussed and described how the compulsory school system reinforces the difference between children and adults and between childhood and adulthood. However, in school, since the late 20th century, children have simultaneously been taught that they are in many respects the equals of adults (Ellegaard 2004; Sandin 2003; Strandell 2007). Scholars have argued that the concept of “the competent child” has had a major influence on the educational system in the Nordic countries (Kampmann 2004; Kryger 2004). This conception of the child, however, has not completely replaced the old idea of the child, rather it is mixed up with the old concepts. “The competent child” is, as Ellegaard (2004:178) suggests, “not a precise concept”, but rather “a container concept”. Important parts of the concept are, according to Ellegaard, that children and adults are presented basically as equals and that there is a focus on children and their life here and now, as social beings in the present rather than as future, becoming
adults. Moreover, children are perceived as competent. Their competence as children is not measured on the basis of what they lack compared to adults. This view of children and their abilities has had effects on the educational system. In school, forms of introspection and self-evaluation have been amplified (Kampmann 2004). I will soon come back to this. More important here is, however, the idea that children and adults are equal. I am suggesting that the children’s talk about the similarity between their own and the adults’ work, between their own schoolwork and the teachers’ work, and possibly even the talk about school as work can be traced, at least in part, back to this.

The Importance of Education

Various researchers have shown that children’s schoolwork has high priority among parents in Sweden. In a study on Swedish middle-class families and parental involvement, Forsberg (2007:215) reports, “For the parents, it is more important that the children do their homework than household chores or leisure activities”. Söderlind (2007) also found similar tendencies in a study of parents’ ideas regarding children’s work, in the two communities that I have chosen to call Ekköping and Vikåsa. We saw in the previous chapter how some children mentioned that doing their homework could be a way of avoiding having to take part in domestic work. When signing up to participate in the present research project, the children and their parents had to give their written consent on a prepared form that I handed out in class for the children to bring home (see

99 Similar tendencies can be found in other parts of the children’s lives, for example in the domestic arena. Beck (1997) argues that the clear ontological difference between adults and children is challenged in today’s society, what Beck calls the period of second modernity. Beck argues that increased individualization threatens the traditional, first modernity, idea of the family. Increased individualization restructures traditional family bonds, diminishes some of the adult authority, and strengthens the children’s position. The lack of difference between adults and children destabilizes the age hierarchy and consequently adults’ authority in the family. The effect is an increased “democratization of the family”, where the family members are turned into a group of equals.
Appendix). When giving their consent to participate, some children and parents added that it was okay to participate as long as participation did not impinge on schoolwork. This could be an example of the time pressure experienced by the children and their parents. It could also be an indication of the importance the children and their parents put on schoolwork and education.

Some children mentioned how their parents’ interest in good school results had been developed into monetary systems. Kenny, an Ekköping boy in the seventh grade, described how his monthly allowance is dependant on how he manages a number of different domestic chores, as well as how well he handles his schoolwork.

Kenny: I get, if I help out at home and make my bed everyday and load the dishwasher and like shovel snow, then I get my monthly allowance. Otherwise I don’t get any and I also have to manage my schoolwork.
Tobias: Has it ever happened that you did not get your allowance?
Kenny: Yeah!
Tobias: That’s tough.
Kenny: But then I haven’t managed school. So then.

Kenny never explained in detail what managing schoolwork meant, how his level of performance was measured or how badly he had to behave or perform to miss out on his allowance. Other children described somewhat similar systems and they were often more exact about what level of performance was required to cash in. Micke, a Vikåsa boy in the seventh grade, explained that he can, on top of his monthly allowance, ”get around one hundred [SEK] if I get a VG”. Lena, a Vikåsa girl in the sixth grade, mentioned a similar system.

Lena: No but, I mean. I have a rather’ my dad is like really interested that, I mean he really wants us to do well in school and so. So every time you get something good [a good grade]. So we had

100 In Sweden, grades are given for subjects taught in compulsory school. Grades are awarded for each term in year 8, at the end of the autumn term in year 9 and when mandatory school attendance ends in year 9. Grades are set by the teacher, and include one of the following possible grades: Pass (G), Pass with Distinction (VG), and Pass with Special Distinction (MVG). Pupils who do not attain a passing level in a particular subject are not awarded a grade in that subject, but a written assessment (www.skolverket.se/content/1/c4/12/67/en_betyg%20.pdf 2006).
some tests, you know. Then I have done really well and then when I
tell him, then he gets really, really happy and then he gives me like
one hundred crowns [SEK]. So I have actually made quite a lot last
month.
Tobias: Okay, right.
Lena: I mean, quite a lot!! Maybe 300 crowns [SEK], or
something like that, I have gotten this now and then, maybe every
week. Without thinking of how much it is maybe, so he gives me.
Xxx
Tobias: So then you could say that you get paid to go to school?
Lena: Yeah. I mean it is almost like that, if I do something good
in school. Then I actually get paid. Because he thinks that it is so fun
that I am doing well.

The examples, regarding Kenny, Lena and Micke, display a connection
between schoolwork and economic transactions. This is similar to
tendencies found also by Näsman and von Gerber (2003) in their research
on children’s participation in economical arenas in Sweden. Thus, this
appears to be part of a larger trend in Swedish society.

The two last mentioned Vikåsa children, Micke and Lena, are
rewarded with extra money for delivering good school results in the form
of a top grade on tests. This is, thus, an extra reward on top of the standard
allowance. In contrast, Kenny does not receive an extra reward for well-
managed schoolwork. Managing his schoolwork is included in his regular
chores alongside making his bed and loading the dishwasher. However, if
he fails to manage his schoolwork or the rest of his chores, he is punished
and loses his allowance altogether.

The parents’ approach to the children’s school performance could
be interpreted as yet another step in the increased “monetizing” of
childhood, where economic transferring is used by parents to show
appreciation for good behaviour and a job well done (Ziehe 1993:19). In
the examples above, we can see that money is used in the families as both a
stick, trying to push the children, and a carrot, trying to encourage and
persuade the children to behave and perform well in school. So far, I have
shown how this is used in relation to grades. This practice, however, does
seem to involve much greater parts of the school day activities and some,
possible, educational activities that might take place outside school. As I
have mentioned before, one recurring topic that I brought up in the
interviews was whether the children had any standard ways, special work
activities, they could undertake to raise 200 SEK in one week. Most children mentioned different forms of domestic work they could do to raise some fast cash. When bringing up this question in an interview with Erik, Lisa and Sally, one boy and two girls in the ninth grade in Vikåsa, they mentioned school-related activities next to the domestic ones.

Erik: One book, I get one hundred [SEK]. Just because I don’t read so damn much.
Tobias: Who gives you that?
Erik: Mom.
Tobias: Okay.
Lisa: I can make two hundred [SEK] if I get MVG in some subjects, but that might take more than a week!
Tobias: But you said that you could do something at home [referring to a previous statement]?
Lisa: Yes, I can. I mean, it depends, if I tell mom that I want. Mom, I really need two hundred [SEK], if I have a good reason. And then probably I ask if I can borrow the money until I get my own money. Because I get the child allowance. Or if I say, I can clean the whole apartment, can I get two hundred [SEK] then? Because I really need it. Then it might happen, then she thinks that. And then I got, I know mom’s friends, who need help cleaning their basements or grandma who needs help blowing leaves or, you know, stuff like that.
Tobias: Yes, yes.
Lisa: It is relatives that do not have the energy and.
Sally: And then you can start going to the gym class.
Lisa: Go to gym class, then I make money.
Tobias: Gym class?
Lisa: Yeah. Then I can make money off that.
Tobias: Is that some kind of gymnastics association?
Erik: No.
Sally: No.
Lisa: No, it is the physical education here in school.
Tobias: Yeah?
Lisa: No, I make money.
Erik: She makes money on being so lazy.
Lisa: Yes, because I, mom, because I was never in school, or in the physical education class before. And now when I have started going, I get money for that.
Tobias: Okay. May I ask how much?
Lisa: Ten crowns [SEK] per class. But if it is a full day of classes I get twenty [SEK] per class.
As we can see in this excerpt, the children are paid to read books, to clean and they are paid when they get good grades. The parents’ will to pay their children to do these activities, as Johansson (2005) suggests, could be interpreted as a sign of parental interest and a sign of encouragement, indicating that it is important for the child to undertake the activity or to put an extra effort into doing something, and parents want to encourage this. The parents'/adults’ will to pay the children could also be seen as the parents'/adults’ will to use his or her economic power to get something done, something that he or she does not have the time to do, is not able to do or does not feel like doing her-/himsel. This could possibly be the case when it comes to cleaning the apartment and basements and blowing leaves. All the activities mentioned, with the exception of Lisa’s school attendance, are in some way presented by the children as “extra” activities, things they do not normally do, and things they are not normally supposed to do. But what about Lisa, who is paid to go to school and to attend her physical education class? Lisa does not receive money as a reward for an extraordinary school performance, but rather she gets paid in cash, although small amounts, for the attendance as such – attendance that is compulsory and regulated by the Education Act. In this way, Lisa’s mother is trying to negotiate with her daughter, using the economic incentive as a carrot to encourage her to attend school more. Lisa, I argue, receives money not for producing a value, but for producing a behaviour. She receives money for her good behaviour, for being the good child.

Planning

During an interview with Kajsa, Mika and Antonia, three Vikåsa girls in the eighth grade, I noticed that one of their photos showed one of the girls’ logbooks. This particular logbook looked like a regular agenda with one week on every book spread. What had once been white pages was now scribbled full of notes. The girls told me that every pupil at Vikåsa School has such a book. In this book, they write down the dates for all their homework, tests and other school assignments. The teachers note their
valuations of the pupils’ work in these books and the pupils note their own self-valuations. It is stated in the curriculum that the pupils should participate in the planning and evaluation of their daily education. The pupils should learn how to plan their own schoolwork and take responsibility for their own learning (Curriculum for the compulsory school system, the pre-school class and the leisure-time centre Lpo 94 2006). The pupils should thus not only shape their own learning process, but also take responsibility for this very process (Kryger 2004). The logbook is a tool in this process and works as a log, a plan or agenda for schoolwork throughout the school year. I was somewhat surprised by this photo, I could initially not see what it had to do with work, and this caused me to ask these three girls in the eighth grade:

Tobias: So if we then think, as I said this was supposed to be about what you do in your spare time [the time spent out of school] and work, if you do any work in your spare time. Or about something you think is work and things like that. If you look at the different pictures then. Yeah, the logbook for example what is the idea behind the picture? You mentioned before that you have a lot of homework.

Kajsa: Yes.

Mika: Yeah, we have loads of homework. We have like two, between two and four homework assignments almost everyday.

Antonia: This can kind of, then we show this in this way, I mean that this is the amount of text it is, and that it is homework you know. It’s the homework that is in there.

Tobias: How much time, I mean two to four homework assignments? How much time does it take, I have no idea, it’s been such a long time since I went to school?

Mika: It takes a lot of time.

Kajsa: Yeah.

Antonia: Yeah.

Mika: It takes a really long time.

Kajsa: An hour a day.

Antonia: It’s not just only homework, it’s also tests.

Kajsa: Yeah. You don’t have enough time for your spare time either, if you have activities.

Antonia: Mm, mm.

Mika: Mm, mm.

Kajsa: It’s very stressful then I think.
Later on in the interview, when discussing their schoolwork, the girls brought up that school is not only boring.

Antonia: Or, yes but it can be fun too, that’s what I think anyway.
Kajsa: Yeah.
Tobias: But you are saying that it becomes like work [referring to an earlier statement by one of the girls]?
Mika: Yeah it becomes, it’s so much to do, you are away almost, I mean you are away a lot of the day. And then when you come home you have a lot of homework to do. Then you eat something you know and then you sometimes you have some more homework to do. And then most people in the class have activities, so in the end, as it turns out it gets really busy.
Kajsa: As if your whole life rotates around school.
Mika: Mm.
Antonia: Mm, Mm.
Mika: You have to plan your weekends and everything according to the school activities.
Antonia: And then, on top of this you can have tests also. And then you know, you have to study a certain amount of time kind of, and then you have to plan what [you have left] to spend on weekends and so.
Kajsa: Yeah.

The discussion started with me asking why they had taken a photo of the logbook in this project on work. This question led to a discussion on how much time school – the work in school during the day and the homework during the evenings and weekends – takes. The girls’ answers depict schoolwork as a very time-consuming activity, an activity that dominates their weeks, and almost makes other activities, or even a social life, impossible. In this way, the girls depict schoolwork as well as childhood in general as a rather stressful time. Similar tendencies can be found in a study undertaken in Sweden by Westlund (2004). The pupils who participated in Westlund’s study displayed how time-consuming homework precludes a social life with friends and spare time activities (see also Berggren 2001; Hellsten 2000; Qvortrup 1994b; Zeiher 2007). It is notable that the children in my study put forward the time aspect when trying to clarify why school is work. The time aspect makes schoolwork into work. The logbook, showing the full schedule, formalizes the homework assignments as work and extends the schoolwork day into the evenings and
weekends. Spatially it also extends the school institution into both the domestic sphere and into the spare time arenas (Corno and Xu 2004; Westlund 2004). Moreover, this extensive use of planning seems to create a situation in which one’s whole life feels scheduled (cf. Westlund 2005). All this extensive planning can be interpreted as a sign of what Giddens has called “the colonisation of the future” (1991:111). This, Giddens argues, is one of the effects of the reflexivity that individuals in our late modern society are engaged in. People are not just busy thinking about the future to come, they actively take part in shaping it. Planning your own schoolwork, directing your own education, trying to increase your chances on the labour market you will be entering in a couple of years might be part of this trend.

A Broadened Learning Concept

So far, the focus has been on school and the learning that takes place there. Learning, however, is not something that only takes place in school (Brembeck 2004; Kryger 2004; Strandell 2007). Yvonne, Jasmine and Ralf, two girls and one boy in the ninth grade in Vikåsa, had some photos describing learning activities outside the school perimeters in one of the children’s homes. When I asked about what the photo depicted, Yvonne explained that they were studying to learn better English. She also explained that the activity in the photo did not really have anything to do with school, even if it depicted a learning activity. I asked:

Tobias: And in what way is it work?
Yvonne: Learning language! That can be work.
Tobias: In what way?
Yvonne: Yeah, I mean, we want better grades in English, so there is still a connection to school. Like if you want to be able to study abroad, then it's good if you know English. So it becomes work in a way, but its hard work, boring.
Ralf: It is connected to work.
Yvonne: Yeah, that’s right.
Jasmine: Mm, mm.
Tobias: It is connected to work?
Ralf: I mean, I mean that maybe it’s not work in itself, but if you do it, it leads to a lot of other work, or makes it possible for you to get good jobs later on or make, like that. It kind of helps you with work later on in life.
Jasmine: And then you can say that this is the work, leading to other work so.
Ralf: Yeah that’s right. You work your way towards another work.
Yvonne: Yeah.

I have shown before how the children broaden the work concept so that their education and learning are included as work. In this excerpt, we can see how the children are discussing their way towards an interpretation they all can accept. As we can see in this excerpt, the children seem to be aware that this interpretation may be hard to accept. Their hesitance can of course be an effect of the doubting questions I put to them, asking them to explain more and to clarify. Ralf suggests that education and learning might not be work in itself. He suggests that it is the activities’ connection to a future job, to the labour market with professions and paid gainful employment, that makes the activities into work. This, however, is overturned in the end when they all agree that both are work. Learning is work that leads to other work.

As we can see here, the education that takes place in the compulsory school system seems to be part of a much larger educational project that stretches far beyond the school perimeters. The children themselves choose this extra-curricular learning assignment. It is an investment; they are trying to increase their chances in their own unknown future. They use their spare time to learn skills that are not only valuable in their present day-to-day life as pupils in the Vikåsa school, but rather skills that are to be used later on in life. In this way, the children display an awareness of the strategic importance of education in increasing their future chances (cf. Christensen and James 2001; Johansson 2005). The children are orientating themselves towards the future, but they are not merely passive objects (Giddens 1991). The children show that they are agents, actively involved in their own education and in their own future. I would even claim that the children are agents, who through their everyday life activities are colonizing the future. However, I would like to add that this is in many ways a dialectic process. At the same time as the children
are colonizing the future, the future is colonizing the present. On a structural level, the children are forced, by the state and their parents, to take part and to attend institutions created to meet the demands of the future society. The compulsory school system is such an institution (Persson 2003). Thus, great parts of the children’s childhood here and now seem to be spent preparing for the life to come. The work the children do in relation to school is an illustrative example of this.

The children’s willingness to succumb to these wider educational demands must be explained to some extent by the fact that they actually think education is important.101 In the children’s statements, we can see signs of what Persson (2003:88) calls “education dependency”102. Overall, the children think it is important to educate yourself. It is important to learn, to work hard and eventually to get good grades. This work will make it possible to get a good job in the future. The children thus, I argue, view their education as an important part of their transition from the present to the future. In this way, they are leaning to view themselves as projects that have to be nurtured and groomed, rather than as natural beings that will develop without outside input (cf. Halldén 1991). Education and learning are important, because they pave the road to a good future, and anything that can help in this transition is work. This would then explain the children’s motivation for engaging in this work.

Through education, by learning skills, the children prepare themselves for the future, another type of working life. Their present time of preparation, however, should not be mistaken for non-work. These preparations are also work, albeit of another kind. In this respect, the children seem to view themselves almost as human capital that can be projected to pay off in the near future (Persson 2003). Herein, the children

101 During my fieldwork, I met children who thought that school was boring and some of them skipped class from time to time. Examples of children describing this can be found in both the interviews and in the time diaries. Children in grade 7, 8 and 9 described this. Despite this, I would still argue that, overall, the children in both the communities acknowledge the need for education in ensuring a good future life. Skipping school does not necessarily mean that you do not agree that education, in a wider sense, is important for your future life. Just as an individual’s physical presence in the school building cannot be taken as a sign of his or her interest in education in a wider sense or even in the schoolwork as such (Berggren 2001; Jonsson 2007; Persson 2003; Willis 1999).

102 My translation from original Swedish. The term Persson (2003:88) uses is “utbildningsberoende”.

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share some of the perspectives put forward by some scholars (e.g., Mayall 2002; Qvortrup 2000, 2001; Wintersberger 2000, 2005). Moreover, they may possibly reflect the changed ideas about the individual and learning that are sometimes put forward in our late modern society (Giddens 1991; see also Kampmann 2004; Kryger 2004; Lee 2001). Herein, the individual is presented as flexible, reflexive, constantly learning and as ”an entrepreneur of himself” (Kryger 2004:157), designing his or her own future (Beck 1997; Giddens 1991). I will return to this in the next chapter.

Concluding Remarks

This chapter began with a discussion of why school is work. Activities similar to the work children are doing in the job and the domestic arena can be found in school. Moreover, the children’s school attendance has similarities to what adults do at their job every day. However, according to the children, the primary reason why school is work is that children do not do anything else and because school is the only thing that matters.

School is compulsory in Sweden, and the children spend a considerable amount of time educating themselves in school. Moreover, the children often have a great deal of homework, in the evenings and at weekends, and this further extends the school day. Furthermore, the children take part in non-school initiated learning activities during evenings and weekends. Taking this aspect of time consumption into account, it is easy to understand why the children can have the feeling that school is the only thing they do. As I show, the notion of school as the children’s most or only important activity is strengthened by the way in which the educational system is constructed. The organization of the educational system and school help to order life in a temporal and age-bound passage from child to adult. As we have seen, the roots of the children’s notion of school as their work – as important work in their passage from children to adults and important work for their future work – can be found in the educational system, as well as in the way they are positioned in this system.

The children argue that both the adult teacher and the children work
in school. They do make a distinction, however, between the kinds of work adults and children undertake. I show in the chapter how we can trace some of the children’s descriptions of themselves as both different and the same as the adult worker back to the educational system. The educational system’s teacher-pupil relationship is built up as a professional-client relationship. A strong feature of this kind of relationship is that the professional helps other people in his or her work. The client might be working, but the activity done by the client is only done to help him- or herself. The children adhere to this difference in their description of the difference between the teachers’ and the pupils’ work. At the same time, the educational system teaches pupils that they and adults are equals. The idea of “the competent child” was introduced in schools in the Nordic countries during the late 20th century. In this idea of the child, children’s abilities and competence are put forward and children’s role in their own learning process is highlighted. One consequence of introduction of the idea of “the competent child” is that the relationship between pupils and teachers and between children and adults in general has become more equalized.
Spare Time Activities as Work

In the former chapter, I showed how the children made a connection between learning and work and how they described their education as work. I also showed how they extended the education part of their everyday life well beyond school and how learning in a broad sense occupies most of their days. I will continue this analysis in the present chapter where the focus will be on children’s spare time activities. Several children reported that their spare time activities were their work and I analyse why this is the case in the present chapter. The children’s spare time activities often contain aspects of learning and appear to be part of a general preparation for the future.

Reinterpretations

During my fieldwork, I asked children in grades four and five to write essays and draw pictures on the topic “my work is”, and to draw pictures of themselves doing their work. I explained that I wanted to know what they are doing when they are not in school. The children seemed to feel unclear about what they were expected to draw and write about. In some cases, this hesitation can be detected in the essays. For example, two Ekköping boys in the fourth grade wrote that, “Fishing might not be work but it is a sport, a very peaceful sport” and “I build with Lego quite a lot but maybe that doesn’t count as a job”.

As mentioned in the method section, several children in the fourth grade in both Ekköping and Vikåsa had questions during the essay writing
sessions. When they asked me what to write and draw, I always repeated the aim of my research project and underlined the focus on work. Some children mentioned various spare time activities, such as football, fishing, jumping on a trampoline and so on. I clarified that they could and should use these examples if they thought that that was their work. Sometimes, if one of the children really had problems getting started, I tried to give them some examples of things that they might do in their everyday life like cleaning, doing the dishes, selling Christmas magazines, collecting bottles to return for money, or selling lottery tickets. I did this to get them thinking a bit more about what I, at that time, would have categorized as work. One might think that this intervention on my part could have negatively impeded the children’s creativity. The risk might be that this could influence their drawing or writing, resulting in essays and drawings depicting only the things I mentioned. However, this was, I would claim, not the case.

The children’s essays and drawings give vivid illustrations of an everyday life (outside school) that is filled with many different spare time activities. Some of the essays and drawings contain descriptions of activities that are in line with those that I mentioned to some of the children when they had problems getting started. The children may have picked up these examples from me. However, more often the essays and drawings contain descriptions of activities that I might not have considered as work when I began my fieldwork. The fourth and fifth graders described, for example, how they, in the evenings and at weekends, usually go biking, play computer games, play game-boy, play in the forest, build tree-huts, do motor-cross, have parties, play football, play hand ball, read, draw, attend the scouts and go horse riding.

But why are these kinds of spare time activities work? As we could see already in the previous chapter, the children in Ekköping and Vikåsa use two concurrent definitions when they describe their own activities as work. On the one hand, they use a broadened work concept, a concept where many different activities are included under the heading work. On the other hand, the children use definitions well in line with the “folk or lay concept of work” (Wadel 1979:368). Real work is what adults do on the formal labour market, away from home at a workplace. The children’s definitions do not simply mirror these traditional ways of perceiving work. They do not simply repeat the societal discourse on work. Rather, what we
see here is an interpretative reproduction in which the children appropriate, reinvent and reproduce the concept (Corsaro 1997). The children use the traditional work concept, but reinterpret its meaning somewhat. The children use similarities and connections between adults’ jobs and their own activities. Both groups work, both adults and children. Nevertheless, the children clearly mark their own activities as different from adults’. According to the children, children’s work is less work, more of a hobby, half work or not even real work. On the one hand, the children broaden the traditional work concept and they define children as workers. However, at the same time, I would argue that they devaluate their own work by defining themselves as something other than real workers.

Furthermore, in their broadened work concept, the children do not only include activities from their own everyday life with a close resemblance to adults’ work, such as paid, strenuous, non-voluntary, time-consuming and stressful activities. The children broaden their usage of the term work to include activities undertaken in their reflexive formation of themselves. Parts of their schoolwork and other forms of learning fit in here. Working then becomes a feature of every human being’s, adults’ as well as children’s, life (cf. Sjöberg 1996).

I am arguing that the children’s spare time activities, displayed in this chapter, contain examples of both these two forms of work. The aim of this chapter is to discuss why the children perceive these spare time activities as work and to outline what this tells us about childhood.

**Why is this Work?**

So then, why are spare time activities like biking, playing computer games, playing game-boy, playing in the forest, building tree-huts, doing motor-cross, having parties, playing football, playing hand ball, reading, drawing, attending the scouts and going horse riding work? Is the time factor important? Children in both Ekköping and Vikåsa take part in two or more organized spare time activities every week. One Ekköping girl in the fifth grade concludes that:
In my spare time, I play football, handball and take part in athletics. I think it’s fun. When I have time over, I also hang out with friends. But I don’t have so much time left over since I practice every day except Friday and Saturday.

Hence, finding time for hanging out with friends, the family or doing homework can be hard given the children’s schedule. Taking part in all these organized spare time activities and at the same time taking care of schoolwork seems, as we could see in the previous chapter, to demand a high level of time management. But this time pressure does not seem to be so important when explaining why these spare time activities are work.

As discussed in a previous chapter, payment of a salary in the form of money and the fact that something is considered a profession are common determinants when defining work in today’s Swedish society. According to this definition, work is simply activities you get paid money for doing. Some of the children used similar ways of reasoning to explain why their spare time activities were work.

Four Ekköping girls in the sixth grade had taken a number of pictures that at first sight might give the impression of merely depicting non-work activities. When going through the pictures in an interview with the four girls, this turned out to be only partially the case. The girls singled out two pictures as non-work without any further discussion. One of these depicted a karaoke machine and the other one showed one of the girls sitting on her bed reading a book. One picture of a girl playing tennis was also sorted out, quite quickly, as being “more of a hobby”. Other photos, however, were discussed more thoroughly and were defined by the girls as pictures of work. Wera, one of these girls, had taken two pictures from her boxing class. One of the pictures depicts her doing sit-ups on the floor of a boxing hall. The other picture shows Wera and another person in the boxing ring, wearing boxing gloves, tooth protection and headgear, ready to fight.

Tobias: As I mentioned before, this project should be about work, what you do outside school and if you work some at home and so on. What were you thinking when you took the pictures, like Wera here for example? Is this your work?
Wera: Yes [hesitating], you can earn money at this so I figured I could take pictures of it, boxing.
Tobias: You can make money boxing?
Wera: There are some people who do that yeah.
Tobias: Yeah?
Wera: Yeah.

As mentioned, the girls’ photos included activities that could be interpreted as both work and non-work. Some activities were explained as hobbies. When I asked what the difference is between hobby and work, Wera explained to me that “You don’t earn money on hobbies, you earn money if you work, you know”. Wera never mentioned that she earns money boxing. But did, nevertheless, although somewhat hesitantly, argue that her boxing is work, and it is work because you can earn money doing it and some people box for a living. Being a boxer is their profession. Money being earned is put forward as the dividing line between a hobby and work. It is not clear here whether Wera’s boxing is considered work at present, if she earns money from boxing, or if she only uses her boxing as an example of something that could potentially develop into work in the form of a future professional wage-earning career.\(^{103}\) It is clear that it is boxing’s connection to an actual wage-earning labour market that turns it into work.\(^{104}\)

One aspect that might make it hard to interpret, or even accept, a boxing activity as the one mentioned above as work is the fact that it seems to be something done just for fun. The four Ekköping girls in the sixth grade used the concept “more of a hobby” when defining an activity as non-work. A common perception seems to be that, when something is fun, it often seems to be categorized as play, at least when children are involved (James et al. 1998; Punch 2003). In addition, according to the same common sense view, play is the opposite of work (Johansson 2005; Strandell 2007). However as, Wera explained, some people do get paid to do this fun activity. In this description, the children thus challenge this dichotomy.

\(^{103}\) During my fieldwork in Ekköping, I heard about children who were being paid in kind as well as in cash for doing sports. One such group was sixteen-year-olds who played football for the local football club and were members of the teams A-squad. According to my sources, the players who were in the A- or the B-squad got shoes and equipment for free. Furthermore, those playing for the A-squad also received 1000 SEK for every game the team won.

\(^{104}\) Notable is that the girls sorted out the photos of a girl playing tennis as non-work. I would argue that also this activity could have a connection to an actual wage-earning labour market.
Ronco and Peattie (1988:716) argue that, “Work may be distinguished from leisure or hobby as being an activity that appears to be a burdensome necessity”. In the children’s descriptions, we find several examples of spare time activities that contain aspects of necessity and are very time-consuming. For example, horse riding and spending time in the stable were mentioned as popular spare time activities among the children in both Ekköping and Vikåsa. The riding clubs around Ekköping and Vikåsa, which the children in this study attended, all have riding school employees who take care of the daily business at the riding school. However, the riding schools need functionaries when they arrange competitions and they then ask riding school members to volunteer. The riding schools also organize maintenance days, where all their members are asked to come and help out. The members also arrange pony riding from time to time at the riding school. Moreover, the youth section of the Ekköping riding school runs a disco once a month, with the assistance of some adults who help out as guards on disco nights, the proceeds of which go to the riding school.

The girls working at the riding schools mentioned that they do this work because it is fun. They also mentioned that many children are happy when participating in these activities, that they often get a great deal of positive response and that their work creates a positive group feeling. The girls like to have the responsibility because that means, as one of the girls at the Ekköping riding school put it, that “you grow quite a lot. I mean, it’s pretty obvious with the ones coming here for the first time. They grow a lot themselves because it is a good experience”. The girls are not working at the riding school for money. The feeling that it is fun, the great friendship among the girls and the personal growth from experiencing the responsibility appear to be payment enough for the girls at the riding schools (cf. Ingenhorst 2001; Ivernizzi 2007; McKechnie and Hobbs 2007).

Moreover, girls working at the riding schools in both Ekköping and

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105 Horse riding and spending time in the stable are activities undertaken by children of all different ages in the two communities. However, even if there was one boy who stated that he takes part in horse riding, overall it seems to be an activity mostly done by girls.
Vikåsa explained that most of them are at the riding school every day of the week. Hence, even if the spare time activities often are voluntary, most of these girls claimed that the amount of time they put in at the riding school leaves them with no time left to invest in other spare time activities. I asked some girls at the Ekköping riding school if they thought their engagement there was work or more of a hobby. The girls argued that it had started as a hobby, but explained that they thought it easily turns into work with all the activities and their high level of involvement. Here, the girls used a quantitative argument. Moreover, they implied that it is the fact that the activity takes a lot of time and fills up one’s schedule, which can be stressful, that gives this particular spare time activity the status of work. Näsman and von Gerber (2003) report similar arguments in a study on children in the economic arena. According to Näsman and von Gerber, 14- to 16-year-olds in Sweden argue that time use is an important aspect defining an activity as work. However, the 14- to 16-year-olds in Näsman and von Gerber’s (2003) study argue that an activity is work when it impinges, time-wise, on one’s spare time, time that one could have used differently if given the chance to choose. Similar arguments have been discussed in other chapters in the book. In this chapter, we can see that extensive time use can be one determinant defining why a spare time activity is work. Still, this does not mean, as opposed to what the children claimed in Näsman and von Gerber’s study, that the spare time activity loses its spare time activity status. Rather, spare time activities can be work.

The girls presented several incentives explaining why they are active at the riding schools, but why are the things they are doing there work? As Hedenborg (2006) suggests, the girls’ activities in the stable, with the animals, are in some ways reminiscent of care work undertaken in other arenas, where human beings are in focus. A lot of the work at the riding schools has to be done daily, throughout the year. In an interview with Sally, a Vikåsa girl in the ninth grade, she mentioned as explanations for why her activities at the riding school are work the routine aspect of these activities and the fact that they are necessary. Her activities need to be done to make the daily running of the riding schools go smoothly. Additionally, they are needed to prevent the animals from dying or suffering. In this way, the children seem to play an important role in the running of these associations. The individual children, as mentioned, do not
receive any money for their work, but their work appears to be needed. If they did not do the chores, someone else would have to – someone who perhaps would have to be paid to do the same chore (cf. Hedenborg 2006; Hungerland et al. 2005; Hungerland 2007; Schildkrout 1981; Solberg 1994). The children’s activities at the riding school are unpaid, absolutely necessary, and take a great deal of time. At the same time, they are fun and include aspects that increase the individual’s self-confidence. The children’s activities are a necessity, for the animals, for the associations and perhaps also for the individuals’ well-being. Nevertheless, the activities appear to be more fun than burdensome. So where does this leave us in the work vs. leisure distinction? Before closing this discussion, I would like to give one more example to add another level of complexity and to outline further the difficulty of making a clear distinction between work and leisure. Let us take a look at the spare time activity of football.

Football was discussed in several interviews. Sometimes I brought it up, and sometimes the children did. Football was one of the most common spare time activities among the children in both Ekköping and Vikåsa. Some children considered football to be work, others did not. The children who did not see football as work argued that football is something that you do because it is fun. In these discussions, I brought up professional football players and mentioned David Beckham and Henrik Larsson as examples of people who are paid to play and who actually play football for a living.¹⁰⁶ On some occasions, I asked the children what the difference is between these adult players and the children who often even have to pay a membership fee to practice and play football several times a week. Several children raised the question of quality; they mentioned that adult players play football better than children do and argued that this is why they are paid. Furthermore, the children agreed that being a football player could be a profession, and did say that it might be work if you do it full-time and make money playing.

Nonetheless, the children still disagreed about football being work because it is fun, no matter who the player is, an adult or a child. After reflecting a while in the interview, some children expressed that they actually found it a bit strange that adults sometimes get paid for doing their

¹⁰⁶ Beckham and Larsson are two male football players, who when these interviews were conducted both played professionally in the Spanish league. The Englishman David Beckham played in Real Madrid and the Swede Henrik Larsson in FC Barcelona.
hobby. Nevertheless, some of the children argued that football might be more like work when one grows older and starts training more often. For example, Carin, an Ekköping girl in the sixth grade and an active football player in the Ekköping Football Club, argued that football can “almost” be like a work when you grow up and play on better teams, but not when you are young. The fact that it becomes more like work when one grows older could imply that age is of importance when defining why football is work, but that seems to be of lesser importance here. Rather, the strenuous aspects of the football activity, the physical training and the practice, seem to be of importance in trying to clarify why football is or is not work. This became obvious in an interview with Leo, Nils and Sven, three Ekköping boys in the sixth grade. Leo, Nils, Sven and I discussed whether going to a disco could be viewed as work and the possible differences between going to a disco and playing football. All these boys thought that discos are only for having fun and amusement. Football, however, is more work than going to a disco, because, as Nils explained, “Football then you practice maybe, well, Monday, Tuesday. And then you have a game sometime in the weekend. Disco is only two, three times a year”. Again, we can see that the children use a quantitative aspect in their explanation. The time aspect, how often something is done, thus seems important when making distinctions between various activities, clarifying why one activity is (more) work (than another activity) (cf. Näsman and von Gerber 2003). Work is a recurring strenuous activity. But is every recurring strenuous activity work? Not necessarily.

**Perspectives**

I argue that we are dealing with two problems here. One problem is the perspective. The other problem is how we interpret the concept of work. If we start with the perspective, activities interpreted as hobbies, play and fun from one person’s point of view might not be viewed as such from another person’s perspective. There may be a difference in perspective between adults and children, but also between various people in these larger
groupings, between children and children and between adults and adults. This was pointed out to me in an interview with one Ekköping boy in the seventh grade. This boy, Kenny, had missed the occasion when I handed out the disposable cameras. However, he still wanted to participate in that part of the research project. To make this possible, he went out and bought his own disposable camera, photographed his spare time activities and handed me the finished film. Kenny and two other seventh graders, one boy and one girl, sat down in an interview with me and went through his pictures. The pictures were, as Kenny himself concluded, “only of one thing”. All the photos pictured Kenny and his friends riding bicycles on a BMX trail. The father of one of Kenny’s friends owned a construction company and he had used the company machines to help the children build the trail. The children, however, had taken part in the digging and shovelling to some extent, and they had designed the trail and made the plans themselves. To explain his choice of motif Kenny said, “I thought that, we have built the jump and so. So it’s a spare time thing. And many here want to become professional BMX riders”. The other children in this interview were a bit sceptical about this activity being work; they claimed it was more fun than work. Kenny however, claimed that:

Kenny: I don’t think it is fun to build and build jumps. It is boring.
You get dirty and it’s hard work.
Märta: But it is fun to bike!
Kenny: Yeah!
Tobias: Why do you, do you think that this is work then?
Kenny: Yes. Or like, in one way it is work, but.
Tobias: Yeah, in what way?
Kenny: Well yeah. You learn. We had like. A friend and I had made the plans and so, for this. And we got, his father helped us build it with the excavator. But we also took part building it. I think it is work in one way, and my spare time hobby in another way.
Tobias: How do you know what the difference is?
Kenny: Yeah, because. How do you know that? Yeah, that one I can’t answer.

In this excerpt, we can see that the difference between work and spare time hobby is far from clear-cut. Rather, the same activity involves elements of both. Biking, Kenny admits, is fun, but building the BMX trail was hard work and they got dirty doing it. That is no fun. Kenny thinks that this is
work, but he has problems explaining why. This hesitancy does not mean that he is not sure or that we cannot be certain if Kenny really thinks this is work. I argue that what we see here is the difference between practical and discursive consciousness (Giddens 1984). Kenny knew what he was photographing when he was doing it, but to have to explain and explicate why this is work in words to me is more difficult.

What is clear from Kenny’s descriptions is that the distinction between something fun and something boring is of importance when trying to define whether something is work or not. The two other children’s hesitancy in regard to whether this is work, as well as Kenny’s explanation of why this is work, is connected to the element of enjoyment, or rather the lack thereof. Kenny mentions that it was hard work and boring to build the trail and underlines the connection to a future profession as a professional BMX biker, when explaining why this spare time activity is work. We can also see that Kenny mentions the learning aspect when trying to explain to me why this is work. Similar ideas were also put forward in other interviews. For example, three Ekköping boys in the sixth grade, Leo, Nils and Sven, explained to me, in a discussion of a photo depicting a bicycle, that biking is work because, as Leo put it, “You learn a lot” and because, as Nils clarified, “You learn a little bit about how to behave in traffic”. In these examples, we are dealing with an informal type of learning. However, as we will see below, a great part of the children’s spare time activities contain aspects of learning, learning that takes place in more formalized settings.

Redefining Work

When discussing the Ekköping girl Wera’s boxing activity above, I mentioned that it might be hard to interpret or even accept this activity as work because it seems to be something done just for fun. Repeating somewhat, I also mentioned that an activity that is fun in a common sense framework is often categorized as play, at least when children are involved. I also mentioned that play in a common sense framework is perceived to be
the opposite of work. I argued, above, that we are dealing with two problems here. One was the question of perspective, which was discussed at length in the example of the Ekköping boy Kenny and his BMX track. The other part of the problem is of course how we interpret the concept of work. Can work be fun? Yvonne, Jasmine and Ralf, two girls and one boy in the ninth grade in Vikåsa, claimed that it can be.

Tobias: What are the pictures? What is it that you planned to take a photo of?
Yvonne: This is when I am loading the dishwasher. I think that’s hard work anyway. Especially when you are forced to do it.
Ralf: Yeah, exactly
Tobias: And that’s the way it is or?
Yvonne: Yeah, that’s the way it is sometimes!
Ralf: This is. I don’t really think this is. It is work, but it is fun work. No one said that work has to be boring, actually.
Yvonne: Yes, and that’s Ralf when he is doing his acting at the theatre.
Ralf: Yes, exactly.
Jasmine: Yeah, this is either me or maybe this is me when I study at Gudrun’s place with her. But she is not here today.
Tobias: No. But these are three pretty different things [acting, loading the dishwasher and studying]. Like you said, it can be hard work to empty the dishwasher.
Jasmine: Yeah.
Tobias: But is it work?
Jasmine: Yeah. Because it is something that has to be done. That you don’t want to do. That turns it into work.
Tobias: Yeah?
Jasmine: Probably. That’s my opinion.
Tobias: Is that how you decide what is work and what is not work, that it is maybe boring or?
Jasmine: Noo, noo.
Ralf: Noo.
Jasmine: It varies.
Ralf: I take this [his acting class] in a way as work, but it is work that I have chosen myself, that I don’t get anything for except the possibility to be there. But I figure that’s enough reward because I get to be there and act.
Tobias: But it is not hard work?
Ralf: No, its not hard work but it is still work. Because you have to work and learn stuff and study to be able to do it and all that. And practice.
When going through the pictures with these three ninth graders, they both strengthen and weaken the distinctions made by the children in the rest of the interviews. They mention that some activities may be hard work and that you do not want to do them. Both these aspects turn the activities into work. However, Ralf also emphasizes that work does not have to be boring. When discussing his acting, he mentions that he has chosen to take part in this himself; that he likes it and that he really does not get any reward for being there except the pleasure of taking part. Despite this, he still argues that it can be viewed as work “in a way” because you have to work there, learn, practice and study to be able to take part. This repetitive learning part of the activity is, thus, what turns the activity into work. As can be seen in the excerpt, I asked the children to compare three different everyday life activities: acting, loading the dishwasher and studying. From their answers, we can draw the conclusion that none of these activities has to be work. Loading the dishwasher is, according to the children, something that has to be done, and that turns it into work. This is, however, not an absolute or fixed way of defining the meaning of work. When I tried to imply this and put forward my interpretation, they all disagreed. Rather, the children were quite definite in their opinion that the meaning of work varies.

Work can thus be fun (Ronco and Peattie 1988). Many would probably agree with this. I myself often enjoy my work. However, I am not so sure whether everyone would agree that “having fun” is work. During an interview with Helen, Majken, Sanjie, Boris and Micke, five Vikåsa children, three girls and two boys in the seventh grade, we were going through the photos they had taken when some pictures of people playing cards appeared. I asked:

Tobias: What is that?
Sanjie: Someone is playing poker.
Boris: Poker.
Tobias: Is that in school or home?
Boris: Yeah.
Majken: That’s not poker.
Boris: Yeah, of course it is poker.
Majken: Oh my God that’s stupid. But wait, yeah that’s right. There’s the pile. I thought that was the flop-pile. I just, you’re stupid!
Tobias: And that’s work?
Helen: Yeah, or Xxx.
Majken: Yeah, that’s work.
Helen: But children’s work, that is to have fun every day, isn’t it
Xxx?
Majken: To be with friends.

[Later on in the interview.]

Tobias: This picture of a TV set, who has taken that one?
Boris: I did.
Majken: He did!
Helen: That’s my job. That’s my job you know.
Tobias: That is your job?
Helen: Yeah, it really is.
Tobias: Tell us a little about your job, what does a normal workday
look like?
Helen: It looks like.
Sanjie: Watching TV.
Helen: You know, you come home. You do what your mother tells
you. So the first thing you do when you are free is to go and sit down
by the TV.

This did not really fit into my previous understanding and I was at first
somewhat surprised by these children’s categorization of the poker game as
work. However, Helen and Majken’s explanation that “children’s work,
that is to have fun every day” and “To be with friends” made the statement
immediately make somewhat more sense to me. One could of course argue
that their answers do not make sense and that the children are not really
talking about work at all. If we decide that the answers are not about work,
then what are they about? They could constitute a protest from the children –
a reaction to a research project they think is stupid. What appear to be
unserious and absurd claims, e.g. that children’s work is “to have fun every
day” and “to be with friends” and that playing poker is work and watching
TV a job, could be absurd reactions to absurd questions and an absurd
research project. Their photo, and their interpretation of the photo as well
as their answer, all lacking signs of what we usually expect when we think
and talk about work, could be a result of the fact that they really do not
undertake anything they consider to be work. Maybe the answers should
rather be interpreted as the children’s attempt to poke fun at the interview
and at me as a researcher, and as an adult. My comment, asking Helen to
describe a normal workday in front of the TV, could be seen as my playing
along, as if I have understood that this cannot possibly be a sincere answer. Then again, are the children perhaps seriously trying to answer the questions? They do not think that they work so they cannot answer questions about that. Instead of talking about something that they do not do, they talk about things that they know something about; they mention activities in which they actually do take part.

Yet another explanation could be that Helen’s, Majken’s and Sanjie’s statements are attempts to position themselves as a non-version of “the good girl”. Throughout the book, I have shown that the children’s parents demand and try to bring out different forms of “good” behaviour in them. The children have to attend school, they have to do well in school, they have to do what the parents tell them and they generally have to “be good”. In their portrayal of themselves, which we see in the last excerpts, the children present themselves somewhat differently. Here, they portray themselves as individuals who hang out, having fun with their friends. To be sure, they may do what their mother tells them, but not more than that. When given the chance, they are un-ambitious, irresponsible, lazy, and sitting in front of the TV. Their parents are of course not physically present during the interview, but the statements may be a reflection of an ongoing power struggle (Närvänen and Näsman 2007; see also Pripp 1999). This description may be the children’s way of trying to retreat from an unwanted position and trying to defy parental attempts at socialization (Hockey and James 1993). The comments may also be a positioning in regard to their friends who are also taking part in the interview. There could be a contradiction between the good pupil, the good child and the good girl, who helps her parents, and the “cool” person, who is a lazy slacker and does as little as possible at home (cf. Jonsson 2007). The girls’ attempts to position themselves as irresponsible and “cool” in the interview may be part of this ongoing positioning between the children and their parents, and among the children.

All these explanations may very well be true, but what if we were to take the children’s answers seriously, as if they were really describing work. There are people in our society who watch TV for a living – TV critics. Similarly there are people who play poker for a living. Particularly Net-poker has grown substantively during the past 10 years. Both these professions are, however, mostly undertaken by adults. Are these children’s activities work because there is a connection to activities undertaken by
some adults who make a living at them? Another possible explanation may be found in the way we view the concepts of children, work and, consequently, childhood. James, Jenks and Prout (1998:90) argue that:

Along the historical trajectory of Western societies the binarism of the work/play distinction became progressively mapped on the adult/child dichotomy, both symptom and cause of the growing conceptual and practical separation between the social worlds of adults and children.

Over time, these social categorizations have been transformed into what could almost be seen as a natural order. James, Jenks and Prout (1998:91) argue that “play became the prerogative of children and work that of adults” through various changes in society (see also Hengst and Zeiher 2000). Thus, adults go to their job to work. That activity is their prerogative in life. Children play. That activity is their prerogative in life. As I showed in the beginning of the book, adults often argue that work is what adults do. Childhood is then, according to this logic, depicted as a time free from work, as a time when children spend their days playing and enjoying themselves (Qvortrup 1994b). I am not arguing that there is anything wrong with children playing; rather I am trying to use the dichotomy as part of my interpretation.

In some of the previous chapters, I have mentioned that the children did not consider themselves as real workers who do real work, because adults are the ones doing real work; they are the real workers. Moreover, I have previously mentioned Pripp’s (1999) ideas about rounding up. I used Pripp’s concept to illustrate how various societal notions of children and childhood – put forward by authorities, the media, researchers and, of course, parents and adults in general – serve to round children up and constrain them. As members of Swedish society and part of its cultural routine, the Ekköping and Vikåsa children relate to and use these societal notions of children and childhood, projected on them as children by the surrounding society, when presenting themselves and their activities to a researcher. I mentioned when discussing this previously that, given this, the children’s answers may just as well be a comment on these societal notions as a reply to the question I had posed. Now, let us return to the two Vikåsa girls in the seventh grade, Helen and Majken. They argued that “children’s work, that is to have fun every day” and “to be with friends”. Could it be that the children are using the concept of work as a synonym for their
prerogative, the activity their group, children, are supposed to engage in all day long? The children seem to use the concept of work as a synonym for “the thing” you are supposed to do all day, or perhaps rather “the thing” you actually do all day.

As I have shown in the previous chapters, the majority of the children I met in Ekköping and Vikåsa did in fact take part in work activities in the domestic and school arena. Quite a few of them also did work in the job arena. Given this, very few of them actually spend all their days “only” having fun with their friends. The Vikåsa girls Helen and Majken could of course be the exceptions. Their statement here implies that they hang out with their friends, having fun all day long. However, if we go back to other statements made by these two girls in the interviews, we see another picture. In their descriptions, Helen’s and Majken’s everyday life seems to be filled with many activities other than just relaxing and having fun with their friends. Given this, the comments the children make here do not seem to be so much about their actual everyday practice, what they are actually doing day-to-day. Rather their comments seem to be in line with one of the general notions of children, in which children are and should be non-productive and in which childhood is and should be a time of play, a time free from responsibilities (Ennew 1986; Hungerland 2007). The answers thus reflect both how the children are used to being identified and how they identify themselves.

**Spare Time Activities as Learning**

As I mentioned in Chapter 6, the children broaden, or rather redefine, the work concept to include their educational activities. In this way, school and learning in general are included under the general work concept. The children spend 5-7 hours in the school institution during weekdays, but the learning does not end when they leave school for the day. Some of the Vikåsa children spend part of their spare time at a culture school in the community next to Vikåsa. In Vikåsa, as well as in Ekköping, several children mentioned singing and dancing as their favourite spare time
activities in their questionnaires, and one Vikåsa girl in the ninth grade mentioned that she likes to act in musicals. In line with this, a Vikåsa boy in the ninth grade mentioned in his questionnaire that he likes to do role-playing and to act in the theatre. There also seems to be a large proportion of children who play instruments such as the flute, piano and guitar. These are all spare time activities with a focus on learning.

In the interviews, the children described the above activities as fun. But that does not mean that these activities are not work. Lena, a Vikåsa girl in the sixth grade, explained to me that the activities, for example her dance class, involve a great deal of training and practice to get things right, to learn all the difficult moves. The dance class often puts on shows for various audiences and practices particularly intensely prior to such events. Thus, even if the activities are fun and something the children want to do, and have themselves chosen to do, they contain various work-like elements. One Ekköping girl in the fourth grade writes that:

Sundays I go to dance class. So does my best friend. It is quite hard. Sometimes we do fitness training. Then it is hard. One time we did Hip-hop and another time Salsa. Our dance is a lot of fun to do. Because you get to learn new steps.

Another example of this could be learning to play an instrument in one’s spare time. This spare time activity is also work according to some of the children because, as Leo, an Ekköping boy in the sixth grade put it, “you get homework and all that”. Moreover, when discussing these activities, some of the children mentioned that they, at least partly, nurture a dream of being discovered, of being spotted by a talent scout while performing. Thus, their spare time activity, even if it is mostly for fun, extends into a possible future in which the fun turns into a profession.

When examining the children’s general spare time activity patterns, it is interesting to note that many of their spare time activities outside school are organized by various associations. Moreover, it is notable that many of the children in both Ekköping and Vikåsa seem to spend a considerable part of their spare time in formal learning environments. After the compulsory school day is finished, they take part in voluntary extracurricular activities where they are taught skills that are not taught in school. This, I argue, is an extension of their education. Nilsson (2000) argues that, in some areas, spare time activities have
begun to serve as informal vocational training. Nilsson claims that these learning activities undertaken during a person’s spare time help blur the clear division between education and spare time as well as between working life and spare time. In the world of today, Nilsson argues, popular professions in sports, music, computer businesses and fashion require knowledge that you cannot acquire through traditional education. This has to be picked up elsewhere, outside school (Nilsson 2000). In this way, we can see connections to the Ekköping and Vikåsa children’s description of work, learning and spare time as being intermixed. It is, however, questionable how many of the children in Ekköping and Vikåsa really take part in their spare time activity with the purpose of qualifying or preparing for a future professional life in the field of dance, music, sports or the theatre.¹⁰⁷

I have highlighted some examples where children mention a connection to a future professional life in the same area as their spare time activities, but I have no real numbers on how many of the children in the present study would claim that this is why they are taking part in their activities. Interesting statistics, however, can be found in a 2005 nationwide, quantitative study on 13- to 20-year-olds in Sweden and their connections to sports associations (Trondman 2005). Trondman reports that only 14 percent of 13- to 20-year-olds take part in activities in sports associations with the goal of becoming an international top athlete, and no more than 11 percent have the goal to become one of the best in Sweden. This total of 25 percent should be compared with the 3 percent who take part in activities in sports associations because they have nothing else to do, and with the majority, the 55 percent who take part in activities in sports

¹⁰⁷ One reason for taking part in these activities could be that the children simply want to please their parents (Qvortrup 1994b). In the present study, I have shown that many children want to be nice to their parents. Moreover, the children’s participation might not at all be a result of their individual active choices. Rather, it could be an effect of societal structures. From a societal and a parental point of view, children’s participation in various after-school activities might simply be a way to create possibilities for parents to work on the formal labour market for another couple of hours or to simply create time for the parents to attend other engagements. In this way, these activities could be perceived as an extension of childcare (Qvortrup 1994b).
associations because they think it is fun to do sports (Trondman 2005).\textsuperscript{108} Thus, the majority, 58 percent, of 13- to 20-year-olds seem to have reasons other than a professional career in mind when engaging in sports activities. One of course has to be careful when comparing the results of two different investigations such as this.\textsuperscript{109} I would nonetheless argue that the numbers in Trondman’s investigation may give us a hint of a possible tendency in Ekköping and Vikåsa as well. In general, it could be argued that the Ekköping and Vikåsa children do not take part in a sports activity as a part of their career planning.

\section*{Identity Work}

The fact that the children from Ekköping and Vikåsa do not take part in a sports activity as part of their career planning does not mean that they are not taking part with their future in mind. Participation in the activities may not be undertaken with a specific profession in mind. However, I would argue that the activities are undertaken as part of a future-oriented project, in which the children, their parents and the society at large are colonizing the future (Giddens 1991).

The ideas surrounding the colonization of the future, as I mentioned in Chapter 6, go back to Giddens’ theories of modernity.\textsuperscript{110} Giddens’ conception of modernity roughly refers to the industrialized world and the

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\textsuperscript{108} Trondman (2005) also stresses that there is a difference between boys and girls regarding why they take part in sports activities. Trondman reports that 62 percent of the girls and only 40 percent of the boys take part in sports activities because it is fun. Conversely, 32 percent of the boys take part in sport activities because they want to become an international or national top athlete, compared to only 19 percent of the girls.\textsuperscript{109} It is not certain that the children in Ekköping and Vikåsa are referring to becoming a top athlete in the world or in the country when aspiring for a future professional sports career. Similarly, it is not certain that the young persons in Trondman’s study are planning to have their sports activity as a profession, even if they plan to become an international or national top athlete. Being an international, or national top athlete does not always mean that you can make a living by being an athlete. Moreover, Trondman’s study does not say anything about spare time activities outside the field of sports.\textsuperscript{110} Similar ideas on modernity have also been presented by Beck (1997).
\end{flushright}
specific social forms, institutions and social relations that have emerged from it. Modernity, Giddens (1991:20) argues, involves three main elements: “Separation of time and space”, “Disembedding mechanisms” and “Institutional reflexivity”. Giddens describes the pre-modern, traditional era as a period in which time and space were linked to one place and in which social relations were placed in a local context. This all changed in modernity. Time is no longer connected to one local place. Time and space have been separated by the introduction of the universal dating system and globally standardized time zones. The disembedding of social institutions was made possible through this. Social relations were lifted out of the local context. New forms of social relations were formed over vast distances. This is sometimes summed up in the concept of globalization, and these processes have been projected even further into the present, the period Giddens refers to as late modernity. All this also affected the traditional notion of knowledge. In traditional, pre-modern societies, individuals’ actions were directed by local traditions and customs. Conversely, in late modernity, individuals are less concerned with the behaviour and ideas prescribed by local tradition and custom. The knowledge gathered by previous generations in the local setting is not used as a guideline for actions in the present. The everyday life is disembedded and takes place in a new form of time-space. Late modernity is, as Giddens (1991:20) puts it, “essentially a post-traditional order”. The knowledge for this new open-ended time-space cannot be found in the local, traditional system. Consequently, individual actions in late modernity require much more and another form of analysis before they are undertaken. To handle this, the level of reflexivity in society must increase. This increased level of reflexivity, however, does not imply that people know more in late modernity, or that people are more certain about how to go about their day-to-day life. Giddens (1991:21) argues that it is quite the opposite, “the reflexivity of modernity actually undermines the certainty of knowledge (...)

Reflexivity is not something undertaken only at an institutional level, but something going on in people’s everyday life. Life in a post-traditional society means a life with very few, or no, set life trajectories. There is an openness of life in post-traditional late modernity, and lifestyle

111 Emphasis in original.
choices are more important than ever (Beck 1997). In this situation, Giddens (1991:5) argues, “Reflexively organised life-planning (…) becomes a central feature of the structuring of self-identity”. The colonialization of the future is one of the effects of this reflexivity (Giddens 1991:111). I mentioned in Chapter 6 how the Swedish school system encourages children to actively plan their present and at least near future day-to-day life by using logbooks. In the logbooks, children, their parents and their teachers can plan, follow and evaluate the children’s learning process as it proceeds. The logbook and the evaluations are used to make decisions about and to plan and direct the individual child’s learning process, educational and inevitably vocational career. In this way, the school institution not only urges children’s reflexive process in the present and future, but also portrays children as agents in the shaping of their own future (Kampmann 2004). The future is drawn into the present. In their life planning for an expected and presumed future, children do not only make themselves ready for the future. What is more, through their planning, they carve out the very future they are planning for (Giddens 1991). In a process of “duality of structure”, this, in turn, feeds back to and constrains and structures the children’s further activities (Giddens 1979, 1984). This underlines the notion that structure is “both constraining and enabling” (Giddens 1984:25).

During the past few years, “employability” has been a reoccurring term in the Swedish public debate on higher education. This debate is a consequence of adaptation to the Bologna system, a harmonized university system of which a large group of the European states are part. In this system, the quality of educational programmes is discussed in terms of employability. Consequently, one could argue, as Liedman (2007) suggests, that the aim of education has changed. The goal of education is not necessarily to learn specific skills or to acquire certain knowledge, it is to become employable. This has consequences also with respect to the individual. It is not enough to have an education. Employability is an ongoing process in which the individual has to try to be an entrepreneur and a good salesperson, selling him- or herself on a changing labour market to potential employers.

It is here, in the choice of lifestyles and life planning, that the children’s spare time activities fit in. I mentioned above that the children do not seem to take part in spare time activities as part of their career planning.
Career planning could imply that the children’s activities have one set goal that they fixated at one point in the future, one career that they are striving towards. I do not think this is correct. The different children’s activity patterns appear to be more un-focused. The same child takes part in activities that could lead to many possible careers rather than one. This does not support the idea of one set career. Overall, however, there is one major trend. The majority of the activities can be seen as the children’s investments in their own person. As Giddens (1991) has outlined, in the society of late modernity, self-identity becomes a project that is organized reflexively. These activities can be seen as part of the children’s reflexive process to construct their self-identity. They are not preparing themselves for one particular career. Their participation in many different activities, which point to several potential careers, can rather be an effect of a reflexive process in which they hold the door open for an unknown number of futures, picking up social and cultural capital that they and their parents imagine can be essential to succeeding on the future labour market (Zieher et al. 2007). In this way, they increase their employability.

Several scholars doing research on the phenomenon of children’s work have emphasized that one of the most important parts of children’s work is the fact that the work they undertake causes them to grow. Children are, to quote the title of a research anthology published in 2007, “Working to be someone” (Hungerland et al. 2007b). This is what I argue also in the present study. There is, however, a difference. The researchers in the 2007 anthology use a different approach to the concept of work and thus focus their investigations on a narrower spectrum of activities in children’s lives. In the present study, I let the children’s definitions direct my perception of work. This has resulted in a broader picture of work. When I argue that the children in the present study, too, are working to be somebody, I include activities that are not discussed as work in the 2007 anthology mentioned above. My focus is rather on activities that would “normally” be placed outside the traditional labour market and outside a traditional work concept. It is interesting to note that what I argue the children are proposing here is well in line with what has been suggested by, for example, Ziehe (1993). Ziehe argues that young people in the world of today are working while trying out and conquering new identities. This process is not work that creates a product. Given this, it is invisible. Moreover, it is not work according to a dominating societal definition of work. Nevertheless, as
Ziehe (1993:44) argues, it is reasonable to speak about a form of “identity work”\textsuperscript{112}.  

**Concluding Remarks**

The aim of this chapter was to focus on the children’s spare time activities. Several children reported that their spare time activities were their work, and in this chapter, I have outlined further why they think their spare time activities are work.

I showed in the previous chapters that the children use two concurrent definitions of work when they describe their own activities as work. On the one hand, they use a traditional folk or lay definition. On the other hand, they use a broadened work concept in which many different activities are included under the heading work. In the latter work concept, the children even include their reflexive formation of themselves. Part of their schoolwork fits in here, but also other forms of learning that take place outside the school perimeters and learning that is not even initiated by the school. This wide usage of the work concept stretches the concept so that work appears to become a collective name or rather a synonym for the activity you do all day.

Activities falling under both these work definitions can be found in the spare time arena. As I show, activities matching the work the children are doing in the other arenas can also be found in the spare time arena. In the same way, some of the spare time activities done by the children have similarities to what adults do at their job every day. The similarity and connection to jobs done by adults on the formal labour market in paid gainful employment is sometimes used by the children in explaining why a spare time activity is work.

As I show, the idea of spare time activities as work created some discussion among the children. From a societal and/or an adult perspective, children’s fun activities may never be perceived as work. Generally, the

\textsuperscript{112} My translation from Swedish. The term used by Ziehe (1993:44) is “identitetsarbete” in the Swedish translation.
children had another perspective. Various children thought that some spare time activities are more work than others. How often and how well the activity is done and how strenuous the activity is are presented as factors that can be used to measure how much work an activity is. How a spare time activity is interpreted, as merely fun or as more or less work, also goes back, again, to the way we define work.

The children often take part in their spare time activities because they think the activities are fun. The work they do in some spare time environments creates a positive group feeling and friendship. Some children have to take a great deal of responsibility in their activities and the responsibilities help them grow. The children appreciate this. Great parts of the children’s spare time activities contain aspects of learning. The children spend a considerable amount of their spare time in formal learning environments, and spare time activities appear to function as informal vocational training. The children’s activities, as I show in the chapter, are not necessarily focused on one set career. Rather the activities seem to be part of a general future-oriented project. This work is thus a form of identity work – work in which the children are producing themselves so as to become adults and to prepare themselves for the future.
8

Conclusions

In the present study, I have investigated how childhood is constructed in contemporary Sweden. I have explored this by studying children’s work through the participants’ own perspective, a child perspective. I set out to study children’s work in Sweden. However, I argue that in order to study this, we also need to explore what work is. Given this, I have investigated how the children themselves understand the different activities they are involved in during their day-to-day life. I have also studied how they use different categories of work and which of their activities they understand as work and why. Furthermore, I have investigated what incentives the children have for engaging in different types of work.

Childhood and work might be perceived as two unconnected concepts. Work is a concept associated with adulthood. Conversely, childhood, as I have outlined here, is often defined through what seems to be its lack of connection to the productive and useful work taking place on the formal labour market. However, both childhood and work are socially constructed concepts, the meanings of which are neither fixed nor absolute. Rather, the way in which these two concepts are perceived changes from one societal context to another. Given this, I argue that if we bring the concepts of childhood and work together, we can problematize both of them. By focusing on the children and their participation in society as parts of the societal division of labour, by studying their activities and simultaneously investigating their definitions of these activities, we may be able to detect how the concept of work is given diverse meanings by the children in different contexts. This gives new connotations to the concept of work. However, it also explicates the process of negotiation in which childhood is constructed. Thus, by studying children’s work, I argue, we can explore how childhood is constructed in contemporary Sweden. This is what I have done in the present study, and here, in this concluding chapter,
I will summarize and discuss my results.

**Children are Workers**

A number of conclusions can be drawn from the study. The children’s views on work illustrate that work is something more than simply paid, gainful employment. As I have shown, the way we define work is of great importance when trying to outline whether people work and how much. Using a narrow definition of work, the vast majority of children in the present study hardly work at all, and their connection to the labour market is insignificant. However, if we use a broader definition of work, the situation changes. First, a broader definition changes our conception of the labour market. Second, the level of work undertaken by the children increases and the children’s connection to the labour market is strengthened.

In this book, I have mentioned theories of insularization and the idea that the modern childhood takes place hidden away from society in secluded institutions (e.g., Qvortrup 1994a; Zeiher 2003). From a societal perspective, childhood might appear to be taking place in secluded institutions, on isolated islands if you will. However, when we use a child perspective to look at the children’s descriptions of their participation, this picture changes somewhat. As we can see here, the children participate in many different activities in the various arenas presented. Moreover, using the children’s definitions, aspects of work can be found in many different and sometimes even surprising spheres of everyday life. In their opinion, and using their definitions, the children in Ekköping and Vikåsa take part in many different forms of work, formal as well as informal, paid as well as unpaid. Given this, it would seem safe to state that the children are in fact workers.

Overall, the children in Ekköping and Vikåsa seem to have mixed incentives regarding their participation in work, and the incentives change somewhat from arena to arena. In the job arena and to some degree in the domestic arena, money seems to be a major incentive explaining why
children work. Relaxation and the fact that work can be fun were brought up in some interviews as an important incentive for working. The children appear to enjoy and like their work. Some children appear to be working to please their parents, to be nice or because they think it is their moral duty to work and thus help their parents. This is most outspoken in regard to work in the domestic arena. The incentive for doing work in the school and spare time arena appears to be connected to ideas of personal development, being able to become an adult and getting a real job or simply creating possibilities for future prosperity in life. Work in these arenas is also much more a question of learning and identity work and thus of work done for yourself or even work done on yourself. The notion of childhood as an important time of preparation and children as projects with a strong future orientation is laid out in the descriptions of the work in these arenas.

**Children, Childhood and Difference**

The majority of the children in Ekköping and Vikåsa argued that work is a natural and sometimes quite extensive part of their everyday life, and thus a natural part of childhood. However, jobs are another matter. The children were often reluctant to see the connection between themselves, their activities and jobs. Following the children’s argument, a place where jobs are done is not really a place for children. Scholars have argued that children are not fully recognized as social and cultural agents by society when it comes to questions regarding the labour market (de Coninck-Smith et al. 1997; Leonard 2007b). There is a reluctance to acknowledge children’s participation on the traditional, formal labour market. It is notable, then, that this reluctance is not only found among adults. I would claim that it is a reluctance partly shared by children. Regarding participation on the traditional, formal labour market, the children in my study do not recognize how they, as children, have anything to do with jobs. They participate on the labour market, but not in the same way as adults do. Children’s work is not real work.

As I show in the present study, the children seem to have a weak
connection to the formal labour market, the traditional labour market where
adults have their steady, paid jobs. When describing where they work, few
children describe regular jobs and regular workplaces on the formal labour
market, places where adults have their gainful employment. Rather, they
describe places on the fringe of the regular formal labour market; they
mention activities in the domestic arena, the school arena and the spare
time arena. Moreover, they argue that they only help out. This distinction
made by the children may of course be an effect of this spatial difference,
the difference between the place where adults spend their days and where
children spend their days. However, the problem may not be that the
children are carrying out their work activities in the “wrong” place, but
rather that they do not perceive children to be workers. The children make
a distinction between a job, some form of profession and employment
undertaken by adults on the formal labour market, and work, which is a
more diffuse category. The children’s own activities fall into the latter
category, the more diffuse work category. It is interesting, then, that the
children’s descriptions of the category work are not restricted to activities
people undertake in their trained profession. Nor is their description of the
category work restricted to activities undertaken by adults. They do make a
distinction, however, between adults’ real work and children’s work. Here,
the children both reflect and construct the notion of children as non-
workers and/or another kind of worker.

In the children’s way of using the category work, we can see how
they combine different understandings in an attempt to pinpoint the
meaning of a particular activity. The children present a number of
determinants when elucidating why their everyday activities or at least
some aspects of their everyday activities are work. Aspects of place and
time seem to be important when the children define why an activity is
work. Furthermore, an activity can be work if it contains elements of
learning, if you are forced to do it or if it is compulsory, if it demands a
strenuous effort and if there is a similarity between the children’s activity
and the work activities undertaken by adults. In the children’s explanations,
we can see how fluid the category work is. Various activities are presented
as more or less work. Levels of quality and quantity seem to be important
when making these distinctions. We can also see how different activities
blend or are combined.

When the children outline the difference between children,
childhood, adults, and adulthood, they appear to adhere more to “the folk or lay concept of work” (Wadel 1979). We can find examples of this when the children depict what a job is as well as when they describe the difference between the jobs adults do and their own activities. Similar tendencies can be found when the children discuss the role of parents and children in domestic work. Here, in their explanations, the children often try to create clear dichotomies, often based on what they argue is the natural order of things.

Using the Ekköping and Vikåsa children’s broadened definitions, work appears to be a normal part of their childhood. Moreover, the work the children undertake appears to be a path to adulthood. The children depict themselves as being part of a general preparation, or maybe even part of a transformation process from childhood to adulthood. Some of the more manual work the children undertake appears to be important in this process. However, this very process is also portrayed as work. Thus, when the children describe work, it is not only production or traditional manual labour. Work is not only the activities undertaken at a job or the odd jobs undertaken on the domestic arena when running a household. Work also comprises educational activities as well as enjoyable spare time activities. Work is not only the process in which a human being produces an external value, but it is also the reflexive process of the self: identity work.

Children, Childhood and the New Work Order

Some scholars have argued that the modern capitalist economy has entered a new phase, a phase in which manual labour has lost its importance to symbolic activities (e.g., Castells 1999; Qvortrup 2001; Reich 1994). The economy, it is argued, has moved from “producing use values to producing exchange values, and from simple to extended production” (Qvortrup 2001:96). One consequence of this high-technological, post-industrial production system is a generally reduced need for unskilled manual labour. This may create the impression that the division between the work skilled
and educated adults do and not yet fully educated children’s work will increase and strengthen further. However, there are also other consequences of the composition of the labour force in general and of working life in particular. Beck (2007:1) argues that we are facing “a Brazilianization of the West”, a change of the labour market and the work order where “the heartlands of the West is (…) coming to resemble the patchwork quilt of the South, characterized by diversity, unclarity and insecurity in people’s work and life” (Beck 2007:1; see also Castells 2000). Beck argues that people in the countries of Europe, due to changes in the economic system, will have to use a variety of economic strategies to try to make a living in the near future. Using Brazil as an example, Beck shows how people survive the new economic climate by combining different temporary forms of paid and unpaid, formal and informal work. This, Beck argues, will soon be the case, if it is not already the case, in the heartland of Europe too, because, “the work society is coming to and end” and “The ‘job for life’ has disappeared” (Beck 2007: 2).

Thus, this societal change has two facets. On the one hand, scholars have argued that the post-industrial changes in the modern capitalistic system demand highly skilled symbolic analysts. On the other hand, scholars have also stressed the many new forms of work that will have to be created side-by-side to support the many who are not symbolic analysts. These forms of work, which will be found in the expanding service sector, will include many jobs that do not require any high level of vocational or academic training or specific skills (Nic Ghiolla Phádraig 2007). Kirchhöfer (2007:47) sums up this process by stating, “Work takes on aspects of childhood (…)”. When it comes to time and place, the forms of employment will change and labour patterns will be broken. Flexible work and short-term project employment are growing fast (Beck 2007; Castells 1999; Lee 2001; Liedman 2007; Strandell 2007; Zeiher 2007). The distinction between work and non-work activities as well as work and non-work sites is becoming blurred (Liedman 2007; Strandell 2007). New forms of work are being created that challenge “the divisions of work and school, learning and working, and childhood and adulthood (…)” (Kirchhöfer 2007:44; see also Lee 2001). I will return to the childhood-adulthood dichotomy. Let me just say that, in sum, this whole process represents an individualization of the work process in which every single person’s contribution to the overall production is different from the next
person’s (Castells 1999, 2000).

If these scholars’ predictions are correct, in the near future large amounts of production will take place outside the formal labour market with paid jobs. This may have consequences for children’s work as well. In a discussion of the economy and production system in, what he calls, the “Third Wave” of our society, Futurologist Toffler (1990\textsuperscript{113}) predicts that much of the work in society will be taking place in the domestic arena. Furthermore, Toffler argues that the demand for children’s work will increase when production returns to the home setting. Toffler (1990:220) even argues that, “Certain forms of work (…) might be specifically designed for youngsters and even integrated with their education”. Castells (2000) found somewhat similar tendencies in his study of the growing “Network society”. In his study, Castells (2000) argues that paid work among children is making a strong comeback, not just in developing countries, but all over the world. Thus, in the industrialized economies of late modernity, working children are no anomaly. Rather, as Nic Ghiolla Phádraig (2007:213) puts it, “children’s work can be situated in the contemporary phase of capitalism as regards labour market segmentation and the extent to which goods and services have been commoditised”.

I have previously mentioned that the insularization of childhood spaces, that is, the seclusion of children in special institutions created for children, is sometimes presented as an important feature of modern childhood. Using material from Ekköping and Vikåsa, I have shown that it is questionable how secluded from societal participation children really are in contemporary Sweden. Moreover, in a post-industrial work order, the exclusion of children from the world of work may be reversed to an even higher degree. Given this, children’s clear separation from the surrounding society is challenged or even undermined (Alanen et al. 2004; Kirchhöfer 2007; Strandell 2007). This in turn has, as Alanen, Sauli and Strandell have pointed out, consequences for the separation between childhood and adulthood because “the clear distinctions and boundaries are blurred” (Alanen et al. 2004:195).

What we see here is a narrowing of the gap between generations. As I have shown in the present study, even today the children in both Ekköping and Vikåsa participate in various forms of work in many parts of

\textsuperscript{113} Toffler’s book was first published in 1980.
the societal arena. Children and adults do not participate on separate labour markets. Although the level of engagement might differ between children as a group and adults as a group in particular societal arenas, children and adults in today’s Sweden do their work in shared spaces. Moreover, the work they do is often similar in nature. Both these trends can be found in previous research (e.g., Leonard 2007a, 2007b; Mizen et al. 2001; Nic Ghiolla Phádraig 2007; Solberg 1994; Söderlind and Engwall 2008).

Consequently, work is no longer an activity solely taking place at a specific workplace and it is no longer the exclusive prerogative of adults. A consequence of the withering away of the traditional work society is thus that work, in the folk or the lay sense of the word, has lost its privileged position as a constitution point for identity construction (Bauman 1998). When the division between work and other activities is muddled, when everything and everyone has the potential of being work and to be a worker, the traditional cultural meaning of work – in which work, in the form of a formal job, is something of a life goal – also withers away (Bauman 1998; Kohli 1988).

At the same time, at the other end of the continuum, learning no longer belongs exclusively to the period of childhood. Learning, traditionally the prerogative of children and the preparatory period of childhood, is today spread out over the life trajectory in a process of life-long learning (Jans 2004; Lee 2001; Strandell 2007). As a consequence, the traditional school arena has lost its position as an exclusive arena for learning (Brembeck 2004; Kryger 2004; Strandell 2007) and, as Jans (2004:30) puts it, “Today learning is an integral part of our everyday life at every age and in diverse domains”.

This is of course a challenge to the modernistic dichotomist societal division between adulthood and childhood. Some scholars have argued that childhood runs the risk of being liquidated when the differences between adults and children, adulthood and childhood are blurred (Hengst 1987). Again, others would argue that the modernistic childhood, as we know it, is long dead. Childhood as we imagine it, in its archetypical modernistic sense, is, using a concept from Beck (2002), nothing but a “zombie category”. Childhood as we know it, childhood as the opposite of or negation of adulthood, could be seen as a zombie category, something that is long dead, but nevertheless moves around as if it were still alive (Beck 2002). The ongoing transformation of society also changes the nature of
childhood, and as I have underlined here, both children and adults play a part in this reconstruction, both intentionally and unintentionally. Thus, it is more a question of a natural transformation than of liquidation.
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Appendix

Request Regarding Participation in Research Project

This is a request asking whether your child can participate in the research project Childhood and work.

The project is connected to the Institute for Futures Studies in Stockholm and to the Department of Child Studies at Linköping University. The overarching aim of the project is to study the work in which children and youth take part in Sweden, paid and unpaid, formal and informal. The aim is to make visible the work and the chores children and young people undertake and to analyse how children and young people perceive their work and what they think are important aspects of these questions.

The participating children will, among other things, be interviewed in groups, take photos with disposable cameras and fill out a questionnaire. The interviews and completion of the questionnaires will take place at the children’s school. Later on, it might be interesting to also interview parents in a follow-up study. We may get in touch with you on this matter at a later date.

Participation in the project is completely voluntarily. Participants can end their participation at any time. Every interview will take around half an hour to one hour and will be recorded. Access to the tapes and the questionnaire material will be restricted to the researchers involved in the project. We guarantee anonymity for the participants in the project, that is, all names will be coded and information regarding school and community will be changed.

If you and your child give your consent to the child’s participation in this study, please sign below and return the consent form to the child’s teacher.

We wish to participate / we do not wish to participate

Parent’s name: _______________________________________________________

Child’s name: _______________________________________________________

Grade: ______ School:________________________________________________

Your child’s participation in the study is of grate value and I am grateful for your help. If you have any questions or comments, feel free to contact us.

Best Regards,

Tobias Samuelsson
PhD student
Tema Barn, Linköpings Universitet
013-28 57 41
tobsa@tema.liu.se

Gunilla Halldén
Professor
Tema Barn, Linköpings Universitet
013-28 40 70
Questionnaire

CHILDHOOD and WORK

Hi,

This is a questionnaire about work. You only have to fill it out if you want to. You do not have to write your name. The answers will be presented in a form that prohibits the identification of the different pupils.

You will find predetermined options to choose from after most of the questions. You answer by ticking off the option that fits you the best. After some of the answers, you will find a dotted line. Here you can fill in the answer yourself.

If you have any questions, raise your hand and I will come over to you and explain.

Thanks for your help!

1. Are you a?  Boy  (  )
   Girl  (  )

2. What grade are you in?
   I am in grade ……

3. Do you live in?  Apartment  (  )
   Terraced or detached house  (  )
   Do you have your own room?  Yes (  )
   No  (  )

   I live with my mum and dad  (  )
   I live with my mum  (  )
   I live with my dad  (  )
   I live most of the time with my mum and sometimes with my dad  (  )
   I live most of the time with my dad and sometimes with my mum  (  )
   I live just as much with my mum as I do with my dad  (  )
   I live neither with my mum nor my dad  (  )

5. Do you have siblings?  Yes........... siblings
   No  (  )
6. What do you like to do in your spare time?
......................................................................................................................................................................................
......................................................................................................................................................................................
......................................................................................................................................................................................

7. Do you participate in any association?

No ( )
Yes ( ) → I participate in the following association/associations:
......................................................................................................................................................................................
......................................................................................................................................................................................
......................................................................................................................................................................................

8. Do you have any special spare time activities?
   Put a tick mark for every option that fits you.

Plays football ( )
Plays floor ball ( )
Plays bandy ( )
Plays ice hockey ( )
Plays handball ( )
Plays golf ( )
Plays tennis ( )
Plays table tennis ( )
Takes part in gymnastics ( )
Takes part in mini-car racing ( )
Plays chess ( )
Takes part in the scouts ( )
Does angling ( )
Takes part in orienteering ( )
Takes part in horse riding ( )
Acts in a theatre group ( )
Sings in a choir ( )
Plays an instrument ( )
Doesn’t have any ( )
Others: .......................................................... ( )
.................................................................................................... ( )

9. According to you, what is work?
......................................................................................................................................................................................
......................................................................................................................................................................................
......................................................................................................................................................................................
......................................................................................................................................................................................
......................................................................................................................................................................................

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10. Do you receive a steady weekly or monthly allowance?

Yes, weekly allowance:.............................. crowns
Yes, monthly allowance:........................... crowns
No ( )

If yes: Do you have to help out at home to receive this money?

Comment: .................................................................

11. Do you otherwise get money from someone in the family/from relatives?

Yes, always ( )
Yes, sometimes ( )
No ( )

If yes: From who/whom?..........................................................

If yes: Do you have to help out with something to get this money?

Comment: .................................................................

.................................................................

.................................................................

12. Do you usually help out at home (look after younger siblings, buy groceries and so on)?

Yes ( )
No ( )
13. Do you earn money? Put a tick mark for *every* alternative from which you make money.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family/relatives pay</th>
<th>Others pay</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cleaning</td>
<td>( )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washing up/emptying</td>
<td>( )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and loading the dish washer</td>
<td>( )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Take out the garbage</td>
<td>( )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Run errands</td>
<td>( )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Garden work</td>
<td>( )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shovelling snow</td>
<td>( )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wash the car</td>
<td>( )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture and forestry work</td>
<td>( )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Babysitting</td>
<td>( )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walk dogs</td>
<td>( )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hand out commercial leaflets</td>
<td>( )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deliver papers</td>
<td>( )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selling papers</td>
<td>( )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selling lottery tickets</td>
<td>( )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selling candy and similar</td>
<td>( )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work in a kiosk, shop</td>
<td>( )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work in a restaurant, bar</td>
<td>( )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work at a petrol station</td>
<td>( )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Office work</td>
<td>( )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collect bottles, cans and similar</td>
<td>( )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promise not to eat candy</td>
<td>( )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promise not to smoke</td>
<td>( )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other:.......................</td>
<td>( )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>( )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>( )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never make money</td>
<td>( )</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
14. How often do you receive money for doing things, always, never or sometimes? Put a tick mark for every alternative that applies to you.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Always get paid</th>
<th>Never get paid</th>
<th>Get paid sometimes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cleaning</td>
<td>( )</td>
<td>( )</td>
<td>( )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doing the dishes</td>
<td>( )</td>
<td>( )</td>
<td>( )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Running errands</td>
<td>( )</td>
<td>( )</td>
<td>( )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Garden work</td>
<td>( )</td>
<td>( )</td>
<td>( )</td>
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<td>Shovelling snow</td>
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<td>( )</td>
<td>( )</td>
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<tr>
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<td>( )</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hand out commercial leaflets</td>
<td>( )</td>
<td>( )</td>
<td>( )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deliver papers</td>
<td>( )</td>
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<td>( )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sell papers</td>
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<td>( )</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>( )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>( )</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Office work</td>
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<tr>
<td>Collect cans, bottles and similar</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promise not to smoke</td>
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<td>( )</td>
<td>( )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other:........................................</td>
<td>( )</td>
<td>( )</td>
<td>( )</td>
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<tr>
<td>........................................</td>
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<td>( )</td>
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<tr>
<td>........................................</td>
<td>( )</td>
<td>( )</td>
<td>( )</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

15. If you make money: When do you make your money?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>During:</th>
<th>summer breaks</th>
<th>Christmas or other breaks</th>
<th>weekends</th>
<th>during the school term</th>
<th>evenings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Often</td>
<td>( )</td>
<td>( )</td>
<td>( )</td>
<td>( )</td>
<td>( )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>( )</td>
<td>( )</td>
<td>( )</td>
<td>( )</td>
<td>( )</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

16. Is it possible to work without getting paid?

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>( )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>( )</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
17. Do you know anyone who works without getting paid?

……………………………………………………………………………………………………
……………………………………………………………………………………………………
……………………………………………………………………………………………………

18. Do you work?
No ( )
Yes ( )

If yes: Where do you work?
……………………………………………………………………………………………………
……………………………………………………………………………………………………

19. How often do you work?
I work approximately …………………… times a week.

20. How many hours do you work on average?
I work around …………………… hours a week.

21. How many hours can every single workday amount to for you?
Every single workday can be approximately …………………… hours long.

22. Are there more children/young people of your age who work?
No ( )
Yes ( ) → It is mostly girls ( )
It is mostly boys ( )
It is approximately as many girls as boys ( )

23. Whom do you work with?
Put a tick mark for every option that fits you.

Alone ( )
Mum ( )
Dad ( )
Brother ( )
Sister ( )
Friend ( )
Some other adult ( )
24. When did you first start working in addition to going to school?

When I was in grade 4 or earlier  (  )
When I was in grade 5  (  )
When I was in grade 6  (  )
When I was in grade 7  (  )
When I was in grade 8  (  )

25. Why do you have a job in addition to going to school?

Put a tick mark for every option that fits you.

I need money for my daily expenses (pocket money)  (  )
I am saving money for something special  (  )
The work is relaxation from school/I think it is fun to work  (  )
I want to support myself  (  )
Something else? ................................................................. (  )

26. How much do you receive in salary every month?

I get .................................................. crowns per month.

27. Did you have a job for which you earned money last summer?

Yes  (  )
No  (  )

28. What are you going to do this coming summer?

Put a tick mark for every option that fits you.

Get a job outside the home  (  )
Work with something at home  (  )
Be away from the family, in another place  (  )
Something else? ................................................................. (  )

29. Do you sell stuff to, swap with or buy stuff from people your own age?

Yes, sell  (  )
Yes, buy  (  )
Yes, swap  (  )
Yes, buy, swap and sell  (  )
No  (  )
30. Do you think it is beneficial for children and young people to have work in addition to going to school?

Yes, very beneficial ( )
Yes, quite beneficial ( )
It doesn’t matter ( )
No, quite non-beneficial ( )
No, very non-beneficial ( )

31. What job would you preferably like to have?
...........................................................................................................................................

32. What do you think about this questionnaire?

It was hard to understand the questions ( )
It was too long ( )
It was pretty good ( )
It was fun ( )

Is there anything else that you think I need to know about you and work? Please add:
...........................................................................................................................................
...........................................................................................................................................
...........................................................................................................................................
...........................................................................................................................................
...........................................................................................................................................
...........................................................................................................................................
...........................................................................................................................................

Thanks for your help!