AN ORDINARY SCHOOL CHILD
Agency and Authority in Children’s Schooling

Katarina Ayton
Pedagogic Practices is an interdisciplinary research area within the Educational Sciences that integrates different disciplines in order to give a new perspective on different aspects of educators work and the institutions’ role in society, primarily school and teaching. The field is tied to the teachers’ training programme and the schools’ activity.

The graduate school of Pedagogic Practices is a part of a long-term development at Linköping University to build a new research organisation and at the same time both initiating change in the teacher training programme and creating closer ties to research. What we today see as Pedagogic Practices, and the research it is associated with, was initiated in 1995 within the then Faculty of Arts and Sciences, and its aim was, among other things, to reinforce teacher training.

Research and graduate studies within the Educational Sciences are distinguished by a concentration on socially relevant research programmes that demand cooperation across subject and faculty boundaries. Graduate training is often organised in graduate schools.
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Katarina Ayton

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The children are asked to hand in their books and to put them on the teacher’s desk. “I see that nine out of seventeen remembered. Not bad”, says the teacher. While struggling to get his book out John says, “I also remembered but I can’t get it out of my bag.” He finally succeeds and goes to the front of the class and places his book on the desk. “Oh good, ten out of seventeen”, the teacher says, “seven missing.” “If we are seventeen?” says Harry. “Well we are seventeen.” answers the teacher.

In the spring of 2002 I joined these seventeen primary school children, their class teacher and the classroom assistant to conduct an ethnographic field study.

During my first meeting with this teacher I tried to explain my study to her. This explanation, and her understanding of it, was the basis for her explanation to the children. On my first day at school I was shown to my desk and my chair, and it was pointed out that my chair had a flowery sticker with my name on it. The children had been told that I wanted to understand what it was like to be at school and I would therefore do everything that they did.

This was the beginning of my relationship with the children in the class. During my time with them they included me in many of their activities, they instructed me, they laughed at me and they were patient with me. To reciprocate I tried to be attentive to signs indicating that my presence was intrusive and to make sure I did not invade the children’s privacy.

This study is about these children’s participation in their own schooling. Set in an ordinary mainstream school class, the study centres on the children’s position in school relative to the adults there, and the restrictions and possibilities for action available to the children in this school setting.
CHAPTER ONE

THE INSTITUTION OF SCHOOL

School is one of the primary locations where children spend their childhoods but, as P. W. Jackson (1968:3) points out, “school attendance of children is such a common experience in our society that those of us who watch them go hardly pause to consider what happens to them when they get there”. According to B. Mayall, when children enter school they enter an environment which is a “closed, complete system, where goals and practices cohere, and where the activities of the teachers (during the school day) are limited to a focus on the teaching and training of the children” (Mayall 1994:125).

The goals and practices that Mayall refers to are part of the communicative patterns created as learning became institutionalised. These communicative patterns are, as R. Säljö (2000:41-7) says, based on suppositions of the nature of learning, suppositions that become an integrated part of the schools’ activities, equipment, buildings and work methods. At the same time school is a social world where staff have their place of work, students meet friends, and routines and traditions of everyday interaction is created (Bergqvist 1990:3).

This may, in part, explain that although specific communicative patterns based on suppositions of the nature of learning have emerged, and although focus is on the teaching and training of children, as I will show in this thesis, this has not created a “closed, complete system, where goals and practices cohere” (Mayall 1994:125). Instead new communicative patterns are continually introduced into school and co-exist with the ones already in place.

In the following section some communicative patterns and suppositions of learning found in the Swedish school will be presented.

Children's schooling in Sweden

Children’s participation

The pedagogic context in which the children in the study class found themselves has a history of being deeply influenced by the American progressivist movement, specifically the writings of J. Dewey. In Dewey’s philosophy there is a developmental perspective in which each person is unique and has the potential to excel. The progressivist movement also contained a deliberate democratic vision, as well as an advanced theory of cognition
proposing that personal experience is a better ground for learning than pure theory (Hartman 1995:153-63, Bergqvist 1990:10-2).

The theories of the psychologists J. Piaget, J. Bruner and E. H. Eriksen were also influential. Piaget’s stage theory, in which a child’s age and maturity to a large extent frames the child’s ability, did not specifically relate to schooling but his recommendations contain the child-centred pedagogy where learning comes from the child and is not handed down by the teacher (Crain 1992:121-4). Bruner, who advocated the active student, and Eriksen, with a psychoanalytically based stage theory, became foreground figures in the dialogue pedagogics, a concept launched in an official Swedish government report SOU 1972:26 (Svedberg and Zaar 1988).

This report was concerned with pre-school educational theory but the concept of dialogue pedagogics spread to the comprehensive school. Dialogue pedagogics built upon the idea that the search for knowledge should be enacted in dialogue between students and teachers. Although dialogue pedagogics as such fell into disuse, possibly due to lack of sound theoretical production, the ideas were to a certain extent incorporated into general educational theories and practices (Svedberg and Zaar 1988:175-86, Crain 1992:247-56).

For the children in the study class, the above theories provide a basis for a child-centred activity based pedagogy together with a belief in stage development – a psychologically constituted child. This child was in the beginning of the 1980s gradually, and in part, replaced with what K. Hultqvist (2001:165) calls the humanistic child – a child expected to be free, autonomous and flexible.

During the same period there was a movement from class teaching to group work activities that were, in the 1990s, gradually replaced by individual seatwork, increasingly so into the 21st century. This seat work is often planned in conjunction with the student and the pace of work individualised (Vinterek 2006 61-3).

By the 21st century the ideal of a child being “flexible, problem-solving, collaborative and perpetually involved in a self-monitoring and active ‘life-long learning’” is widespread (Lindblad and Popkewitz 2003). There is also a change in the principles governing teachers’ actions and in Sweden the teachers are seen as reflective professionals and agents of change. The teacher is seen as a ‘counsellor’, a ‘reflective facilitator’, directed by established goals and
“procedures for assessment, evaluation and measurement of outcomes, rather than processes” (Lindblad and Popkewitz 2003:19).

Like the previous curriculum, Lgr80, the current Swedish curriculum for the compulsory school system, Lpo94, comprises goals and guidelines for schools and this, together with the absence of a public examination system, allows for considerable teacher autonomy and latitude. This leads to variations in organisation and practice where “traditional practices exist and continue alongside attempts to take innovative impetuses from the centre quite seriously” (Ball and Larsson 1989).

I. Wernersson (1989:100) points out that compulsory schooling functions both as a ‘transmitter of knowledge’ and as a ‘transmitter of ideology’. The children of the study class find themselves in a school where educational reforms illustrate a very ambitious and radical policy that has been aimed at reducing social inequalities in the educational system with a hope that this would have effects on society in general creating equal opportunities for all (Härnqvist 1989:19-29, Beach, Gordon and Lahelma 2003:1).

The democratic ideals of the Swedish school system are also stated clearly in the introductory statement in the current curriculum Lpo94 (Skolverket 2006:3), where it is declared that the school system rests on democratic values. ‘The school’ is to enact and impart ideals of equality, of the individual’s freedom and integrity, of gender equality and of solidarity with weaker groups in society. The curriculum also clearly promotes student agency in declaring that the democratic principles of influencing, taking responsibility and being participants should include all students (Skolverket 2006:13)\(^1\).

These democratic principles are to be enacted within the compulsory institution that the children in this study found themselves in, an institution that J. Landahl (2006:8), claims promotes the idea of adults and children being of qualitatively different social categories.

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\(^1\) One way of ensuring the possibility of participation is through class meetings/class councils. These generally occur once a week and here students and teachers, often using formal meeting techniques, discuss issues relating to the school environment, teaching, rules and social activities. In the class meetings/class councils students are chosen to represent each class in the students council.
The social categories of children and adults
Looking at the children’s participation in their own schooling and the restrictions and possibilities for action they find there we need to understand changes in the ideals of agency, responsibility and authority in the Swedish school.

The student agency, of influencing, taking responsibility and being participants, promoted in the curriculum is to be accomplished in a school that has been seen as having two goals – dispersing knowledge and, that which is of interest for this study, bringing up children (Landahl 2006), and Landahl finds that the social task of upbringing can be divided into discipline and care. Discipline then addresses the norm-breaking child while care addresses the suffering child.

Looking at discussions on discipline, Landahl (2006:226) found that in the early part of the 20th century the student collective was seen as too “tight” with the solidarity between the children causing them to “revolt and protest collectively against the teacher”. The discussion during the later part of the 20th century instead focused on conflicts within the collective of students with a focus on bullying.

For a deeper understanding of this development Landahl (2006:91-8) looks at respect as vertical and horizontal. The respect the children were to afford adults, the vertical respect, was largely built around the concept of obedience. The teachers and students were to large extent understood as being in conflict with the teachers in readiness to defend themselves against potential aggression.

This understanding of the students as a (uniform) collective, pitted against the teacher, was challenged with the introduction of the comprehensive school. The student body now became more heterogeneous and teaching methods increasingly individualised. In this divided student body the teachers’ role became that of mediator, and the lack of horizontal respect between students was instead seen as problematic. The goal of teacher authority, was thereby no longer only to create respect for the teacher but to make the students respect one another (Landahl 2006:84-136).

In this development we find ideals of student obedience towards teachers intermingled with teachers seen as mediators in student conflict. The latter indicates a different relationship between the students and teachers, an increase in closeness between them.
The beginning of this closeness between students and teachers, which is clearly demonstrated by the participants in the study class, Landahl traces to the occurrences in 1965-1975 which, in Sweden, has been called an informalisation. This is exemplified by the replacement of extreme forms of formal address with a simple “you”, which mirrored a change in the understandings of how the relationship between superiors and their subordinates should be organised. This can be seen as an expression of a process whereby, in Swedish society, intimacy between people become an ideal (Landahl 2006:171-5).

According to Landahl this ideal of intimacy created a moral obligation for teachers to engage in student care, an expectation that teachers would see student suffering and engage in it (Landahl 2006:171-83). This meant that whereas earlier on, in what Landahl calls the panoptic pedagogy, the student had an obligation to show her/himself, the late modernity’s pedagogy instead includes the right of the student to be seen (Landahl 2006:184).

The right of the student to be seen can be related to developing ideals of student agency as opposed to teacher authority. There was during this time a shift in the view of children and their character formation that has been portrayed as a “discursive transition” where there was a shift from a “top-down control directed from the outside”, to inner-directed control springing from “‘within’ the child itself”. J. Qvarsebo claims that these discourses do not replace one another but instead “overlap and blur in such way that none takes precedence over any other” (2006:194-5). The morally oriented pedagogies and the regulation of behaviour through rules and dictates continued to influence how the school was to form the child’s character at the same time as there was room for a participatory, reflexive subject.

Through the discussions above it is shown that the children in the study class find themselves in a context where ideas of democracy and participation, of children being active in their learning, and of an intimacy between children and teachers are central. Such ideas of democracy and participation are reflected both in the concern with underprivileged and socially disadvantaged groups and in the declaration of the current curriculum, Lpo94, that the school system rests on democratic values and that the democratic principles of influencing, taking responsibility and being participants should include all students.
With a history of child-centred pedagogy as well as dialogue pedagogies, the concept of children being active in their search for knowledge seems firmly embedded. Together with this there is today’s ideal child who is flexible, problem solving, collaborative and self-monitoring while the teachers are to be reflective professionals and agents of change.

As will be illustrated, the children in the study class thus find themselves in a school setting where there is an increased closeness between teacher and student. A closeness traced to the informalisation that, as discussed above, led to intimacy between people becoming an ideal, thus creating the moral obligation for teachers to engage in student care.

The above characteristics of the Swedish school contextualises the descriptions of the children’s school days as presented in this thesis.

**Research on children and their schooling**

Children and schooling are central in a variety of studies. We find studies pertaining to gender (Thorne 1993, Lundgren 2000, Karlson 2003, Evaldsson 2004), ethnicity (Evaldsson 1995, Narrowe 1998, 2000, 2002, Runfors 2003), class (Willis 1977, Ambjörnsson 2003), social relations between children (Bliding 2004), and schoolwork (Bergqvist 1990, 2001). The studies above, among many others, have been of inspiration for this study.

In the section below I have, however, chosen to present such studies as have specific pertinence to the study of the children in this ordinary mainstream class, of their participation in their own schooling, of their position in school and of the restrictions and possibilities for action they find in this Swedish school setting.

Studies of special pertinence to this study are found in three areas. These are studies that:

1. Problematis children’s everyday life in school.
2. Explore conceptions of children and childhood.
3. Look at children’s positioning in school settings.

The first to be presented are studies that have looked at children’s everyday life at school, problematising children’s scope of action within school.
CHAPTER ONE

Children’s everyday life in school

As mentioned above there are a variety of studies of children in school. In these children’s pupilness has often been taken for granted while other aspects of school life has been brought forward. Among studies that focus children’s everyday life in school I am presenting four that are of special interest in terms of their influence on this study. These are studies where I find that focus has been on children as students, on their pupilness.

The first of these is Jackson’s Life in classrooms (1968), or more precisely the first chapter of this book. Here Jackson presents three aspects of classroom life – crowds, praise and power – that all students must learn to deal with. In P. Woods The Happiest days? How pupils cope with school (1990), students’ reactions to school is examined. Woods starts by stating that schools are places of struggle where social constraints collides with personal intentions. In school teachers require something of students and invariably have to bargain, as students are not passive mouldable objects. In Making Spaces. Citizenship and difference in schools (2000) T. Gordon, E. Holland, and J. Lahelma “explore the part played by the school in the production of difference, and in the construction of citizenship and otherness” (Gordon et al. 2000:2). Making an analytic distinction between the official, the informal and the physical school, Gordon et al. look at the use of buildings and spaces, documents, lesson content and classroom interaction as well as interaction over and above the instructional classroom interaction between teacher and student. The focus of Å. Bartholdsson’s Constructing the pupil. Normality and benevolent government (2007) is on how normality is learned and managed in a Swedish school setting. She looks at discourses of children, parents and school ‘today’ as well as at how the students are expected to learn to be students while learning to be ‘themselves’.

Although their main focus may vary, the above studies contain discussions of creating and negotiating school order as well as of power relationships between teachers and students.

The results of crowded classroom conditions where several students are to be helped by a single teacher can be seen in the everyday organisations of classrooms (Jackson 1968). Jackson found that sharing limited resources resulted in delay, denial, interruptions and distractions where the children are to wait for help and attention from the teacher and expect teacher interruption in their work. Together with this the children were expected to ignore the
activities of other children. In a sense, Jackson (1968:16) says, “students must try to behave as if they were in solitude, when in fact they are not.”

In this crowded setting, says Jackson, praise is used to award the children and they early on have to adapt to a constant monitoring and assessment of both their behaviour and their learning. Praise can be compared to the ‘benevolent techniques’ that Bartholdsson (2007:210) finds are applied in order to “guide pupils to achieve clearly formulated goals as well as to establish classroom order”.

Looking at this power relationship in classrooms, Jackson points out that in schools one subgroup of the clientele (the students) are involuntarily committed whilst the other subgroup (the staff) has the freedom to leave. Teachers’ authority, says Jackson, is centred on gaining command over the students’ attention and to persuade the students that they are to “employ their executive powers in the service of the teacher’s desires rather than their own” (Jackson 1968:30-1). Bartholdsson (2007:135-7) claims that learning to be student is to a large extent about learning to be subordinate and give authority to teachers. She finds that students that “employ their executive powers in the service of the teacher’s desires” are described as mature, and that the mature student is positive, pleasant, polite, willing to learn and/or accept reprimands, i.e. the ideal student.

In school there is, according to Gordon et al. (2000:66), a pedagogic relationship that “organises social relations and interaction in schools, and positions teachers and students in an institutionally defined instructional relationship”. The pedagogic relationship becomes a power relationship in that the teacher is understood to be professional and mature and the student neither. Gordon et al. find that there is in this understanding a tendency to overlook challenges and negotiations as well as student maturity and professionalism. Student professionalism necessitates the following of formal rules, being well-mannered and showing consideration of others. This professionalism can be compared to the ‘maturity’ called for by the teachers in Bartholdsson’s study.

Emphasising students’ possibility of exerting influence in the classroom Woods discusses young children’s influence in creating classroom order. According to Woods (1990:2, see also Gordon et al. 2000:90) good order is a “product of an agreement between teacher and pupils”. Using the concept of negotiation Woods point out that this rests on a variety of assumptions: the assumption that teacher influence over pupils is not straightforward, that the
teacher–student relationship varies, and that the parties in negotiation have
different interests (Woods 1990:148). Student negotiation does not, however,
indicate equality between teachers and students, and the students’ situation can,
says Woods, be seen as a marginal one. Using A. van Gennep’s (1960) analysis
of “rites of passage” Woods point out that at starting school children are
separated from their primary world and do not return to a primary world until
leaving school. This way a child’s schooling is a transitional period, a time of
liminality (Woods 1990:156).

During this transitional period the students are expected to both conform to
control as well as developing and exercising agency. Moreover, the agency
they are to develop may differ in relation to the official school, the informal
school or physical school (Gordon et al. 2000:13). In the physical school “the
use of space is routinisé, ordered and controlled”. Here children are positioned
as students, their entry is controlled and they lack private space. Students may
also use space differently from that which is sanctioned, they may “aim to alter,
hinder, ritualise and dramatisé, or remain unaffected, as well as to oppose or
challenge.” This may or may not be related to resistance, according to Gordon
et al. (2000:143-54), who also point out that “resistance can be located in the
gaze of the researcher”.

It is important to remember that students’ concept of order/chaos in school
may actually be the same as the teachers, because as Gordon et al. (2000:157)
point out “expectations of education are embedded in cultural understandings
in complex ways – students frequently expressed their desire for agency, whilst
also asserting the necessity for control” and Gordon et al. see schools as places
with “multiple levels and practices” that can be contradictory, with spaces for
agency, negotiation, avoidance, opposition, and resistance creating tensions
between emancipation and regulation (Gordon et al. 2000:2).

As Woods point out, during schooling children are exposed to a number of
new experiences over which they have little control. Through a maze of
activities and encounters they “negotiate their way, making the most of their
power and abilities in furthering their interests […] discovering and inventing
strategies of infinite number and complexity” (Woods 1990:156).

Apart from these experiences that children at school negotiate, conceptions
of what children and childhood are, or should be, have to be negotiated, and the
second set of studies to be presented are studies that explore such conceptions
at school and at home.
Conceptions of children and childhood

This study centres on the restrictions and possibilities for the children’s action in this Swedish school setting, and on the children’s position in school relative to the adults there. Guiding children’s position in any setting are the conceptions of children and childhood that are present. In a school setting these conceptions guide the conceptions of students.

In B. Johansson and E. Johansson’s (2003) study Ethical meetings in school2 they analyse the teachers’ conceptions of children and childhood. They identified four dominant conceptions, which they label the malleable child, the good child, the emotional child, and the sensible child. They found that individual teachers would relate to each of the different conceptions at some time, but individual teachers tended to favour one of them. Johansson and Johansson also found that the teachers’ methods of working with the transmission and teaching of ethics varied depending on the conceptions of children and childhood focal at the time.

Within the different conceptions of childhood similar values vary in expression. One example is the respect for others, related to democracy, which was found in all four childhood conceptions. It was found that when the good child was central the tendency for teachers to listen to the children was more noticeable, while when the malleable child was in focus the necessity for the child to listen to the adult was in focus (Johansson and Johansson 2003:46).

Looking at the individualisation of learning Johansson and Johansson found that regarding the good child, the child’s experiences would be understood as central to learning, whereas regarding the emotional child, both the individual and the collective would be brought into focus. With a focus on the malleable child, teaching would be more than learning. Teachers who turn to the sensible child emphasise the children’s individual responsibility (Johansson and Johansson 2003:47).

Johansson and Johansson thus show that the conceptions of childhood and children present in school, and foremost in any teacher’s understanding of a particular student, guide both the expectations of the students’ behaviour and the manner in which they are taught.

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2 My translation
In a similar study, but based on interviews with parents and pre-school staff, G. Ekstrand (1990) in her comparative study *Children of Culture* looks at conceptions of childhood in Sweden and India.

Ekstrand identifies different ideals of children’s independence, of their expressions of emotion, and of their obedience in the Indian and the Swedish interview data. Interviewing both parents and pre-school staff in Sweden she found that their discussions often centred about the term *independence*. Ekstrand identified four aspects, or as she calls them, structures of independence: independence towards authorities; the ability to take care of oneself; having an opinion and the courage to express it; and being active (Ekstrand 1990:123-6, 255).

I find that these aspects of independence can be related to expectations of children’s agency and today’s ideal child, described as flexible, problem-solving, collaborative and self-monitoring (Lindblad and Popkewitz 2003).

The term independence was, however, according to Ekstrand, used in discussing both positive and negative aspects of children’s behaviour and the adult’s expressed ambivalence in regard to the children’s independence. Ekstrand found what she calls a hidden ideal of obedience in the Swedish material. This can be seen in that independence was viewed as negative if the children were too independent, too persistent, did not listen or were too active, or if they questioned the adults’ authority.

This variety in the conception of children and childhood, and how these conceptions guide adults’ actions towards children is also found in G. Halldén’s and G. Eckert’s studies of parents and children.

In *Parents’ ideas about children* Halldén (1992) interviews parents about their conceptions of child development and their views on child rearing. Halldén identifies two dominant conceptions, which she labels with the metaphors of *children as projects* and *children as beings*. These are not to be seen as two distinct categories; instead they can be used as tools for considering parents’ statements about their children. Both metaphors could be seen in statements made by a single parent but expressed in relation to different conceptions of child development and child rearing. According to Halldén the metaphors can be seen as “symbols for the parents’ way of relating to the inherent conflict present in parenthood” (Halldén 1992:126).

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3 My translation
Eckert’s (2001) ambition in her study *Wasting time or having fun?*, which dealt with children’s play and television habits, was to identify meanings of childhood and children. Interviewing parents about their children’s play and television habits Eckert (2001:141-53) identified a variety of ideas pertaining to both children and childhood. These conceptions she labelled the *educational childhood*, *idyllic childhood*, and *child-guided childhood*. Together with these conceptions of childhood children could be understood as vulnerable, robust, or as small people. In addition to this she found that ideas of the evil or innocent child was expressed. Like Halldén she found that the same parents could express a variety of these ideas during an interview.

Of interest is that Eckert also interviewed children. She found that children were aware of the different conceptions of themselves and presented strategies to counteract them. Eckert (2001:189-217) found that children were well aware of, and frequently made references to, ongoing discussions about children’s TV habits and play. In the children’s accounts of adult rules and regulations the different conceptions of children and childhood reappeared. Although the children did not always agree to these interpretations of themselves, of necessity they needed to relate to these conceptions as they influenced how the restrictions of the children’s actions were argued for.

In the presented studies we find different conceptions of childhood and children that emerge in interviews with adults and children. We find that a person could express a variety of conceptions of children and childhood indicating that these are negotiable and can be contradictory.

It is also shown that conceptions of children and childhood impact on children’s lives. The conceptions guide the actions of the adults in their surroundings, and interviews with children showed them to be aware of these conceptions, and that this in turn guided their actions.

Conceptions of childhood, children and the proper relation between children and adults may restrict or create possibilities for children’s action in the school setting. In this study about children’s participation in their own schooling such conceptions are considered when analysing the children’s position in school.

This brings us to the third set of studies of pertinence to my study, those that look at children’s positioning in school settings.
Positioning children in school

A central issue to this study is the children’s positioning relative to the adults in the school setting, and the restrictions and possibilities for action this positioning entails.


Mayall (1994:116-20), looking at British children’s health care in school and at home, found that whilst the children viewed themselves and could be viewed as actors in both settings “their ability to negotiate an acceptable daily experience is heavily dependent on the adults’ conceptions of childhood and of appropriate activities by and for children in the two settings” (Mayall 1994:114). This means that the nature of the power relationship between children and adults varies according to the setting and a child’s position in the home context differs from that in the school context.


Ellegaard (2004) discusses the concept and understandings of the competent child in relation to the Danish kindergarten. Asking to what extent the discourse of the competent child is found in everyday practices Ellegaard finds that it competes with other conceptions of children and questions the idea of the competent child as a hegemonic discourse (Ellegaard 2004:117).

In her recent study of children within the Swedish school Moinian (2007:12) aims to “explore, describe and understand children’s perspectives on themselves and their lives”. Taking her point of departure within the sociology of childhood, she views children as social beings and has an interest in the ways in which they relate to others through institutions such as the family and the school. To illustrate the possibilities children find for challenging or negotiating different positions in various contexts Moinian has used theories on identity construction as an ongoing process (Moinian 2007:30).
In the studies presented above the relations between adults and children in school are regarded as constructions in specific settings at specific times in history. In the same way the relation between the children and the adults in the study class is a construction in the specific setting of this mainstream school in Sweden.

Both Devine and Bartholdsson, presented earlier, find that teachers express views of ‘children today’ where these are seen as different from how children used to be. While the Irish teachers find children of ‘today’ “more forward, outgoing and ‘adult like’” and being quick to assert their rights in their interactions with adults (Devine 2000:27), the Swedish teachers describe the children of “‘today’ as individualistic and daring” (Bartholdsson 2007:211).

In his study Ellegaard (2004:193) claims that although the competent child in recent discourse is seen to be a child equal to grown-ups, competent, reflexive and self-governing, other understandings of children have prominence in the teachers’ descriptions of children. According to Ellegaard (2004:181), in analysing observations of kindergarten life, he found that the children appeared to be participating in two different social worlds: one social world shared with and dominated by adults, and one limited to and consisting of peers and peer relations. Similarly Bartholdsson (2007:211) points out that pupils must learn to handle multiple expectations of whom one is or should be. This means, she says, that a “pupil has to manage being a child in relation to adults and being a peer in relation to other students”.

Ellegaard (2004:181-6) points out that the two social worlds exist within the same physical space but appear to differ in norms and competence demands. While the social relation between children and teachers seem traditional he finds the idea of a self-governing competent child prominent in peer relations. Ellegaard finds that this self-governance, however, takes place within a clearly defined generational power relation that both is structural and shows itself in everyday interaction and that all the children’s activities take place under conditions where possible teacher intervention is inherent.

Devine (2000:39) points out that schools as institutions play a central role in both the definition and experience of childhood. Her analysis indicates that children actively position themselves in relation to structural influences and define themselves and are defined by the different discourses that they are exposed to on a daily basis. According to Devine the children in their “rejection or acceptance of their subordinate status in school” drew on two competing
discourses, “one framed within paternalistic terms which highlighted children’s relative immaturity and incapacity to be taken seriously by adults, and another framed in more liberatory terms, which challenged the existing structures of domination between themselves and teachers in school” (Devine 2000:38).

Ellegaard (2004:179) also argues that the discourse of the competent child “is mixed up with other discourses and forms of practise in relation to children and institutions”. He finds that the child–adult relationship in kindergarten appears to be based on the patriarchal power, the arbitrary power yielded by adults in relation to children (Hood-Williams 1990) and bureaucratic power. Bureaucratic power being such power that public servants have in relation to citizens, a power based on rules and rationality – treating everyone equally and neutrally (Dencik, Bäckström and Larsson 1988). The two types of power make the adults power doubly determined. At the same time two different images of children seem to be constructed: an incomplete and externally disciplined child and a competent and internally disciplined child. The incomplete child was found in the company of adults and the competent child was mainly seen and allowed during interaction with other children (2004:186).

In the explorations of the child–adult relationships in schools Devine (2000:38) found that discourses relating to the rights and status of children positioned them as ‘other’ within school while Ellegaard (2004:194) says that the ideas of the incompetent child that he found in kindergarten may be the ‘other’ needed to construct the “‘normal’ competent child”. We find that both indicate that children are the ‘other’ within school. Devine believes that children’s opinions in school will not be taken seriously until “teachers, as adults, begin to reflect on their own positioning with their pupils, as children” (Devine 2000:39) and Mayall finds that the competence and self-reliance children have acquired before they start school is devalued once they get there (Mayall 1994:123).

Moinian concludes that children may actually need a new language to put across their perspective as it is not fruitful for them to “explain their reality in language that conveys unequal power relations between adults and children and regulates the natural and ‘good’ child from an adult perspective” (Moinian 2007:79).

In the above studies we find that children in school find themselves in a setting where conceptions of child, childhood and the proper relation both between adults and children and between children and their schooling is
continually interpreted and reinterpreted. In the study class the children’s participation, and the restrictions and possibilities for action they find in school, is played out in relation to such conceptions. Using the above studies as a point of departure the aim of this study is presented below.

**THE AIM OF THIS STUDY**

The aim of this study is to explore the position of children in a particular school setting and the restrictions and possibilities for action available to them there. The study is set in a mainstream school class and the following questions were generated from the data:

1. Does being a member of a specific school class have significance for the children’s positioning and agency in the school setting?
2. How do the children position themselves in negotiating central aspects of school, such as time and space?
3. In what manner can the children claim, and be granted, command over their school day activities?
4. In which situations and in what manner do the adults’ right to control become visible and how do the children react when their competence is questioned?

In order to explore the participation possible for the children, their position in school, and the restrictions and possibilities for action they find there, I have used the concept of *generation* (Mayall 1999, Alanen 2000). This combines the view of children as social actors interacting with and acting upon their surroundings, with seeing children as a permanent social group that interacts with the social group of adults. To further examine the children’s participation in the school setting I have used the concept of *positioning* (Davies and Harré 1990, Harré and van Lagenhove 1999c) to explore the interaction between children and adults Thereby two theoretical discussions, that of generation and that of positioning, underpin this study and will presented in the following section.
CHAPTER ONE

Theoretical approach

In this thesis the concept of generation, a concept which incorporates ideas of structure and power, is specifically used to explore the social organisation of generational relations within the study class. The concept of generation also describes how individual relations are organised between those constructed as adults and those constructed as children.

These individual relationships will also be explored through the use of the concept of positioning. This is to emphasise that being constructed, or positioned, as children in relation to adults does not fully describe the positions of the children in the study class. The theoretical concept of positioning accentuates the fluidity of the children’s position in school.

Childhood as a generational phenomenon

This study focuses on the relationship between the children and different aspects of their schooling. A central aspect of children’s school life is the social organisation of generational relations. In school those positioned as children and those positioned as adults are understood to be of different social categories (Landahl 2006:8). In everyday life in school this means that the expectations, possibilities and limitations of action differ for the two categories.

To explore the relationship between these categories in the study class the concept of generation has been used. Generation has arisen within childhood studies in order to link the actor-centred observations of children’s everyday activities and experiences, where they are seen as social actors interacting with and acting upon their surroundings, with a macro approach where childhood is acknowledge as being a transient period in the individual child’s life but also a relatively permanent element in modern social life with children as a permanent social group (Qvortrup 1994, Alanen 2001:13).

A generational analysis of childhood was proposed by L. Alanen (2001) as she argued that childhood is a generational phenomenon, and that the study of childhood in one way or other is always embedded in a generational frame.

Mayall (2002:28-31) proposes that this should be analysed at several levels; individual, group and cohort. In everyday living she says children and adults negotiate space, time and status as they relate to each other on an individual level. At a group level the concern is with relations between “the social positions of childhood and adulthood” and Mayall identifies school as an arena
where these relationships can be observed in children’s activities as children in school “identify themselves as a group which has to deal with the adult group” (Mayall 2002:29).

At the third level, that of cohort⁴, we find that “social policies that impact on childhood experience are constructed, whether by design or not, by cohorts of older people drawing on their own experience, and on their ideologies of childhood and adulthood and the correct relationships between childhood and adulthood (Mayall 2002:30)”.

Saying that childhood can be relationally conceptualised both in terms of external and internal relations, where the basis for an external definition of the category child would be some observable similarity such as age, Alanen (2001:20) argues for focus to be on internal relations. In this way generational structure or order would refer to social processes whereby people become, or are constructed as, children or adults. In this there is interdependency between the categories in that neither can exist without the other and a change in one is tied to a change in the other.

This construction, says Alanen, involves agency of both children and adults and a specific concern in generational studies is children’s agency. This can be seen as “inherently linked to the ‘powers’ (or lack of them), of those positioned as children, to influence, organize, coordinate and control events taking place in their everyday world” (Alanen 2001:21). This definition I would, however, modify referring to B. Davies (1990) who in relation to positioning theory argues for a definition of agency that includes choice. According to Davies (1990:359) the questions is not whether individuals can have or not have agency but whether there is a choice, and whether there are practices which “provide the possibility of the individual positioning themselves as agent – as one who chooses and carries through the chosen line of action”.

In this thesis agency will be both the “micro-constructionist understanding of being a social actor” and the choices, possibilities and limitations of action “determined” by the specific structures (regimes, orders) within which persons are positioned as children” (Alanen 2001:21). Understanding construction as a practical and material process, Alanen argues that it should be studied as a practice or a set of practices as it is through “such practices that the two

⁴ In this context Mayall understands ‘cohort’ to be people born at roughly the same point in historical and social time.
generational categories of children and adults are recurrently produced” (2001:21).

Generation as an analytic concept has been criticised by among others A-L. Närvanen and E. Näsman (2002) who point to its multiple meanings. The term can, they claim, not only have different meanings in various studies but can be used in more than one sense in a single study. This is acknowledged by Alanen as she describes the use of ‘generation’ in what she calls common parlance where the term is multifaceted and relates it to etymologies where the term implies genealogies and succession with the original meaning linked to kinship.

However as an analytic term Alanen wants to base it on Karl Mannheim’s notion of generation which has mainly been used in studies of youth and youth culture (Alanen 2001:16). Wanting to go beyond Mannheim, Alanen says that there are good reasons to believe that sociologists “will learn more about childhood as a social and specifically generational (structural) condition by working on the notion as an analogue to class, gender, ethnicity or disability (Alanen 2001 17)”.

This means that with the emergence of the concept generation parallels can be drawn to feminist studies. Just as the concept of gender emerged in feminist analysis in an attempt to show the cultural aspect of sexual identity, the concept of generation has emerged in childhood studies in an attempt to combine children’s experiences as social actors with structural aspects of their surroundings (Mayall 1999, Mayall 2002:24-5, Alanen 2000). Another similarity is the use of a child standpoint which is related to standpoint methodology, an approach of giving due attention to people’s experiences as a basis for analysing their social condition (Alanen 2000:24-5, Mayall 2002).

In their criticism of the concept of generation Närvanen and Näsman propose the use of life phase. Halldén (2003) points out that this could be as problematic since life phase is not always related to age. Another problem I can see is that life phase does not indicate the relational aspects of childhood the way that generation does. This means that although the criticism of the concept is relevant I find no equivalent concept in use which, like generation, points to the relational aspect of the concept child where child is understood from the position children have within the generational system.

This does not mean that I disregard A. Prout’s (2005:77-9) criticism of Alanen’s and J. Qvortrup’s discussions of generation. Prout finds that they tend
to over emphasise the stability and solidity of intergenerational relations and that Alanen formulations seems to imply only two subject positions, that of child and that of adult. Prout claims that she thereby reinstates a dichotomy between childhood and adulthood at the same time as she ignores intra-generational relations and he argues for the concept of life course to be used in the study of children’s lives. Such an approach would, according to Prout, allow for the multiplicity and complexity of childhoods.

I find, however, that by using the concept of generation to explore the social organisation of generational relations within the study class, and the power relations inherent in this relationship, this will not be reduced to an issue between individuals. To allow for a multiplicity of relations a parallel use of the concept of positioning emphasises the fluidity present in the ways children and adults can be constructed.

**Positioning in interaction**

Generation is used to discuss the relative positions of children and adults in school and how daily activities are organised in relation to these positions.

In the study class it was, however, clear that these two positions, child and adult, would not be sufficient to explore the children’s everyday life in school. Among the earlier presented research we saw studies where the conceptions of children had been explored. In the same way the conceptions of children as school children are explored in this study. Using positioning theory, framed in social constructionism and discourse analysis, the children’s positions are related to conceptions of them and will be used to emphasise that the relational aspects of generation do not indicate a fixed or stable relationship. Within the generational relationship positions can and do change and positionings are used as coping strategies (Harré and van Lagenhove 1999b:17).

Three dimensions can be distinguished within positioning (Harré and van Lagenhove 1999a:6). The first is whether individual persons position individuals, or if collectives position collectives. In the school situation this can be discussed as whether the positioning is at an individual level or if those of the social category of children position and are positioned by the social category adults.

The second dimension is whether the individuals or collectives reflexively position themselves, or are positioned by some other, i.e. are the children positioning themselves or do adults or other children position them. The third
dimension is whether each positions the other, or if in positioning one the other is also positioned.

R. Harré and L. van Lagenhove point out that the rights for both self-positioning and for interactive other-positioning are unequally distributed depending on the situation. Positioning always takes place within a specific context and in each context rights, duties and obligations of participants are in place (Harré and van Lagenhove 1999b:23). Relating this to the generational organisation of schooling we find that this affords the adults possibilities for positioning that may override any positioning attempted by the children.

An unequal distribution of positioning can also be dependent on individuals’ capacity to position themselves and to positioning others, in their mastery of the techniques and in their willingness to position and be positioned (Harré and van Lagenhove 1999b:30). We therefore find that variations in positioning rights and possibilities may be individual attributes or they may be socially determined with the power to position being derived from the participants’ specific location in social orders and networks. So although we often find people’s actions intelligible and understand their positions by referring to the roles they occupy, or to some institutional aspect of social life, positioning can shift from being grounded in the social to being related to personal attributes. Harré and van Langenhove (1999b:21-2) point out that the less intelligible the actions are, in relation to social roles, the more prominent the personal positioning will be.

Harré and van Langenhove (1999b:20-2) make an analytic distinction between first order positioning, where positioning occurs without intention, and second order positioning, which is always intentional and follows on a tacit first order positioning. The second order positioning occurs when the first order positioning is questioned by one of the persons involved. This means that the children and adults in the study class do not need to be aware of either positioning or being positioned since, although we are all constantly engaged in positioning ourselves and others, the positioning can be either intentional or tacit (Harré and van Lagenhove 1999b:22-30).

Positioning theory is framed in social constructionism and discourse analysis and according to Davies and Harré (1999:37) positioning is a discursive process locating people in conversation “as observably and subjectively coherent participants in jointly produced storylines”. Harré and van Langenhove (1999a:1) point out that within social and psychological
writing the word ‘position’ has been used in many ways but within positioning theory it has come to take on a specific meaning in the “analysis of fine-grained symbolically mediated interactions between people”.

It is important to remember that positioning is inherently dynamic in character. A speaker generally takes up or adopts a position in the opening of a conversation, or as I argue, in any interaction. This act, however, does not, and indeed could not, pre-empt the continuation of the interaction, which could be redefined through a rejection of the original positioning by other participants or by their adoption of other positions (Harré and van Lagenhove 1999b:28). It must be clear that positions are relational, positions can and do change and that “fluid positionings, not fixed roles, are used by people to cope with the situation they usually find themselves in” (Harré and van Lagenhove 1999b:17).

Pointing out that positioning theory should not be regarded as a ‘general theory’ Harré and van Langenhove (1999a:9) say that it thereby does not call for a “deterministic application to several specific subject matters”. Positioning theory should instead be treated “as a starting point for reflecting upon the many different aspects of social life”, and it is in this manner I aim to use positioning theory in this thesis.

The concepts of generation and positioning will be used to explore the children’s participation, their position, and the restrictions and possibilities for the children’s action in the school setting.

**OUTLINE OF CHAPTERS TO FOLLOW**

In Chapter One research from three areas seen to have pertinence for the study has been introduced. These are studies that problematise children’s everyday life in school, explore conceptions of children and childhood, and studies that look at how children are positioned within the school setting. The aim of the study has been presented and the theoretical concepts of generation and positioning and their use in the study discussed.

Chapter Two is a methodological chapter where I strive to achieve transparency with regard to underlying assumptions that exist within the interpretative research tradition. Here it is thought that there does not exist a truly independent observer nor a ‘field’ awaiting discovery and exploration
(Atkinson 1992:8). Since the field’s organisation, and the position of the researcher and other participants, is firmly related to the data generated, these aspects are discussed. In this chapter I also look at ethical and methodological considerations\(^5\) that were raised due to the study being situated among children. One such issue is the question of access and informed participation as children generally are not in the position to give or withhold consent either to being studied or to being involved in some way in a study (Masson 2000:36).

In Chapter Three the researcher’s positioning in relation to the children in the study is further explored. This detailed exploration is due to my belief that the children, throughout the study, positioned and repositioned me according to their current understanding of my role (David, Edwards and Alldred 2001:359). The everyday relationship between the children and myself and how our relative positionings can be understood is explored with focus on the children’s possible interpretation of my position in the field and the ethical dimensions raised by my participation in their schooling.

Chapter Four is the first of the empirical chapters and its focus is on the unity of the members of the class and the question raised is how this unity was constructed. To describe the cohesion that can exist in school classes, or very small groups, different concepts have been used. In this chapter I will relate this cohesion to the concept of community, primarily to the imagined and symbolic aspects discussed by B. Anderson (1991) and A. P. Cohen (1985). The children’s positioning and agency during everyday activities and the generational order enacted within the class will also be discussed.

In Chapter Five time and space as a framework to everyday school activities will be examined. These are mapped by timetables that indicate the ‘where and when and what’ of the school day and together with school rules embody the routinised and organisational framework of school (Gordon et al. 2000:137). Timetables “establish rhythms, impose particular occupations, [and] regulate the cycles of repetition” (1977:138-57). These rhythms epitomise school life for many people – the regularity of repeated lessons, in specific classrooms, at designated desks with the same people throughout the week and throughout the school year. The study class is thus placed within an institution where time and space are central. In this chapter the question of how the children negotiate

\(^5\) I found early on that these issues where neither separable nor could they be resolved at the start of the study and then be seen as complete. Questions of methodology and ethics were raised throughout the study, as I will show further on.
these central aspects of school, and how are they positioned in these negotiations, is raised.

In Chapter Six the children’s view of themselves as active participants and their display of assurance will be explored. I will look at how the staff supports the children by assuming them to be able participants and by organising activities where the children can position themselves as able participants. The skills displayed by the students during their school days and how they were positioned and could position themselves through being granted and claiming command over their school day activities will be discussed.

In Chapter Seven I show that there are frequently occurring occasions during the school days when the children are positioned as less competent. This may happen when, within the routine everyday interaction between children and adults, the adults are positioned as having the right (and obligation) to control students. The question raised is this chapter is in which situations and in what manner the adults’ controlling activities becomes visible, and how the children react when their competence is questioned.

In the last chapter, Chapter Eight, the children’s position will be discussed in relation to the issues raised in the previous chapters. Their schooling will specifically be related to the generational order and the institutional organisation, and both teacher and children agency will be discussed as choices, restrictions, and possibilities for participation in the school setting.
CHAPTER TWO

METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

AN ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY

According to H. F. Wolcott the underlying purpose of ethnographic research is

[To] describe what the people in some particular place or status ordinarily do, and the meanings they ascribe to what they do, under ordinary or particular circumstances, presenting that description in a manner that draws attention to the regularities that implicate cultural process (Wolcott 1999: 68).

Doing ethnography means going through the process of doing an ethnographic study as well as producing an ethnographic text (Agar 1996:53, MacDonald 2001:60, Wolcott 1999:41).

Within ethnography data is generated by coming very close to the studied field since to do ethnography the researcher has to do more than watch; s/he needs to be immersed in the lives of the ‘others’ who are being studied (Emerson, Fretz and Shaw 1995:2, Spindler and Spindler 1987:154). This immersion is attempted through what is called participant observation, where the researcher both participates in, and observes activities occurring in the chosen field of study.

It is the fieldwork within ethnography that is referred to as participant observation6, although the relationship between participation and observation varies among researchers. R. M. Emerson et al. (1995:2) point out that the idea of “ethnographic immersion” precludes conducting fieldwork as a detached observer. To do participant observation is to enter into a social setting and participating in the activities there, developing relationships with other participants, experiencing events and getting to know the specific social setting

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6 Participant observation is sometimes discussed as synonymous to ethnography or used as a catch-all label for what the researcher does during fieldwork, but I will discuss it as one distinctive part of the ethnographic study.
(Emerson et al. 1995:1-4, Duranti 1997:89). At the same time the researcher observes, makes notes \(^7\) and asks questions.

The extent to which the researcher participates is not given, but the field itself, the interest of the researcher, as well as the personality of the researcher influences how s/he positions him/herself and to which degree s/he participates (Duranti 1997:85-121, Emerson et al. 1995:1-4, Hammersley and Atkinson 1983:77-104, Wolcott 1999:46-51). Wolcott points out that participation is not always the preferred choice and that for his own research in schools he has mostly adopted what he refers to as a ‘non-participant observer’ role. The researcher who does choose to more fully participate will not only experience the events s/he is studying but will use that personal experience to gain insights as well as to generate further questions (Duranti 1997:100).

Ethnography has become increasingly popular among researchers of children, childhood and education (Lloyd-Smith and Tarr 2000). When studying arenas where one of the main groups of actors are children ethnography offers advantages such as the children having time to get to know the researcher before being questioned at any length, and that the researcher not only has the children’s statements, but observations of activities from which to draw inferences from.

In relation to this a distinction can be made between describing the act of research as ‘collecting data’ or as ‘generating data’. E. M. Graue and D. Walsh (1998:72 pp) place these two descriptions of doing research along a continuum, where at the one end there is a view of the researcher collecting preformed data and then making valid inferences from this, and at the other end there is a more interactive/generative view of data. Here the “act of research is conceived as nested contexts, including the researcher’s perspectives on research, theory, and in this case children; the role negotiated with/by the participants; and the relationships that ensue over time” (Graue and Walsh 1998:73). Data is thereby not seen to be available to be collected, but is generated through the researcher’s interactions in a local setting.

Although participant observation may be seen as the corner stone of ethnography, ethnography is an open research method where the researcher may draw upon various sources of information (Hammersley and Atkinson

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\(^7\) Increasingly audio- and video-taping are used instead of, or as a complement to written notes.
Common sources of information are formal and informal interviews, collections of artefacts, surveys, extensive video and audio recordings (Bergqvist 1990, Evaldsson 1993, 2000, 2001) as well as archival research.

The different types of data generated are then seen as complementary rather than comparable (Wolcott 1992:20). Seeing the data as complementary indicates that there is no need to rank the different types of data, but see them all as expressions of the field studied. This means that different types of data are accorded the same value in a study, as they may relate to different aspects of the field in question or provide different perspectives to the researcher’s questions.

In this tradition where the ‘field’ of fieldwork does not exist independently of the researcher, but is produced in conjunction with the researcher, it does not mean, “that there are no social beings or social acts independent of [the researcher’s] observations. Clearly there are.” (Atkinson 1992:9). But the ‘field’ of fieldwork is produced through social transactions and, according to P. Atkinson; it is then constructed by what the ethnographer writes.

Writing the ethnographic text is partly a process parallel to the process of analyses and partly a process of presentation. While writing it becomes clearer whether the analyses done is coherent, but at the same time the text produced needs to be transparent. This transparency should relate to the analysis, the ethnographer’s position in the field, as well as to the ethnographer’s person.

In this chapter I strive to achieve such transparency with regard to underlying assumptions that exist within the chosen research tradition. In this interpretative tradition where there is thought to exist no truly independent observer and no ‘field’ awaiting discovery and exploration (Atkinson 1992:8), the field’s organisation and the role negotiated by the researcher, and by other participants, are firmly related to the data generated.

**The data generated**

- The main data were fieldnotes from two shorter periods and one longer continuous fieldwork period adding up to a year. The fieldnotes were mainly written in English.
• At all times I carried a notebook. As well as participating, I would jot down notes of what was happening around me. At end of the day I would go back to my office and write up my fieldnotes.

• When the children where in Year 5 nine group interviews of 15 to 25 minutes duration were conducted with thirteen\(^8\) of the twenty children, and the class teacher and the assistant was interviewed.

• In Year 6 individual\(^9\) interviews were conducted with sixteen\(^10\) children and the class teacher.

• The questions the children were asked in all the interviews were about the class and their teacher, about why they were in school, and what made them happy and unhappy during a school day. They were asked to describe school to someone who does not know what it is and reflect over what would happen if there were no schools. During the second lot of interviews the children were also asked to compare their current school with their previous one and they were asked of their thoughts about their impending move to senior level school (sw. högstadiet).

• The staff were asked of their thoughts about the class, about school and their roles as teachers/assistants.

How the data was generated, the reflections and the choices made, will be discussed in detail below.

I joined the children in the study class at Hill school as a student in the beginning of May the year they were finishing Year 4.\(^{11}\) I returned after their

\(^{8}\) The parents of two children said no to their being interviewed, two children were uncertain and I therefore chose not to interview them, and two permission slips were not returned. One child did not turn up twice to be interviewed, as he was busy playing.

\(^{9}\) Except two boys who asked to be interviewed together.

\(^{10}\) One set of parents declined, three children did not want to be interviewed and one child was absent.

\(^{11}\) In Sweden one is nine or ten years old the year one starts Year 4, so the children I spent time with were between ten and twelve.
summer break when they were in Year 5 and I left in the beginning of April in the spring term. Just over a year later, when the children were in Year 6 I again spent some time with them, this time in another setting as they had moved to a nearby senior level school and they had a new class teacher. Throughout the fieldwork period my time with the class was intermittent; at times I was with them for full days and full weeks, but mostly I spent part of the week and part of the day with them.

My initial contact with the class was top-down in that I had requested permission from the town council to do a study in a school. When I contacted the town council and requested a “fairly stable school” their response was to question whether there were any stable schools, but they would see what they could do. I was told that they would ask the headmasters/mistresses and a few weeks later I was given the name and telephone number of a teacher willing to have me in her classroom.

By positioning\textsuperscript{12} myself as a fellow-student, instead of the more common attempt of achieving the position of a free-floating researcher, I spent my time doing schoolwork in the classroom and joining the children in their games whenever possible during break time.

Whilst joining the children I at all times carried one of two notebooks, a larger one to use in class and a smaller one to fit into my pocket during break times. As well as participating I would also try to jot down notes of what was happening around me and at end of the day I would go back to my office and write up my fieldnotes, elaborating on the short notes I had written (cf Thorne 1993:17). The fieldnotes were mainly written in English and conversations scribbled down were mostly directly translated into English, but sometimes written in Swedish to be translated later on.

In the beginning of the fieldwork I spent more time participating in school work and games, while during the last months of my main fieldwork period I withdrew a little and spent more time observing what was going on and writing up more elaborate notes when still at school. When returning to the class for the last time it seemed simpler to position myself as the conventional free-floating researcher spending my time observing and writing notes as well as interviewing. This change gave me the possibility to re-assess and reconfirm my earlier decision to position myself as a fellow-student. Positioned as a free-

\textsuperscript{12} My position in the field will be discussed in detail in chapter three.
CHAPTER TWO

floating researcher the staff included me in discussions about the children, giving me information not available to the children. This had not been the case during my earlier fieldwork.

Within participant observation the myriad of casual conversations and questions asked during fieldwork are often referred to as informal interviews or informal questions (Agar 1996:139-40). Apart from these casual conversations more formal interviews are generally part of ethnographic studies. The type of interview that is conducted does not only depend on the researcher’s interest but on the possibilities offered in the field. There can be physical and organisational issues that frame the organisation of interviewing but there is also the ecology of questioning (Duranti 1997:104) to be taken into account. This means, perhaps especially in regards to the less formal interviews, that there are issues of by whom, when and how questions may be asked in any social setting.

Beginning my fieldwork, I had assumed that I would be able to ask the children questions about their schooling during the school days, as well as observing and participating. Instead I found that the days were very busy and there was little opportunity for talk. During lessons the children were busy with schoolwork and the conversations that occurred then were short and discreet. During break time and lunch most of the children in the class spent their time busily with some physical activity, and trying to ask them questions interfered with this. This does not mean that no casual conversation occurred, but that it was less than originally hoped for.

As originally planned somewhat more formal audio taped interviews with the children and the teachers were conducted during the latter part of the fieldwork. These were what M. Hammersley and P. Atkinson (1983:113) call ethnographic interviews making a distinction between these and what they call standardised interviews. The ethnographic interview is seen as a reflexive interview where the ethnographer tries to cover certain issues instead of bringing specific questions into the interview. In the interviews I conducted I wanted to explore how the participants spoke of their understandings of school, the activities and relationships there.

The first set of interviews were conducted before leaving the class in April, when the children were in Year 5. These were group interviews as the children chose to be interviewed in groups of two to four in each (cf. David et al. 2001:362, James, Jenks and Prout 1998:190), and some children were
Swedish and I have translated excerpts chosen as examples. During the interviews, prominent understandings and interpretations of the social setting or the activities discussed. These understandings and interpretations are then analysed as social phenomena (Hammersley and Atkinson 1983:126) in the same manner and accorded the same dignity as data generated during participant observation.

The first interviews, which were group interviews in Year 5, were therefore conducted as conversations where I would bring up a topic or a question and the children would either answer or start a discussion among themselves. During the individual interviews in Year 6 it was harder for me not to dominate the conversation, but in all interviews the aim was to let the participants guide the direction of the interview. In some interviews my role became more prominent than in others. Although a number of questions where brought to the interviews, these were mainly used as a guide, so when a new topic arose in one interview it would often be incorporated into the next interview and in this way the interviews developed over time. All interviews were conducted in Swedish and I have translated excerpts chosen as examples.
Conducting fieldwork in one language and presenting the findings in another, as was done in this study, is becoming increasingly common among social researchers according to M. Birbili (2000). In cases such as mine where the researcher and translator is the same person “the quality of the translation is influenced by factors such as: the autobiography of the researcher-translator; the researcher’s knowledge of the language and the culture of the people under study; and the researcher’s fluency in the language of the write-up (Birbili 2000). With my familiarity with the two languages and the cultural contexts, as well as having worked with children in both English and Swedish settings, I hope my translations are as true to their original meaning as necessary for this study.

During my time in school I also collected samples of schoolwork, an almost full year of weekly letters from the teacher to the parents, the forms the children filled in to choose which friends they wanted to follow into senior level as well as some school policy documents. The children also gave me permission to make copies of the letters they wrote to introduce themselves to their new teacher.

The different types of data generated during the fieldwork will be considered complementary (Wolcott 1992:20), as discussed above, and used together to understand and present these children’s schooling.

The researcher in analyses and text

What sort of scientists are they whose main technique is sociability and whose main instrument is themselves? (Geertz 2000:96).

M. H. Agar (1996) asks ‘Who are you to do this?’ and discusses the ethnographer in relation to the people s/he studies and in relation to the culture and the setting the study is situated in. My study is situated among children in a school in the country of my birth. In this I am very close to the setting I am studying in two ways. Firstly, as A. Laerke (1998) points out, by placing a study among children one enters a setting one has once been a part of, secondly, school is also a setting which we have been part of and have memories of. B. Thorne (1993) uses her memories and recognition of schooling to reflect about the school situation she studies. In the same way my memories of childhood and of school are with me during this study. These memories have
been used during fieldwork to understand and to compare, they have been used during analysis as I recognise or puzzle over situations that occurred. For example by remembering the school bells of my childhood calling out that play time was over and that it was time to hurry back to the classroom, the absence of a school bell became noticeable, and in pursuing this I found myself considering other aspects of time keeping.

But the school I joined for this study was not ‘my school’, I did not ‘return’ to school and re-live my own schooling. I entered a setting that in many ways was unfamiliar to me, a setting that differed culturally and in its organisation from the schools I had been familiar with. This distance between my earlier school experiences and the experience gained during this study is also a mind frame – entering a setting and assuming one is familiar with it makes it harder to see the unfamiliar – by distancing myself and placing myself as ‘the other’ I tried to see this school as something different and something new.

This distancing may have been more easily achieved because although I am Swedish, I left Sweden when I was five years old to live in different countries in Africa and, apart from vacations and a year and a half during my early teens, I did not return until the age of twenty one. Six years later I again left Sweden and spent nine years in Swaziland where I lived and worked in a boarding school/college. This means that although school is familiar to me, both as a student and as a member of staff, the specific setting of school in Sweden is not as familiar. Apart from this ‘spatial’ distance there is the matter of time. We cannot believe that the superficial likenesses between a school in the late sixties and early seventies and a school in the early 21st century means we ‘return to school’. To do so is to disregard the continual changes inherent in culture and societies.

To further distance myself and to look at the setting through the eyes of a stranger I chose to reinforce the non-Swedish aspect of myself by conducting the study in English. By bringing my English-speaking personality to the forefront I brought experiences gained in other countries to the forefront and use these to reflect over the happenings in this Swedish setting. In comparative traditions there is an assumption that cultural patterns can be made visible (Ekstrand 1990:16) by the researcher studying cultural settings, which initially are unfamiliar, using the knowledge of his/her own cultural background as a contrast.
Chapter Two

Analysing the data

One begins fieldwork not with a tabula rasa but with a foreshadowed problem in mind. However, the problem is of necessity general in scope. Because one is attempting to understand a system in its own terms, according to its own criteria of meaningfulness, one cannot predict in advance which aspects of the system will have significance or the kind of significance they will have (Wilcox 1982:459).

Apart from the above quote K. Wilcox says that “the initial tasks in doing ethnography is deciding what to focus on” as, she goes on to say, it is apparent that one cannot describe everything (Wilcox 1982:459). Doing ethnography is thereby a balance between an open explorative study and a focus based on knowledge of earlier studies and it is difficult to break down the research procedure into clear-cut phases. Planning, doing fieldwork, analysing and writing can be seen as separate phases although they often overlap.

Having said this there are different phases of analysis that can be clarified and described. The first phase is the analysis that occurred while doing fieldwork. The occurrences in the field were analysed as the fieldnotes were written and later copied up. The understanding created here brought the fieldwork forward in a specific direction.

Once fieldwork was done analysis was more structured. The fieldnotes had four analytic readings (cf. Gordon et al. 2000:206). The first was a thematic reading where the material was searched for major themes. The main question asked at this time was ‘what is important to the children during their school days?’ Here three themes in the children’s school life emerged – the relations within the class, the creation of order and the organisation of schoolwork.

The second reading can be seen as both thematic and interpretive and was related to each of these major themes. The goal was to identify what could be organised under each heading and in this way themes within each area were identified and concepts tied to them. A third reading was done to find and identify recurring topics within these themes.

The topics thus generated were:

- The significance the membership of the study class has.
- The children’s negotiations of time and space.
- The children’s active participation.
Visible adult control and the children’s reaction to this.

The fourth reading was an extractive/interpretive one where illustrations for themes and concepts were drawn out, examined and re-interpreted.

In all the readings a combination of looking for patterns and fractures, and of alternating between seeing ‘the large picture’ and examining the minute details, was used (cf. Karlson 2003:74-7, Markström 2005:51-3).

In the above description it appears as if all themes and categories were found in an orderly and systematic analysis. This is not so. I do believe that the “truly analytical moments [occurred] during brief bursts of insight or pattern recognition” (Wolcott 1994:24) during long walks or wakeful nights. These could then be tested against the empirical material and the systematic analysis being done.

**Naming**

Writing about the young members of the study class, I found myself in a quandary about what term to use (cf. Thorne 1993:8, Evaldsson 2001:7). They could be discussed as students, pupils or children. As the children generally talked of themselves as children or as school children, not as students, and as the staff talked of them as children, the term child/children will be used. The term *children* is also related to the generational order and positioning in my analysis however, and when used as an analytic term it will be italicized.

When speaking of a specific child I will use that child’s name except when it was not possible to note who said something or whether the speaker was a girl or a boy. I will then, without specifying, say that ‘a boy’, ‘a girl’ or ‘a child’ did or said something.

In relation to calling the children ‘children’ I should, to be consistent, generally call the adults ‘adults’. As the children in this study do not generally talk of ‘adults’ as a group I only do so in relation to discussions relating to the generational order. The children most commonly call all members of staff by their first name when speaking to them and of them. At times they also use the term ‘fröken’ which means both ‘teacher’ and ‘Miss’. I therefore talk of adults, of staff and of teachers as well as using first names, all depending on the situation and on the discussion on hand.
I have also found it necessary to consider how I name and position myself within the ethnographic descriptions. Having joined the class as a fellow student and joining them in their activities I was included as a member of the class, albeit an odd one. In this manner I would talk of ‘our class’ in many conversations with the children. During the more formal interviews I would talk of ‘the class’ and it was understood which class I talked of.

In the ethnographic examples I find that it is not possible to consistently use either ‘they’ or ‘we’. I considered using the term ‘we’ when describing a situation where I joined the activities and the term ‘they’ when I would stand aside and observe, as well as during the interviews. I found that this could cause confusion and I have therefore removed myself as much as possible from the examples. However, as I use my own experience as a tool in my analysis, I cannot remove myself wholly from these examples and still maintain credibility (cf. Bergqvist 2001), so my presence is still noticeable.

A STUDY AMONG CHILDREN

My research interest led me to conduct my study among children. This means that although the aim of the study is not to study children as such, there are ethical and methodological considerations that come to the forefront in that the study is situated among children, and the participants in focus are children.

This study could have been conducted with children of any age but my choice was to work with children of the age of ten to twelve years. Due to the organisation of the Swedish school system, I see them as having a central position within schooling.

The Swedish comprehensive school was at its formation divided into three levels: junior level (sw. lågstadiet) being the first three years; intermediate level (sw. mellanstadiet) comprising the next three years; and the senior level (sw. högstadiet) the last three years. Although officially dispensed with, this organisation is still in place in many schools and the children in the study class were organised accordingly.

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13 I found early on that these issues where not separable, nor could they be resolved at the start of the study and then be seen as complete. Questions of methodology and ethics were raised throughout the study, as I will show further on.
Starting school at the age of seven, the children would ideally have the same class teacher throughout junior level. At this level children are seen as novices and as very young. They are closely supervised during most aspects of their fairly short school days, and entering the intermediary level is a concrete and noticeable step. At the senior level the children are seen as teenagers who are on their way out of compulsory schooling. They are regarded as struggling with identity problems and generally rebelling against the confines of the school\textsuperscript{14}. The children at the intermediary level are neither on their way in nor on their way out. They are firmly placed in school and this is seen as the obvious place for them to be. This is why I see them as central to school life. Their place is seldom questioned and it is possible that even they themselves seldom question their place at, or within school\textsuperscript{15}.

**Ethical considerations**

One ethical consideration has been to make the setting of the study as anonymous as possible. In order to do this I have not only changed the name of the school and the participants, I have also changed other details relating to the study. These changes are judged by me not to interfere with the interpretations of the research material as well as retaining sufficient transparency for others to be able to judge my interpretation.

Another ethical issue is the question of access and informed participation, which is particularly problematic with regard to doing research with children. Children are not generally in the position to give, or withhold consent to either being studied or to being involved in some way in a study (Masson 2000:36). An adult seen to be in charge usually grants access to children and the arenas that they inhabit (David et al. 2001:351, James et al. 1998:187). When studying schooling or children in school, access is usually granted by principals, teachers and possibly parents.

This is both an ethical dilemma to be discussed below, as well as a methodological dilemma. I believe that it is a methodological dilemma in that gatekeepers are also in the position to “position” the researcher (Hammersley \textsuperscript{14} This description of how the children are perceived in these stages is my interpretation based upon personal experience and knowledge. \textsuperscript{15} I have only chosen this age group due to their position within school; I do not believe that there are developmental, or other intrinsic reasons that make this age group more suitable than other age groups.)
and Atkinson 1983:72-6). It is often through these gatekeepers that children are informed of research objects and methods. The gatekeepers’ understanding of the project, and even their understanding of research, of relations between adults and children and of children’s status within the research arena, guides the introduction of the researcher and the project (David et al. 2001:358-61).

In my study, permission was sought from the headmaster and the teacher first, as they are in the position of gatekeepers for the school as a whole. After my initial meeting with their teacher, she informed the children of my project and a letter was sent to the parents where they were asked to contact the teacher or me if they had any queries about or objections to the study. Leaving the class at the end of May, I was given permission to return in the autumn and doing so, I sent another letter to the parents explaining my research and again giving them the choice of contacting me.

Having followed the children for almost a year, I prepared to proceed with the more formal audio taped interviews. I told the children that I wanted to interview them, and that they would be given a form that both they and their parents would need to fill in. On the form there were two sections, one where the parents were asked whether or not I was allowed to interview the child, with the child’s consent, and one where the child could answer either ‘no, I don’t want to be interviewed’ or ‘I think Katarina may interview me, but I will make up my mind later’. Almost all the children and the parents gave me their permission to conduct the interviews, but before each interview I made sure the children knew that they still had a choice.16 When returning to the class a year later, the same procedure was used to gain permission for interviews, trying to make sure the children understood that they had a choice in the matter.

Both obtaining children’s consent to a study and making sure their participation is an informed one is not straightforward, as research may not be something they are familiar with. This study was conducted among children 10 – 12 years old and I believe that they had some idea of what research is and that the simple explanation of my purpose, i.e. that I wanted to find out what it

16 Personally I learnt a lesson with regards to such a situation some years previously when I was on the verge of granting permission for my nine-year old daughter to be interviewed during school time. She asked if she really had to participate, as she had done so before and found the experience discomfiting. She had at that time felt that she did not have a choice.
is like to be a ‘school child’ and then I would write a book about it (cf. Evaldsson 2001) was clear and sufficed as an introduction.

As well as obtaining the teacher’s permission to return after the summer holidays, I also asked the children whether they minded if I returned. The children answered that I was welcome back\textsuperscript{17} and I returned to the class to continue my study. On my return in the autumn I elaborated the explanation I had given them of my purpose, but the class did not express any interest or curiosity\textsuperscript{18}.

But although I had been given this verbal ‘of course you may come back’ from the children, I was aware that theirs was not a fully informed choice and I tried to be extra sensitive to, and respect any indication that they wished to spend time away from my gaze (cf. Thorne 1993:27). Another ethical consideration raised itself in that the children I followed did not seem to spend time discussing or reflecting over happenings during the school day (cf. Evaldsson 2001:2). If I were to initiate these types of reflections it seemed to me, as M. P. Manke (1997:107) puts it, that “my questions might shape not just their answers, but their developing views of their teachers and of their own place in the classroom”. A few times when I asked about more sensitive happenings, I was met with genuine puzzlement over my curiosity and I soon dropped the subject.

I am aware that throughout my study the children positioned me according to their current understanding of my role (David et al. 2001:359). I am also aware that the interpretation of this would vary among the children and depending on the current situation I was involved in.

In the following chapter the everyday relationship between me, as the researcher, and the children will be discussed. Focus will be on the children’s possible interpretation of my position in the field.

\textsuperscript{17} I am well aware that their agreement may count for very little as children in school are used to agreeing with adults’ suggestions, but at the time I could find no other way than asking to discern their will.
\textsuperscript{18} During my research I found that the children were constantly exposed to the presence of unknown adults both in the classroom and in the schoolyard. There were often student teachers doing studies of various kinds as well as doing their vocational training but also other, sometimes unidentified, adult visitors. This can be why the children did not query my presence to start with although some of them later asked how long I was staying.
As discussed in the previous chapter the term participant observation raises questions about the researcher’s participation as it clearly denotes both participation and observation. Anyone participating in a social setting becomes one of the actors in the setting and how they position themselves will guide which aspects of the social setting become available to study. As a researcher the choice of being the free-floating researcher can seem the most sensible course but when it comes to studying children, or rather children’s social arenas, the choice is not as simple.

When reflecting over how to position myself for this study I knew that I wanted to spend my time with the children and not the adults. Furthermore I knew that I wanted to explore the children’s everyday activities and the experiences of schooling that they were in the process of obtaining. I realised that this would be hard as I could not blend into the group of children, but I also knew that I could not achieve my purpose by blending into the group of adults. Attempting to understand the children’s experiences of generational order and positioning, I wanted only access to what the children had access to. This implied physical admittance solely to school areas that the children had access to, access to information that they had, and to be given the same justification for rules and sanctions.

Among researchers doing ethnography among children there are ongoing discussions about which role to take as participant observer. In her ‘least-adult’ role N. Mandell argues for minimising the physical differences between adults and children, and she herself became an active participant over time, joining the children in their games (Mandell 1988). This ‘least adult’ role is, on the other hand, criticised by A. James, C. Jenks and A. Prout (1998:183) who argue that since adults cannot pass unnoticed among children as age, size and authority intervenes, one should instead reflect on the significance of these differences.
Graue and Walsh (1998) point out that the social, physical, cognitive, and political distance “between the adult and the child makes their relationship very different from the relationship among adults. In doing research with children, one never becomes a child. One remains a very definite and readily identifiable ‘other’” (Graue and Walsh 1998:xiv). In a way this does not differ from the situation of anthropologists who conduct studies in other societies and cultures. They may join the activities of different groups but will always remain “a very definite and readily identifiable ‘other’”.

On the other hand Laerke (1998) who located herself on what she calls ‘the children’s level’ during field work in an English village, imitating the children as best she could, points out that there is a difference in that when studying children “you have in some sort of way, however culturally and personally constructed and ‘tampered with’ ‘been there once’”. You have been a child, and you have been a member of a social category which in many ways is seen “as immature, small, only partly developed, in need of discipline, advice, guidance and protection” (Laerke 1998:3).

The dichotomy between adult and child might need to be examined and as Thorne (1993:6) points out it is “socially created, historically changing, filled with ambiguity and contradiction, and continually negotiated”. Maintaining the dichotomy makes it harder for children’s experiences to be given the same dignity as adults’ experiences and the only option for an adult researcher would be to ‘study down’ (Thorne 1993:12). One way to negotiate this is to see the children as social actors in their own right and “approach their social worlds as ethnographers approach the worlds of adults” which means open-ended curiosity and an attitude of respectful discovery (Thorne 1993:12, cf also Christensen and James 2000).

In considering how to position myself in the field I also reflected over K. Norman’s (1999) description of how she, during fieldwork in a kindergarten in Germany, was asked to stand in for the head teacher for a two-week period. According to Norman this experience of being a teacher gave her a “‘sensory knowledge’ about how the relations between adults and children were constituted” (Norman 1999:71) from the teacher’s perspective. She points out

19 The idea of sensory knowledge can also be related to Wolcott’s discussion of that which is experienced, the information that comes through the senses, during participant observation (Wolcott 1999:46).
that the position one holds, being a student, teacher or researcher, has a bearing to what one experiences.

In an earlier classroom study with younger children (Ayton 1998) I had thought to position myself as a ‘non-participant observer’ in the classroom. Seating myself at the back of the classroom I found that the children tended to turn around to see what I was doing. By seating myself in full view at the front of the classroom they soon seemed to lose immediate interest in me. I felt strongly, however, that to observe the class in this manner exposed the children in the classroom to my gaze (cf. Thorne 1993:27) in a way which at times seemed to make both them and me uncomfortable. Being an observer in this way also put me in a position of being included in the teachers’ sphere and being told of their intentions and their interpretations of activities and understandings of individual children’s actions and personalities.20 As my intention in both studies has been to concentrate on the experience of school from the view point of the children I felt that being given this type of information upheld the generational order between adults and children making it harder to see the children as participants in their own right.

The researcher’s positioning is related to the data the he or she hopes to generate and can make certain happenings more prominent and thereby constituting reality in quite specific ways (Graue and Walsh 1998:75). In this study I therefore preferred to place myself firmly within the children’s sphere and this I did by joining ‘the social group children’ (Qvortrup 1994, Mayall 2002:21) and attending school as a ‘student’. By positioning myself with the children, joining their activities and following the routines and rules that they follow I hoped to gain a ‘sensory knowledge’, a physical and psychological experience of students’ life at school while at the same time distancing myself from the adults at school. I did not intend to pretend to be a child but by joining ‘the social group children’ (Qvortrup 1994, Mayall 2002:21) I wanted to put myself as far as possible in the position that a child/student occupies within school.

By standing beside the children and ‘going to school’ I tried to understand their school experience. At the same time being an adult with many years

20 When I changed my role to that of an observer when re-joining the class in Year 6 the (new) teacher and the assistants frequently asked me ‘how my research was going’ and gave me information about students and about how they were perceived. I became included in the ‘adult sphere’.

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Experience of school in various roles I also understood school from an adult’s perspective. I am also a researcher who has been fascinated by schooling for many years and this is yet another perspective brought into the study. All three perspectives are present in this study.

**Negotiating the Field**

Entering school in the role of ‘student’ I attempted to leave my adult authority behind. This meant following rules aimed at the students such as not entering the classroom during break and queuing up with the children at lunch. Nor would I try telling children what to do, or how to do things, or join the adults staying inside on cold days (cf Thorne 1993:14). At the same time I had to keep in mind that both the children and I, as well as the adults I interacted with, were well aware that I could at any time have chosen to step out of my role as a student and regained the authority of an adult.

Positioning, role construction and negotiation is an ongoing process though, and it continues throughout the course of a study (Graue and Walsh 1998:76). This means that although I joined the class with the intention of staying within the students/children’s sphere, my position and other’s interpretation of it was not only defined by me (Graue and Walsh 1998:76), nor was it stable, instead it was continually renegotiated and developed over time.

**Joining the study class**

The children in my study class had been informed that I was to join the class and do what they did. During my first day in the class I was seated at the front together with a boy and a girl. One of our first lessons was maths and another girl then joined us and the two girls worked side by side in their books. They also instructed me in writing up my sums and what to do.\(^{21}\) Although I was better at maths than they were I was not better at doing maths in this particular classroom setting and therefore genuinely needed their help.

I think it was important that my knowledge of what was to be done and how it was organised was truly wanting and I therefore needed the children to guide me. My lack of knowledge also made my study make more sense to the

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\(^{21}\) That they, not the boy instructed me can be seen as a gender issue, but the reason could be that this boy did not follow the class curricula in maths.
children as they could see that I did not know how to ‘go to school’ and therefore needed to find out.

The two girls who worked next to me during this first lesson guided me through the first few days. They helped me during lessons, took me to lunch and included me in break time activities. At this time the main activities were playing marbles or a ball game. I was taught both, and several children in the class were involved in teaching me. As I was not very good at these games I would, after losing for a while, join the small group of girls who used to spend their time on the steps outside the classroom. Here I could stand observing the playground as well as socialising.

Within the study class I was able to move between groups; sometimes being with the boys when they played marbles; joining the main group of girls in some of the ball games; or joining the smaller group of girls who usually stood by the steps. The boundaries between these groups were not in any way rigid and the girls and boys played marbles and ball games together and the girls in the small group occasionally joined the main group of girls in games, or the main group joined them on the steps. This fluidity meant that my moving between groups within the class was not especially noticeable (cf. Evaldsson 1993) but it was easier to be included in the girls’ activities during break times than the boys’. Apart from the issue of gender the boys often spent break time playing intense games of football and as I do not play football this effectively excluded me.

Although there was this fluidity between groups, there were groupings and these were arranged according to gender. Joining the class as a student meant that I had to join as a male or a female student; there is no gender-neutral position. As a female ‘student’ I was then invited to join the girls more often that the boys and I was included in the group of girls in gender divided situations such as lining up in girls’ and boys’ lines when entering the class room. Gradually I believe I was seen as a combination of adult and member of the ‘girl group’ and while learning to be a student the girls became my models and teachers to a greater extent than the boys.
During my time at school I joined the children whenever possible.\textsuperscript{22} Doing schoolwork in the classroom at the same time as I tried to keep track of what others were doing, going to lunch, washing my hands and queuing up with the rest of the class, and spending break time outside, joining in where I could without feeling I made a fool of myself (cf. Fine and Sandstrom 1988:23).\textsuperscript{23}

The class teacher treated me as one of the class, giving me class work and correcting handed in work. She gave me a place in group-work and called on me to read aloud when the others did. She never approached me during the school days to ask about my research and I did not feel I had more access to her than the children in the class unless I completely stepped out of my role as a student. This became noticeable when I wanted to ask permission to bring ice cream to the class at the end of the first term. Trying to approach the teacher I found that as a part of the class it was not possible for me to talk to her without the ‘other children’ being near by and hearing what I said, as there were always crowds of children around her wanting to talk.

Although I had, as discussed above, chosen to participate as a student in the class, there were situations where I again had to choose the degree of participation suitable at the time. When choosing my level of participation I would consider what would be most conducive to my research but I also considered what effect my level of participation had on the situation I participated in and how this was interpreted by the children. This sounds as if I could sit down and balance the research and ethical questions against each other before participating, but of course that was not how it worked in reality.

Most of these choices were of a split-second nature, often in mundane situations and the choice made was soon forgotten. Some choices stayed with me and I will present a few of these here, starting with a situation involving bad language and insulting behaviour, going on to discuss my positioning in the national assessment tests and finishing with a discussion about friendship.

\textsuperscript{22} I drew the line at attending Physical Education (P.E.) as I did not feel it possible to join the changing and showering this entailed nor did I feel it possible to join the sports activities involved.

\textsuperscript{23} In my case this meant that I at times joined ball games or marbles, but I did not join games involving chasing boys or likewise, and I would watch rather than participate when the girls did their dance routines. It is also telling that in the first type of game, I was invited to join in, whilst not in the others, apart from being jokingly invited to join the dance group.
Talking dirty – the message of non-interference

I will first introduce you to Alex who was the most noticeable child in the class in that he seldom stayed quiet or sat still at his desk for long. He was tall with long hair and a chubby face. He walked with a swagger and wore a back to front baseball cap and was always fashionably dressed in the style of ‘very cool’. He talked out of turn and seldom spent time in his seat, but wandered around interfering with the other children and their work. Perhaps his reading difficulties caused him to tire of his work, and his was the most frequent voice heard calling ‘Helen!’ in order to gain the teacher’s attention.

One day I was included in a group working on a project about the body. The group I was to join consisted of Jessica, Stephanie, Alex and Benjamin. Our assignment was to make a wall poster about the human skeleton. As usual Alex did not get down to work; instead he teased Benjamin calling him stupid and accusing him widdling in the shower. He told Benjamin that his willy was smaller than Alex’s and Alex also alluded to Benjamin’s ethnicity and indicated that his stupidity had to do with his ethnicity. The two girls kept their heads down, copying down information about the skeleton, carefully avoiding looking at the boys. I glanced at them, then at the boys, and then, positioning myself as one of the girls, I kept my head down while I listened intently.

After lunch group work was continued, but Alex and Benjamin were at reading practice. I asked Jessica and Stephanie if Alex often talked like that and they said that he was silly and they usually ignored him. When Alex came back he kept on talking dirty and again no one responded.

As a member of the group of children it was not wrong or unusual to ignore Alex’s bad language. It is also possible that as a researcher it was correct to ignore him, for how can a researcher find out what children talk about when no (responsible) adults are around if they censure the children’s talk? However, as a (responsible?) adult I may have signalled that Alex’s behaviour was acceptable when I did not react to his talk where he insulted and violated Benjamin’s privacy by discussing his body and his behaviour in the shower, as well as deriding his intelligence and being ethnically discriminating in his talk about the ethnic group Benjamin belongs to.24

24 The boys come from ethnic groups in the Balkans that have been in conflict with one another recently, but this was the only time I witnessed any conflict between them.
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Signalling that this is acceptable behaviour not only has significance for Alex, but also for Benjamin as well as for the two girls who were only involved as an audience. To Benjamin the message might have been that it was acceptable for Alex to insult him and he might as well accept it. To the girls the message was that when someone is behaving badly one might as well just put up with it, seeing that even an adult did not find it appropriate to interfere (Laerke 1998:1).

The second choice I will discuss is of a different character. Here it is not my actions as a responsible adult that can be questioned, but my ability to uphold my position as a fellow-student.

Helping, cheating or withdrawing – the impact of non-participation
During the first half of February the children took national assessment tests which all Year 5 children in the country do. I had been absent for a while and arriving during break time I had no thought of the tests. I was therefore taken by surprise when the teacher, Helen, said that the class was now to continue with the national tests. The story that she had read aloud before break was to be used, and the children would be divided into groups to answer the questions. Everyone would receive an individual answer sheet, a story sheet, a group question sheet and a map as well as a ruler. Each group would also be given a piece of string “in case they needed it”.

I listened and was prepared to sit this out and only observe, when to my surprise I heard that I was placed in a work group.

Soon there was quite bit of moving and talking going on, with everyone finding a seat in their new group constellation. Whilst arranging the seating my mind was racing, wondering how to handle this situation. ‘What did the teacher expect of me? What did I feel was okay?’ These were national assessment test taken by all Swedish children and they are used to judge how the child, the class and the school is doing relative to other children, classes and schools, and I wondered how an adult would fit into this.

The test was based on a story about some children looking for a lost cat and questions were to be answered about which routes they would use through the town, why they took those routes, and what distance they walked. To answer the questions, clues from the story had to be used as well as ‘common sense’. I was to work with Hanna, Ali and Benjamin. Ali immediately said something about them being able to do quite well with me in the group, but I was rather
non-committal and said that I did not know how to do this test. Ali then started
by asking Hanna to read the first question. Benjamin did not seem to listen at
all, and Ali and Hanna tried to discuss what they were to do to work out the
route. I kept to the edge of the discussion, trying to balance being in the group
but not giving the right answers from my adult perspective, positioning myself
as a non-participant.

The questions were completed in the set time but when the teacher told us
the correct answers I realised that the group had not done very well. Throughout
the test I had tried to be as neutral as possible so that my presence
would not influence the test result. I did not tell them the answers I could easily
see. I did try to reinforce correct answers by being more enthusiastic and I did
try to nudge them in the right direction at times, but I think Ali’s hope that my
inclusion in the group would give them an advantage became a disappointment.

After leaving school that day this test kept coming to mind. What had
actually happened in the group? What had my role been? When I was placed in
his group Ali expressed the assumption that having an adult in the group would
help them. In everyday life children are seen as less competent and
knowledgeable than adults, and in school adults normally help children to reach
the right solution to their problems.

Hanna’s thoughts on my role were made clear to me a couple of weeks later
when another child said that I could do the national tests in English in her
place. Hanna then pointed out that that would not do much good as I had not
helped them, or cheated at all, when I was in her group. I asked if I should
have, and she said, ‘yes, since you’re big and you were in our group’.

I have come away with the conviction that my partial participation actually
influenced the results of the test as much as full participation would have done,
but with negative test results instead of positive ones.

The last choice I will present was not a single occurrence but an ongoing
situation during my time at school.

**Being friend or researcher – attempting to help**

When I was at school I ate lunch with the children. This lunchtime I took my
food and walked towards the class’s tables. I looked for the main group of girls
and saw that they were at a small table at the window. Olivia was ahead of me
and one of the girls beckoned to her, saying that there was a free seat. Olivia
deprecated and walked over and sat on her own at the end of one of the large
tables. This put me in a quandary as I would have liked to have sat with the main group of girls, but I felt that if I did I would not conform to the codes of friendship. I could also see that there were free seats next to Hanna and Stephanie where I could have sat but in the end I chose to be a good friend and sit with Olivia.

Olivia had moved to this school towards the end of Year 4, shortly before I joined the class. She repeatedly told me that her previous school was much better, and that she knew all the teachers and all of the children in that school, while here she does not know many outside the class. When I first joined the class Olivia and Stephanie spent time together. They spent a lot of time standing on the classroom steps and occasionally they would initiate some game such as throwing a ball against the wall or to each other. They did not join the other five girls in the class who spent time together.

When I returned to the school a few weeks into Year 5 I found that a new girl, Hanna, had joined the class. A friendship developed between Hanna and Olivia’s friend Stephanie. It appeared to be a rather intense relationship which left Olivia in a position where she could either stay on her own; make an effort to join the main group of girls where she was aware that she held a marginal position; try to latch onto Hanna’s and Stephanie’s intense relationship; or become my friend.

During the autumn Olivia often took the initiative to spend break and lunch with me. If she could get hold of the ball she would want us to play and would try to stop other children from joining us. If I stood around she would join me and chat or ask me whether I would be joining certain activities or not. At lunch we would usually sit together, and if I were behind her in line I would find that she was keeping a place for me at the table.

By November I was worried about this and tried to avoid Olivia at times, but it became obvious that this hurt her as I made her feel rejected. Instead I tried to be a proper friend according to the codes I seemed to discern, but at the

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25 Although we did not have designated seats at lunch we had certain tables we were allowed to sit at. One of the tables was more popular, as it was smaller and stood next to the window. Its popularity had led to the girls and the boys being given alternate weeks to sit there. Apart from this, seating during lunch was often 'together and apart'. Although girls and boys sat at the same table and beside each others, one would not find a girl or boy choosing to sit on their own with the opposite sex and I based my actions on this.
same time I tried to make sure that we joined the other girls more often. Returning to school after the Christmas break I found that Olivia more frequently joined the main group of girls. One day after lunch I left the dining hall together with Olivia but found that she was gradually walking off towards the other girls. I decided to stay on the step and I watched as she drifted over to join the ‘in-group’ of girls, who were playing a catch and chase game.

During my time at the school I found that being Olivia’s friend was both advantageous and disadvantageous for me. The other girls were almost always very busy playing ball games or catch and chase games during break and lunchtime and this meant that there was little opportunity for talking or for me to ask questions. Olivia did not run around and play as much and therefore had time to talk.

After a while my main question became what advantage or disadvantage did the situation hold for Olivia? How would the fact that she turned to me in her need of a friend influence her chances in jockeying for position in the class? Would it give her a stronger hand than if she was seen to be all on her own or would she be seen as an oddity who only turned to adults? Would she not bother to try to better her situation if I was there to cushion the blows? Did the fact that I only spent intermittent time at school mitigate against this?

This became an ethical consideration to me, where I felt I had to place a child’s wellbeing ahead of my research interest, but where I could only guess at what the best interest of the child was. In this situation I did not have the choice of non-interference, as I had been pushed into action by Olivia using me to alleviate her own loneliness. Having to take an active role and deciding to try to nudge this girl in the direction of the main group of girls meant I deliberately tried to steer what happened in the field.

The three situations I have described above are of different character, but the questions they raise are related both to my position as a researcher and to my position as a fellow-student as I will discuss below.

**Ambiguities of My Presence**

In the situations I have described, I have explained how I positioned myself, and that the interpretation of my positioning was ambiguous. I do not only mean my positioning as a student, but also in combination with my positioning
as a researcher. As a researcher my designated role is to observe, and therefore to merely observe even behaviour which in any other circumstance would prompt me to intervene. As a researcher I am to strive not to have too much of an impact on the arena I am studying, but I am also bound by rules of ethical conduct, and these two responsibilities can conflict with one another, as the above examples illustrate, and as I will discuss further below.

**Legitimising bad behaviour**

A-C. Evaldsson (2001) found that her presence in school made the children reflect over the relative positioning of adults and children. It became important to clarify whether she was a teacher or some other kind of staff member. To prove her position as a non-interfering adult some children told their friends that she had joined them in their forbidden excursion to a nearby shop to buy sweets. Accepting invitations to join forbidden activities like this was a way for Evaldsson to show that she was not on the side of the teachers and to gain access to certain peer groups.

Choices such as these seem inevitable when studying children in school as the children are encircled by rules which they often stretch or break during the school day (cf. Thorne 1993), and as researchers we want access to these situations. Laerke (1998) on the other hand seems to take this a step further when she writes that she at times found herself bullied and at other times “giggling along with those who bullied others”.

In this I find an ethical issue where the research interest and the need to be included in, or gaining access to a group must be balanced against possible harm. Here I would claim that as an adult (even when positioning oneself as a child), one’s actions carry more weight as norm bearers than the children’s actions do. This means that to join in bullying gives the bullying legitimacy it would not otherwise have. Although I did not join in actively, the same argument can be used in the situation where Alex in different ways insulted other children. When he did, I avoided his eyes and the eyes of the boy being insulted. I did not interfere, intervene or protest in any way. Through this non-interference on my side, I legitimised Alex’s actions. That I participated in the position of student in no way changed that legitimisation.
Possible participation
In the second situation where I joined a group doing a national assessment test, my role as a student was more of an issue. What happens when adults enter children’s spheres as ‘not quite adults’? How do the children interpret their presence? In spite of not wanting to pretend to be a child, my actions led a girl in the class to note that my job was to “to spy on children and pretend to be a child”. It is clear that she sees me as the adult I am, but also that she is suspicious of my motives, as she accuses me of spying (cf. Evaldsson 1993:275, 2001:14, Thorne 1993:27).

During the national test the difficulty of positioning myself as child or student became especially noticeable. I did not convincingly do either as I was far too busy being an adult and researcher. As an adult I was concerned about the impact of my participation on the test result. I am well indoctrinated or socialised in the importance of tests and assessments and therefore worried about somehow falsifying the results through wholehearted participation. On the other hand, as a researcher I was more interested in studying how the children were working with, and interpreting their task, than in helping them with the work. That I did not help at all is true and Hanna is quite justified in finding my participation lacking and disappointing.

Friendship in research
Becoming friends with a marginalized student may or may not have been dependent on positioning myself as a fellow student; it may simply have been my availability. Had I entered the school as a free-floating adult with a less ambivalent role I may have found myself the chosen companion for anyone temporarily lonely and thus being their adult friend.

The difference was that as a fellow-student I had to follow the codes of how to be a good friend, and I was available to make dates with before going out at break. This meant that Olivia could ask during a lesson or at the end of one whether I wanted to join her in a ball game or some other activity. I also had to be sensitive to the acceptable behaviour of friends, which meant choosing to walk with or sit beside my friend.

Being in the situation of becoming the special friend of one of the students made the matter of my positioning in the field come to the forefront in a way it may not have done otherwise. It gave me no choice in the matter but I had to act and I had to choose how to act in the long term. I had to calculate how my
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presence would be most positive for the student and how my ultimate withdrawal from the field would have as little impact as possible. In this I had to make active choices and take deliberate action.

When it comes to my research it is possible that having a marginal student as one of my main informants could be seen as a disadvantage, but I believe that there are positive aspects to the situation as well. During her fieldwork in school Thorne (1993:97) discovered that her fieldnotes mainly highlighted the most visible and dominant groups of children. She points out that this bias, and the subsequent silencing and marginalization of other groups, is common in research about gender relations among youngsters. I find that this may also be the case in other types of field studies of children (cf. Evaldsson 1993:276). As my study is about children’s life in school it would be a perpetuation of this bias to only work with the central group of children in a class. The children’s experience of, and positioning in, school and the interpretation of this experience will vary depending, among other things, on the child’s position in the class. So with careful usage of data, an informant from the fringe of the class need not be a disadvantage. Within anthropological fieldwork it is common that a marginal person is the anthropologist’s closest and best informant and it is possible that such a person, who stands somewhat outside the main group, may have insights that real insiders do not.

REFLECTIONS

By entering school as a student, albeit an adult student, I wanted to and believe I did gain a sensory knowledge of the children’s positioning within the school. I did not believe that I necessarily would find it easier to gain the children’s trust this way (cf. Holmes 1998:17) and I do not believe that I did. Instead I was such an anomaly that at times it felt as if they treated my presence as a game, and at times they felt like playing the game and at other times they would rather not and then they would ignore me.

I believe that my presence was interpreted in different ways by different children and that they had to reassess my presence in different situations (cf. Evaldsson 2001:14). Would my presence be a hinder or help to them? Could they use me and in what way? I was useful as an additional companion when a fight or someone’s absence caused a child to be lonely. I was useful as an audience, as when the girls practised their dances and when, in an argument,
they would try to get me to side with one group against another. I was less useful when it came to schoolwork as I either genuinely did not know how to do something or I feigned ignorance so that I could find out the children's interpretation of different situations and instructions.

The children had to work out who I was, what my presence entailed for them, if I was trustworthy, if I was in any way useful and how they should treat me in different situations. Just as I had to constantly negotiate and renegotiate my positioning, wondering how to act in a given situation and how students interpreted my presence, they were also ‘negotiating’ my position in that they had to assess and reassess my presence and my actions (cf. Evaldsson 2001:14, Thorne 1993:16-20, Agar 1996:91).

My presence as a student added to the difficulty of placing me and interpreting what kind of person I was, but if I had entered the field as a free-floating adult this interpretation would still have been necessary. There are not free-floating adults within the fabric of school. All adults have a role and whether it is as a teacher, an administrator, a dinner-lady or a cleaner, their relationship to the children is that of adult–child where the adults may enforce the rules and control the behaviour of the children (cf. Evaldsson 2001:13-4). To have entered the school as a free-floating adult would also have made me an anomaly (cf. Thorne 1993:16-20). The only way to avoid being an anomaly would have been to enter school in the position of a teacher or an assistant. I would then have had such a position that adults have in school, but I would have had to fill this position with the correct behaviour and thus positioned myself with the adults. As my aim is to explore the children’s schooling, such positioning does not seem to be the most conducive.

I find that there appears to be no perfect solution to the problem of positioning when conducting studies such as these, of or with children. The choices one makes are flawed and there are always arguments that say other choices should have been made. These choices would also have their flaws and arguments against them made. It is not possible to choose the perfect method or the perfect position in fieldwork, but we all have to make choices. Having made the choices we must then try to be aware of what our choices entail – their weaknesses and their strengths – and then do our fieldwork and our analysis with this in mind.

In the following chapter the children’s positioning and agency during everyday activities, and the generational order enacted within the class, will be
discussed. The focus of the chapter will, however, be the composition and organisation of the study class and the construction of unity therein.
CHAPTER FOUR

THE STUDY CLASS – A COMMUNITY WITHIN HILL SCHOOL

Hill School, within which my study was conducted, is located at the edge of a suburb with a fairly busy road next to it acting as a boundary between an area of high-rise buildings and an area of detached and semidetached houses. The school buildings, surrounded by trees and greenery, consist of two single-story blocks with a central playground between them. The staff room and the dining hall are situated at one end of this playground and the library at the other end. The classrooms have their entrances onto the central playground and, although there are grassy football fields at one end of the school, this is where the majority of the children spend their break times.

Each class has a home classroom where the majority of their lessons are held. When I join the study class they are housed in a classroom with one wall consisting of windows overlooking the nearby high-rise buildings and an entrance facing the playground. The teacher’s desk is placed on one side and is covered with books and papers. The room contains a screened-off area in the back where there is a computer and in front of this there is a red couch. The children’s desks are placed in groups facing the whiteboard and the seating is arranged so that there is a mix of girls and boys in most of the groups.

The school houses two parallel classes from pre-school class to Year 5. There are approximately twenty children in each class resulting in a school housing about 250 students. Placed as it is in the junction between a housing area with high-rise buildings and an area of detached and semidetached houses the catchment area of the school is socially mixed.

The number of children in the class fluctuated between seventeen and twenty during the years of this study. During my fieldwork with the class it became apparent to me that these children, their teacher and assistant had
become a close-knit group of people and that this closeness was a significant aspect of the children’s schooling and school life.

A CLOSE-KNIT GROUP

The closeness of the members of the class raised the question of how this unity was constructed, how the generational order within this unity was enacted, and what significance being a member of a specific school class has for the children’s positioning and agency in their everyday activities.

To describe the cohesion that can exist in school classes, or very small groups, different concepts have been used. In their study of a remedial reading group in an elementary school in New York State, P. Epstein and F. Gearing (1982:244) describe this reading group of five people as a small cultural system. They claim that whenever the same people come together in the same place for the same purposes on a regular basis “the small world of that scene gets rather elaborately classified by them, principally into classes and subclasses of activity and classes and subclasses of person”. In a similar vein A. Garpelin (1998) when studying the social aspects of a Swedish school class described its formation as a social drama.

In reference to the tendency to keep children together in the same school class for many years in Swedish schools Evaldsson (2004:335), without developing it further, mentions that a class, thereby, can be thought of as a small community. In this study I will develop this idea by relating the study class to the concept of community, primarily to the imagined and symbolic aspects discussed by Anderson (1991) and Cohen (1985).

The class in focus in this study was created by school officials when the children were to enter pre-school class. They were then between the ages of five and six. Some of the children knew each other previously, either privately or because they attended the same pre-school-centre. When after a year the children entered Year 1 the class was named ‘1B’. The children in 1B stayed together as a class until school officials dismantled the group at the end of Year 6. During these seven years the class was identified within and without the school as a unit with a specific history and future, i.e. symbolically as a community.
Symbolic and imagined community

Community can be understood as geographical area, as people living in a specific geographical area or of people with a specific interest in common. Community can also be seen as having a value and can then be related to F Tönnies’ book Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft from 1887 where the idea was that gemeinschaft, a feeling of community and solidarity in a world of close relationships of rural societies, was being replaced by gesellschaft. This was seen as a more instrumental relationship, with the individual in the centre, that Tönnies thought was developing through the advent of modern society. Community can be even less concrete and be approached as a matter of the mind as Anderson (1991) does in Imagined Communities and Cohen (1985) in The Symbolic Construction of Community.

In Imagined Communities Anderson discusses nation states. He sees them as imagined since the members of even the smallest nation will never know, hear of, or meet most of their fellow members but still have an idea of communion. He goes on to question if even the communities in primordial villages of face-to-face contact may be imagined (Anderson 1991:6).

The nation as a community Anderson (1991:6) relates to the nation being “conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship”. Although A. Stables (2003) says that it would be a rare school that could claim that it is conceived as this ‘deep horizontal comradeship’ he finds Anderson’s view of the nation as ‘imagined community’ to have implications for research into schools and schooling. In Stables discussion of school as an imagined community he claims that schools do not exist in geographical spaces, instead he places them in a discursive space where the meaning of ‘school’ is dependent on actors’ perceptions, and these are dependent on factors beyond the school (Stables 2003: 895). What Stables claims is that school can be seen as imagined in comparison with the primordial village, as except in the smallest primary school nobody knows everyone else in the school and even if they did they do not spend all their time there but have other private aspects of their lives.

In relation to schools and classrooms the concept of community has been used in studies of school effectiveness (Stables 2003) and in studies of learning communities (Watkins 2005). In these studies the relationship between learning and community has been in focus and C. Watkins (2005), in his review of 26 I.e. the gay community, the Indian community etc.
classrooms as learning communities, says that in a classroom with a sense of community the students are more active and engaged, have a greater sense of belonging, that participation and motivation increases, governance and responsibility is shared and diversity is not seen as a problem, it is instead embraced.

In one of the studies *Caring School Communities* (Battistich, Solomon, Watson and Schaps 1997) it is claimed that looking at schools and classrooms as communities has become quite common in literature on effective schools. V. Battistich *et al.* point out that although there is no agreed upon definition there are common elements in the descriptions of school communities. Communities are seen as caring and supporting places where members participate and influence the group’s activities. They also feel a sense of belonging as they have the same goals and values as the group (Battistich *et al.* 1997:137).

Battistich *et al.* discuss a longitudinal research program where they started by trying to create caring communities in classrooms. Although they later extended this to the creation of caring school communities their initial choice of classroom was because they believe that in elementary schools most of what is important for students involves what happens in the classroom (Battistich *et al.* 1997:140). Here I would differ and claim that it is not what happens in the classroom as such, but what happens in the class that is important for the children in my study.

In the introduction of *The Symbolic Construction of Community* (1985) Cohen starts by pointing out that community is a concept that has had a variety of definitions all of which have implied or contained theories and, as these theories have been contentious, this has reflected on the definitions. Instead of trying to provide another definition of community Cohen claims to examine the use of the word and says that its use seems to imply two related suggestions. One is that the members have something in common and the other suggestion is that this in a significant way distinguishes them from members of other groups (Cohen 1985:12).

This would mean that community expresses a relational idea where both the similarity between that within its boundaries, and the distinction from that outside its boundaries, is implied. According to Cohen ‘boundary’ is the element that embodies the differentiation between a community and ‘the other’ and marks the beginning and the end of the community. Boundaries may be
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statutory, physical, racial, linguistic or religious, but boundaries may also be thought of as existing in people’s minds and may thereby be perceived differently by different people. This is the symbolic aspect of the boundary – the meaning it is endorsed with (Cohen 1985:12). Boundaries can thus be marked in different ways and are largely composed by people in interaction. The class studied marked their boundaries in the ways shown in the following text.

DEVELOPING COMMUNITY

Membership as boundaries
One aspect of community is membership, i.e. who belongs within the community and who does not. Membership is thereby an aspect of boundaries that according to Cohen embodies the differentiation between a community and ‘the other’ (1985). In this study class the boundaries vary as the membership varies. Although many of the original members of the class created in Year 1 remain there are several who have left and several new arrivals. This can in part be seen as a normal fluctuation of populations but changes are also due to school organisation.

In Sweden there is a differentiation made between pre-school teachers and schoolteachers. Traditionally and organisationally there has also been a differentiation between teachers for the first three years, junior level and teachers for the next three years, intermediary level. This means that the community’s membership has deliberately been changed as it has been defined as having left the pre-school class identity to gain the school class identity and again when it left the junior level identity and became identified as intermediary level.

Apart from these planned changes there are changes of staff within these periods, as well as children leaving or joining the class. Many of the members who have left seem forgotten but they have become part of the class history. This becomes apparent when the children tell me of the teachers from their earlier years. It is also possible for a former member of the community to retain contact with the class as Mallory, Alice’s friend does. She moved from town but is through Alice continually updated on the happenings in the class.
During their time in intermediary level the membership continued to fluctuate. As this study commenced the class consisted of seventeen children, seven girls and ten boys as well as two adults. The adults were a class teacher and a part time assistant. At the end of Year 5 there were twenty-one children, seven girls and fourteen boys, the teacher and a fulltime assistant. In Year 6 the class moved to a nearby senior level school due to space problems and there a new teacher and a new assistant joined them.

Apart from the more constant members of the class, the children, the assistant, and the teacher, there are others who are identified as members at times. These are mainly members of staff who have a more peripheral role, teaching subjects such as P.E., handicraft or music. These will be identified as belonging to the class in relation to a lesson. The frequently occurring student teachers are also included in the community as they are called ‘our’ student teachers.

Membership is also extended to the parents of the children. The parents are identified as members in relation to social events, such as picnics which occur specifically to include them and when the organisation of extracurricular activities such as discos or sport events create a need for extra adult help. The parents are also included through the weekly letter brought home, and in relation to the individual child during the twice yearly teacher-parent-pupil talks (Adelswärd, Evaldsson and Reimers 1997) where the child’s behaviour and learning is discussed.

As has been shown the participants varied, both over time and in relation to activities, but the community as such stayed intact from Year 1 until the end of Year 6 when it was dismantled. That the community stayed intact although the members varied can be ascribed to the symbolic aspect of boundaries (Cohen 1985).

Territorial claims as boundaries
Standard definitions of community are related to geographical areas and the people who live there. In the study class the feeling of community is strengthened by their claims to a specific area of the school. The symbolic aspect (Cohen 1985) of their claim is apparent in that the location and the makeup of this area changes during the history of the class.

At the school the classrooms are placed in two single story buildings with a central playground between them. The junior level classrooms are at one end of
the playground and the intermediary level classrooms at the other. This means that in the junction between Year 3 and Year 4 the class moved to a new classroom. This move extended the area they were seen to have the sole rights to. In the earlier years they had their own classroom and shared cloakroom and toilets with another class. After the move their territory started by and included the steps outside the classroom. This was made clear to me one break time when two unknown girls where ‘hanging out’ on the steps. A young child, probably from Year 3 asks, “Are you allowed to be on 4B’s steps?” She is ignored by the older girls but informs me that, “You aren’t allowed to be on other classes’ steps”.

Their territory now also includes a cloakroom with two benches placed inside the door for putting shoes under, and a wall with hooks for hanging jackets, a girls’ and a boys’ lavatory, a small group room and a classroom. When the class is moved to a nearby senior level school in Year 6 their locality once again changes and their territory now consists of their classroom and a section of the corridor that ends outside their classroom.

The areas identified as ‘theirs’ could at times be further extended. Although most of their lessons are held in their classroom certain lessons such as P.E. and handicraft are held in other locations. At such times not only does membership extend to the teachers of these subjects but the physical area identified as belonging to the class is also extended to include these classrooms. This extension can even include areas of others schools as when handicraft is taught at a neighbouring school.

As shown above the class claimed certain ‘geographical’ areas as their own. That these varied in locality and size did not lessen their importance to the members of this community. The boundary’s relative instability accentuates the idea that these boundaries to a large extent exist in the mind of community members (Cohen 1985:12).

Creating boundaries through interaction
A community’s boundary is composed by people in interaction (Cohen 1985:13). Interaction between members of the community during the school year as well as talk about the class creates and recreates boundaries. During interviews and in conversations the children willingly discussed the class as an entity distinct from other entities, thereby creating a boundary that upholds the idea of community. They described the class as ‘nice’, ‘fine’ or ‘a good class’.
Some elaborated that the teacher was nice and his/her classmates where nice. Apart from the friendly teacher and good friends in the class the children pointed out that the class was calm and they could feel secure (cf. Pollard 1987:4, also Westling Allodi 2002). This they related to the teacher’s ability to keep order but also to the children’s behaviour and attitude.

In interviews some children talk about their earlier school years and the teachers become their focus. They tell me that they had several teachers in the first three years and that every time they changed teacher the class became disorderly or chaotic. During these interviews in Year 5 some of the children say negative things about several of their earlier teachers, and making comparisons with the situation today, they claim that their current teacher Helen is a good teacher. At the end of Year 6 some of them make comparisons between their current teacher Ruby and their previous teacher Helen, this time to Helen’s disadvantage (cf. Westling Allodi 2002). In these comparisons between teachers boundaries are erected between the community today and its history, but also between the members of the study class and ‘others’. Having a shared history, here partly a history of suffering, symbolically differentiates one group from another.

That the children focus on the teachers in their talk of the class can be related to the teachers’ centrality to the organisation of everyday activities in the class. The generational order is upheld through the children’s descriptions of current and previous teachers and their relation to whether the community is orderly or not. Although the relations between the children in the community are central to their everyday school life this is seldom discussed, it is instead enacted.

Several children have been friends since pre-school class,27 or even since pre-school, while other children have joined the class later. Some of the children who have joined the class recently make comparisons between this and their previous school and their new setting is claimed to be better. In this way they show their allegiance to the community they have joined. Monica, who was considering moving back to her previous school, was ambivalent. She claimed this school to be better but when asked why she, in that case, was considering a move changed her mind and said this school no longer was

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27 The majority of children in Sweden attend pre-school class the year before starting compulsory schooling. These classes are commonly called ‘six-years’ as the children attend them when they are six years of age.
better. This vacillation could be related to her marginal position weakening her allegiance to the community.

During break time activities the children in the study class mainly socialised with other members of the class. This could be in constellations involving a large section of the class as in some catch and chase games or games of 4-square. During other activities socialisation was within smaller friendship groups. Some of the friendship groups were between children who had been members of the class from its formation whilst other friendship groups were mixed or consisted of newly arrived children.

That socialisation occurred mainly within the study class was encouraged by break times being scheduled at different times in the different classes, and also by the slight differences in time arising from teachers letting children out early or late. These time differences meant that instead of trying to gain entrance to games that had started in other classes the children tended to socialise within their home classes, which in turn strengthened the boundaries between and the bonds within classes.

As socialisation was mainly within the class, marginalised children did not find it easy to regularly socialise with children from other classes. Instead they continually had to struggle for acceptance within the class. In the study class the strongest group consisted of four girls who had been together since pre-school class. Their closeness during Year 4 and 5 partially excluded others who attempted to gain entry. Monica, a late arrival, whose position in the community had been weak but improved during Year 6, had strong allegiances with children from another class. This was not apparent in the daily life in school but when the class was dismantled at the end of Year 6 her choice of friends in senior level school was from the parallel Year 6. Another new arrival, Hanna, maintained a peripheral role throughout Year 5 and 6. Either because of or in spite of this, she was the child who expressed most worry about the break-up of the community and the move to a senior level class.

Having been a member of the class since its formation does not, however, guarantee inclusion. One of the boys had been with the class all the way since pre-school and joined the games of football throughout my study. That his

\[28\] As the class was being split when entering senior level school the children were asked to fill in a form to say which special friends they mostly wanted to be with them in their new class. This is done to make the move to a new class less upsetting for the students.
inclusion was restricted was disclosed at the end of Year 6 when he was one of two children not chosen as anyone’s special friend to stay with in senior level. Among newer arrivals there are some children who soon became central to the community such as Drew and Ali. Joining the class in Year 5 they both claimed that their old schools were fine. They did not find the change of school problematic and pointed out that it only took them a week to become friends, and I noted that they played a central role in many peer activities.

The children include their teachers, even student teachers temporarily assigned to the class, as members of the community. Some of the more peripheral of these members volunteered their view of the class as soon as I met them. On my first day of fieldwork standing by the sports fields with the P.E. teacher he tells me that this is one of the nicest classes he has met. He goes on to say that children accept each other fully although there are many ‘special’ children in the class and that they have had a rough time but know and accept each other, and support one another. He underlines the boundary of the community further by contrasting this class’s behaviour to the parallel Year 4 where, he says, the rivalry and competition is tremendous.

As P.E. was the one subject where I did not join the class activities I often sat watching the lessons. In the autumn of Year 5 three student teachers that were doing a project about group dynamics and leadership joined me. Having spent two days with the class observing the children and trying to identify the leader they tell me that this is a very strange class as there are four girls acting as leaders and no boys. Then one of them adds that Alex keeps trying to be a leader but no one accepts him as such because “he is such a dolt”. I am also told that one of these student teachers had met the study class when they were in Year 3. She claims that the class at that time had been in total chaos and she finds that they have calmed down considerably. Both the P.E. teacher and the student teachers discuss the class in a manner that emphasises the view of the class as a community. They not only discuss the class as an entity, they also compare this entity to others as well as attributing it a shared history.

Interviewing their class teacher Helen towards the end of Year 5 she, in contrast to other adults, starts by discussing individuals which can be compared to Gordon et al.’s claim that “teachers do recognise difference between

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29 This I noted as I was allowed access to the forms handed in by the children. It was not common knowledge in the class.
students in school and act on it” (Gordon et al. 2000:36). Helen’s first reflection is that “they are a singular collection of individuals but rather charming”. She goes on to say that many of them are very unusual, peculiar. She says that what is most unusual is that they are so good at taking care of one another, that they are kind to each other and that there are very few conflicts. I ask whether, as she says they are unusual, she find them different from other classes and her reply is that she has not had so many unusual children in the same class ever before, children with so many specific difficulties and children that are so strange in some way, and yes she finds them very unusual.

I ask her if there is any difference between the children who have been together since their first year and children who arrive new and she answers:

Excerpt from interview

Helen – the new arrivals they blend in terrifically well sort of because the group is special, put together in… in, a special way or something they are in a special way they are caring and so I mean that no one tries to change anything they just adapted to the existing structure in the class. (…) In some way they must have built up something that is, that works well

Katarina – Mm

Helen – where you can sort of arrive new and yet because I know they had problems in Year 3 (pause) when Sean arrived and they had a hard time letting him in

30 In Swedish:
Helen – dom som kommer nya dom smälter in fruktansvärt bra i liksom för gruppen är ju speciell, sammansatt på… på, ett särskilt sätt eller liksom dom är ju dom är ju på ett särskilt sätt dom är omhändertagande och så där och ja menar det är inte så det är ingen som försöker liksom ändra på nånting dom bara dom bara hängde med på den strukturen som är i klassen. (…) På nåt sätt har dom väl byggt upp nånting som är, som funkar bra
Katarina – Mm
Helen – där man kan liksom komma in som ny och ändå för det vet jag att dom hade problem med (paus) i trean kom Sean i klassen och honom hade dom jättesvärt att släppa in
Katarina – Jaha
Helen – och samma sak med Peter när han kom i fyran det var jättesvärt för dom att släppa in honom i gruppen. Men det kan ju bero det kan kanske bero på liksom hur den personen är som kommer också men
Katarina – Mm
Helen – ja det är nånting som dom har blivit bra mycket bättre på
Katarina – Yes
Helen – and the same thing with Peter in Year 4 it was really hard for them to let him into the group. But it could depend on the, on sort of how the person is that arrives but…
Katarina – Mm
Helen – yes it is something they have become much better at.

Helen, who is an integral part of the community, starts by discussing individuals within the community. In the excerpt Helen goes from discussing individual children to viewing the class as a community with a structure and a history of its own creating a context that has developed over time. Into this existing community some new members are quickly absorbed while others have more difficulties. Helen sees these differences as being due to the individual characteristics of the children trying to gain access.

The assistant, Kristin, talks easily of the class as a unit and tells me that it is a lovely class and that she really likes them. Having Helen’s description in mind I ask if she finds them different from other classes. Kristin says that she can clearly see a difference because here the children are gentle and kind to one another, and that they also happily spend time with and chat to adults instead of adopting the cocky attitude she finds that children in other classes often do. Although I initiated the differentiation between this class and others, Kristin elaborates on this. She describes them and then differentiates between them and members of other classes and thereby she stresses the view of them as a community.

Apart from descriptions of the class aimed at me, comments about the class were aimed at the class itself in that they were told their good points.31 When their teacher Helen gives the class a talking to about entering corridors and classrooms during break time the assistant Kristin adds that this class is usually very good about this. In comparison to the other classes, she says she thinks they are best at staying out of doors during break and not sneaking in again.

Another time one of the boys who joined the class in Year 5 has been upset. Helen tells the class that this boy has troubles he does not want to talk about. She asks them not to ask him about this but to be extra nice to him. The class

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31 I have not heard anyone elaborating the class’s bad points in such a general way. If the class were given a talking to it related to specific incidents not that they were generally bad in some way.
agrees and Kristin says: “That’s what is so good about this class: that everyone is allowed to be as they are. Sometimes Alex sits on my lap and no-one minds, it can be nice to be on my lap even when one is almost twelve.”

Here, again there is a tendency to accentuate boundaries through comparing this class with other classes and thus identifying it as a community.

**Summary**

In the section above I have shown how boundaries between a specific school class and ‘others’ are created and recreated during school life. The strong sense of *us* that arises in this school class is to a large extent due to the tendency in Sweden to keep school classes together for a long period of time. This strong sense of *us* that makes it possible to understand the class as a community was present in the children’s stories of the class, of its troubled past with many changes of teacher and its present status as a good class. The adults confirmed it in their accounts of the class as special or unusual, a class where the children had a tendency to look out for one another.

The closeness of the study class, of this community, creates limitations and possibilities of action for the members. Over the years they have spent together the members of the community have got to know each other and relate to one another. They have to a certain extent learnt to accept each other’s idiosyncrasies, but also to expect certain behaviours from certain people. This can limit the children’s scope of action as individual children or groups of children may be ascribed characteristics that they constantly have to negotiate. Through other studies about schools, or school aged children (among others Adler and Adler 1998, Eder, Parker and Evans 1995, Evaldsson 1993, 2004, 1995, Thorne 1993, Karlson 2003) we know that norms related to aspects such as age, gender and ethnicity are negotiated in interaction. It is through negotiation that accepted behaviour is established.

What is understood as accepted behaviour may differ between communities as Kristin, earlier on, illustrates when she mentions that in *this class* it is accepted that Alex occasionally sits on her lap. Although Kristin mentions Alex’s behaviour as a possibility existing in the class, by Alex sitting on

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32 Commonly they stay together between three and six years, sometimes the full nine years of compulsory schooling.
Kristin’s lap, and by Kristin mentioning it, the generational relations are also made visible and the children in general become positioned as children.

The sense of community within a class is created through the long time spent together building up relationships. At the same time this creates a division between school classes creating not only the strong division by age (Evaldsson 2004, James and Prout 1997 237-8, Adler and Adler 1998, Thorne 1993) but also a division between children who have different class teachers. As A. Giddens (1985:286) formulates it “[s]chools are internally partitioned”. The separate classes may obtain different reputations as when this class is said to be gentle while the parallel class is said to be competitive. These reputations could impinge on the status of the class as a whole (cf. Bartholdsson 2007:129) or on the status of individual children.

In this chapter I have shown that boundaries are created that differentiate one school class from another. This means that although the children become participants of school life, and although the overarching membership is in the particular school they attend, the daily interaction is mainly within a school class. Each school class develops its own idiosyncrasies and its own sub-culture, creating possibilities and limitations to the children’s actions. These are developed in relation to the members of the class, to the surrounding school and society, and to the children’s positioning within school.

In the next chapter time and space as a framework for everyday school activities will be introduced. The focus of the chapter is the children’s negotiation and positioning in relation to time and space use in the class.
In the previous chapter the creation of a school class community was described. We could see that daily interaction was mainly within the class which developed its own sub-culture with possibilities and limitations to the children’s actions. Running through all activities of the school class is the matter of time and /or time–space use that is mapped by timetables. In this chapter time and space as a framework for everyday school activities will be examined.

Timetables indicate the ‘where and when and what’ of the school day and, although challenged and renegotiated by both children and staff, together with school rules the timetable embodies a school’s routinised and organisational framework (Gordon et al. 2000:137). Jenks (2005) sees the timetable as a central organising principle of the curriculum and the curriculum as an essentially spatial concept in that it maps out children’s in-school experience through a “combination of space, time, location, content, proximity, isolation, insulation, integration and hierarchy” (Jenks 2005:76-7).

In school, timetables are created in relation to the curriculum, the school’s available physical areas and the available staff. The timetable determines where a member of the community should be at any specific time, as well as what activity should be taking place, thus creating a pedagogy based on time and space (cf. Markström 2005). The timetable becomes a part of what M. Foucault (1977:138-57, see also Jenks 2005:78-82) calls disciplines. Discipline, says Foucault, proceeds from the distribution of individuals through space but also necessitates control of activity. Through timetables one can “establish rhythms, impose particular occupations, [and] regulate the cycles of repetition”.

These rhythms are what to many epitomise school life – the regularity of repeated lessons, in specific classrooms, at designated desks with the same people throughout the week and throughout the school year. M. Westling
Allodi (2002:191) found that to children in her study, school meant the structuring and regulating of time through the school bell. To some children school itself was a timetable in that they identified it with the schedule, and I believe that this scheduling, that is so dominant in school, in turn gives an impression of an orderly progression through school, and by implication, through childhood.

Timetables divided the study class’s school days into segments, longer segments of time where they were in classrooms and shorter segments where they were outside. Although the length of their school days varied, they started at ten past eight and the first segment of classroom time would last for approximately two hours. Thereafter there would be a short segment of twenty to thirty minutes of outside time and then another segment of inside time lasting about an hour and a half. A longer segment of outside time followed, which was partly spent in the dining hall, another hour and a half of inside time followed and thereafter twenty minutes of outside time. Lastly an hour or so would be spent inside. The segments of time spent inside were further divided into segments relating to different subjects. These could be anything between twenty minutes to an hour long.

Through this regulated division of the school day children can anticipate the activities of each day. They learn when lessons start and finish, which subjects occur during a certain day, and in what order, what time break and lunchtime occur any specific day and which classrooms and teachers are involved.

For the study class time spent inside was mostly spent in their home classroom, and generally with the class teacher. This meant that the home classroom as well as the relation between the class teacher and the children became central to this community and in extension to the children’s experience of school.

As we see the community of the study class is placed within an institution where time and space is central. The question raised here is how the children negotiate these central aspects of school, and how they are positioned in these negotiations.
BEING SUBJECT TO TIME–SPACE MAPS

Inspired by Giddens’ (1985:286) discussion of school timetables as fundamental in co-ordinating time–space paths, Gordon et al. (2000:149) see timetables as maps of the time–space paths in which school’s time and space are interlinked and become routinised through repetition (Gordon et al. 2000:148). These maps may give the children a feeling of control over their school life, but the regularly occurring segments also deny them flexibility and options – a flexibility partially available to teachers in spite of the timetable.

Negotiating time

The time–space maps that divides school days into segments is one way of accessing both adults’ and children’s time (Gordon et al. 2000:149, Westling Allodi 2002), and time is a contested resource within school. Control over time can be related to power relationships within school, since within the segmented school days staff, in comparison with the children, not only have a greater command over their own time, they also have access to the children’s time.

That the children are expected to follow time–space maps, and allow scheduled activities to supersede other activities without protest, is clear when their class teacher, Helen, is absent and two student teachers are in charge. The children are making a booklet as a good-bye gift to Helen. When the remedial teacher arrives at nine o’clock to collect some of the students they do not want to join her. The children insist that what they are doing is important but the remedial teacher seems unimpressed. None of the children leave their seats and the remedial teacher turns to leave. As one of student teachers questions this she is told that the children know they are to come and this should work even without Helen being present.

In spite of this assumption by the staff that scheduled activities should be given precedence, the children are not allowed the same assumption. If a member of staff initiates an activity that is not completed at the end of the lesson they may let the activity continue into the next lesson. The children do not usually comment on this unless the lesson being encroached upon is one they especially like, such as fun-time

One day, during the lesson before fun-
time, I note that several children are having difficulties with their work and that Helen is a little short tempered when they ask her for help. While she is helping them several children quietly say, “fun-time” but none of them ask straight out why fun-time has not started. Fun-time usually starts at half past one and they have run over by five minutes.

At first Helen ignores the mutterings but then says to Henry “fun-time is up to you”. Henry looks startled and says “oh” and leaning over his desk he proceeds to show how hard he can work. Here we see that although fun-time should have started the children only discreetly try to remind their teacher. She, in turn, indicates that the scheduled activity is a privilege that needs to be earned by hard work.

When a lesson encroaches on break time the children sometimes protest in vain, as when five minutes before break a word game is initiated by a student teacher. When the lesson officially ends there are some muted mutterings and when the lesson has run over by a few minutes there are some louder comments. Helen, who is at her desk looks sternly at the class and says, “You’ll soon be finished”. The class is let out for break five minutes late.

When the Year 6 teacher Ruby arrives just before break to introduce herself to the class, Helen tells her she may encroach on break time. There is a quiet protest from Rashid that is ignored. Ruby finishes her introduction by saying, “This is me but who are you? After break I would like you to write a letter and maybe make a drawing as well.” In response to this Alex asks, “Do we get a shorter break?” This time they are told that they will be compensated with five minutes at the end of break and the class cheers.

At the end of a maths lesson in Year 6 the children notice that it is getting late. Someone mentions that they should have break now and Tony tells Ruby “Ruby, we’re supposed to have break now, we’re running late.” Ruby’s response is that they will have break when she says they have break. Tony persists and says that they should have a longer break then but Ruby tells him to be quiet. So although she does later compensate them for the lost time she does not find it acceptable for the children to try to enforce the timetable and we can see that during the school day it is the teacher who is to initiate activities and bring them to a close.

Although lessons were scheduled within the timetable, the actual time allotted to each activity during a lesson was often not specified. At the beginning of a lesson an activity would be initiated by the teacher and the
children would get busy working. At any time during the lesson this activity could be interrupted and the children told to tidy their work away. An example of this is when Ella and I had almost completed our work on Stockholm, having worked our way through “history”, “tourism” and almost completed “politics”, we were told to pack up our work before the end of the lesson since Helen was going to read aloud from a storybook. Another time maths is interrupted by the student teacher telling the children to put their work away since she wants to quiz them on the English homework before the start of the art lesson. At other times the children are told to draw pictures of characters in some story they have been told, only to be told later to skip the drawings because they are to go through some questions instead.

These changes in activities that commonly happen during lessons mean that to be too engrossed in an activity does not pay as it can be interrupted at any time. This, together with being told off if they do not end an activity quickly enough, causes the children to be attentive to the teacher in constant readiness to break off one activity and start a new one. As Mandell says “one of the skills children acquire is distinguishing adult sound from immediate action sound. […] children learn to expect and listen for teacher announcements interrupting their ongoing activities (Mandell 1988, also Waksler 1996:49). This attentiveness makes the teacher a pivot around which the children and all activity centre.

When it comes to following timetables we can see that teachers have the opportunity to adjust timetables by ending lessons early or late and to initiate and conclude work activities in the classroom. The children, on the other hand, are expected to follow the timetable and let it override their own wishes and needs while not being able to assume that the teachers will do the same. This means that the school day, for the teachers, contains opportunities to initiate change and for the children it is an arena where they have to expect change but are not supposed to initiate it.

Using space
Timetables as time–space maps do not only organise time. In school space as such is “routinised, ordered and controlled” as Gordon et al. (2000:143) point out. The accessibility of the different areas of the physical school is, for the children, governed by a variety of rules. There are areas of the school that are never freely accessible to the children such as the library, the admin area, the
kitchen and the staff room (cf. Gordon et al. 2000:149). These are all available to adults within the school irrespective of formal position.

Other areas that are available to the children are also governed by rules and these rules are often related to time (Gordon et al. 2000:148). The schoolyard is freely accessible before and after school\textsuperscript{34}, as well as during break and lunchtime. The classroom is available during lessons and the dining room during lunch. Other areas of the school such as the library and the staff room can be made accessible to the children by permission by adults in their various formal roles, mostly teachers and assistants. The schoolyard can at times be used for schoolwork or the children may be let out on an early break. The classroom may be opened early or during break time if a staff member so wishes (cf. Gordon et al. 2000:148).

That such decisions are the staff’s is clear when the class teacher Helen arrives at the classroom a minute or two early and chases out the boys who have entered without permission. Once everyone is out Helen tells the class that they may come in “although it is not quite yet time”. By first emptying the room Helen upholds the rule that says that the children may not enter the classroom until the lesson starts. By then letting the children in again she claims the right to define when they may be in the classroom.

There are ways to gain access to the classroom during break or lunch. Arriving during the lunch break one day I find some of the girls practising dance sequences inside the classroom. Just as I arrive the assistant Kristin tells them their ten minutes are up and they have to go outside. When some girls ask to practise again the week after they are told no. When they point out that they had been allocated ten minutes of practise time last week Kristin answers, “Was that ‘kind week’ or what?” and the children are not allowed in. We see that gaining access is a matter of negotiation and here the same children are allowed access one week and denied it the next. The staff’s control over time is also apparent in that Kristin does not feel obliged to discuss her decision with the children.

During break the classroom is usually locked and so is the main door to the cloakroom. It is possible to enter the cloakroom by finding an unlocked door by some other class’s cloakroom and the parallel Year 5 children use their

\textsuperscript{34}The school area is not fenced and if there are limits to its availability out of school hours I have no information of this.
cloakroom as a recreation room during break but in the class studied this is seldom so.

Another area not always available to the children to use is the bathroom. During lessons the children may have to ask permission to use the bathroom and as Alex found this might be refused. Alex, having been late in from break, is refused permission by the teacher Tommy to go to the bathroom whilst Tommy shortly afterwards gives Monica permission to go to the bathroom. In their home classroom with Helen the children did not usually ask permission to go to the bathroom but instead quietly left and returned without disturbance. When student teachers are in charge one day they do, however, regulate Benjamin’s use of the bathroom. As he leaves the classroom one of them calls out “two minutes, Benjamin”. While Peter claims that Benjamin usually gets out of lessons through frequent trips to the bathroom, Robert expresses surprise at Benjamin being given a time limit, thus showing that this was uncommon.

As we have seen above the accessibility to the children of different areas of the physical school is regulated. We find that the children attempt to gain access but are dependent on the goodwill of the staff. The accessibility is thereby negotiable and the children are dependent on the rulings of different staff when attempting to access space in school and in these negotiations they are frequently positioned as children.

Time–space maps routinised the use of time and space as Gordon et al. (2000) noted but, as shown above, the children attempt to gain control over time and space through negotiations. In the following text we can see that they also gain control by learning to master the time–space maps.

**Keeping time – mastering time–space maps**

The time–space maps could not be enforced without the cooperation of the children. In schools children’s cooperation can be obtained in several ways. In the study class it was apparent that the class teacher Helen expected the children to participate in keeping classroom order and that she assumed them to be responsible in a variety of ways. One of these was in the matter of time keeping, a necessity for both adults and children in school.

In my examples of time keeping below I am aware that the girls are presented as responsible in planning their time keeping and the boys as being late for class. It is possible that this is a constant gender pattern but the examples of children actually being late are too few to draw these conclusions.
There were fewer occasions of children being late than the lack of a bell made me expect and this indicates instead that both girls and boys are skilled timekeepers\(^\text{35}\).

Early on in my fieldwork I noticed that there was no bell marking when lessons started or ended. Being interested in the possibilities for the children’s agency I started to note both the children’s strategies of time keeping, and any control mechanisms in place.

Tagging along with a group of girls going off to play football during a lunch break the issue of time keeping comes up. Before leaving the schoolyard there is a short discussion about time and they decide to return at twenty-five minutes past twelve in time for the twelve thirty lesson. Ella then pulls out a large wristwatch from her pocket and puts it on.

Another time Alice asks the girls on the steps, Hanna, Olivia and Stephanie, if they want to join the game in the field and Olivia accepts the invitation. Leaving the schoolyard they ask me if I have a watch but I do not. Olivia then worries about getting back on time but Sandra who catches up with us has a watch and so we will know when to be back. Olivia still seems to worry about the time though and after having to repeat herself three times when asking Sandra the time she leaves us and goes back to the schoolyard.

Early on during my fieldwork I noted that some classes had a hand bell to ring at the end of break time to let the children know that it was time to go back to the classroom. Walking with Alice and Sandra to a sewing craft lesson in a nearby school I took the opportunity to mention the bells and to ask why the class did not have one. The two girls say that it is the lower years that have bells.

“It is for those who haven’t learned to tell the time yet and cannot keep track of the time themselves. We don’t need one.”

Asking if they had a bell last year when they were in Year 3 I am told that they did. Alice adds “We had Tina then” as if having had another teacher is an explanation for having had a bell. Later in the day I ask Monica why the class does not have a bell. She looks blankly at me and says, “I don’t know”.

\(^{35}\) That this is situational is indicated by the behaviour of the large group of boys at their Year 6 school with another teacher. The boys played football every break time and during the time I spent with them this new teacher regularly had to call through the window or send someone out to tell them that the lesson had started.
The girls I asked seem not to have reflected over the fact that they had a bell in Year 3 but not in Year 4. In response to my question they look for a reason. By assuming that it has to do with age or with who their teacher is they are relating my question to the context of school. Their school life is organised in relation to class teachers and to age, and as James and Prout (1997:237) point out “age class structures find embodiment in the school system” and the different age positions entail different rights, duties and privileges as well as status. To the girls the issue of school bells and time keeping appears to be linked to understandings of increased maturity and thereby increased status.

From my own school time I remember bells ringing to tell us when to go to the classroom and also to announce the end of lessons. Olivia, who recently moved from another school, tells me that it was easier to play at her old school as there was a bell to tell you when to go in. The negative effect of not having a bell was that she did not dare to leave the vicinity of the classroom. The lack of a bell at Hill school together with not all or even most of the children wearing watches meant that keeping track of when to go to the classroom required the kind of planning shown above. The children thereby developed an awareness of time together with methods of time keeping that enabled them to be in time for lessons without waiting for a bell.

One day, having no one to spend break time with, I hung around the marble players. Being on my own I found that I became uneasy\(^\text{36}\) towards the end of the break – it felt as if I could easily miss going in on time. I kept looking at the clock on the outside wall of the library, I kept checking whether Helen was coming from the staff room, and I looked around to see if any of the others from the class were going to the classroom. In other words I used all three methods of time keeping I identified being used by the children when staying in the schoolyard.

Checking the wall clock can seem to be the obvious method of time keeping but I do not remember ever hearing a child referring to it when discussing time keeping. The two most common methods the children used were to look out for other children moving towards the classroom or to keep an eye out for the arrival of the teacher expected for the next lesson.

\(^{36}\) In spite of Helen seldom getting angry with latecomers the uneasiness I was feeling shows that being on your own away from the class was risky.
Watching for the teacher’s arrival was a favoured method. A reason for preferring this method to the use of watches and clocks may be that the teachers do not always arrive on time. As mentioned earlier teachers may end lessons early or late, but they are also flexible when it comes to starting lessons. This means that although the children are expected to be on time to their lessons they can in no way enforce or expect that teachers arrive on time. Instead of wasting playtime waiting for the teacher’s arrival, they have devised a strategy that enables them to follow time–space maps at the same time as they take into account that the teachers do not always do so. So by waiting until the current teacher is seen walking towards the classroom the children do not waste time by standing outside the classroom waiting, and at the same time, by using the teacher’s arrival as a means of keeping time, they in effect transfer the responsibility of time keeping back to the teacher.

The method of keeping time by keeping an eye on the other children in the class can be related to the idea of the class as a community presented in the previous chapter. Apart from assuming that if other children are moving towards the classroom it is wise to do the same, it is also common to turn around and check if there is anyone from the class who seems to be missing the signals. In this way the members of the community look out for one another. By calling and reminding other children that it is time to go to the classroom children manage other children, thereby reinforcing community order.

Watching for the teacher’s arrival keeps the children constantly aware of their teachers’ movements. As in the classroom, the teacher becomes a pivot around which the children attention centres, so although time keeping on one hand is linked to ideas of increased maturity and status, local time keeping methods accentuate the children’s dependency on the adults in this setting.

In spite of the different methods of time keeping developed there were occasions when children were late for lessons. During one of my first days of fieldwork David, Robert and Harry arrive late after morning break. “Sorry we are late, very” they say. “Yes you are” says Helen, “eleven minutes late”. In this exchange the children apologise for being late and Helen acknowledges that they are late. Although her tone might be dry it is not a confrontational situation and no more is said as the class gets on with the work at hand.

In the study class being late is not very common, though, and the first time I notice children being late in the morning is in the beginning of winter with frost and a bit of snow on the ground. That day I myself arrive two or three minutes
late. The class has gone in and as I take off my coat Robert and Benjamin arrived – late as well. In the class the children are waiting to start a spelling quiz. Robert, Benjamin and I go to our places and sit down and Helen starts the quiz. During the quiz Peter arrives. He quietly sits down and joins where we are. There is no admonition to anyone who is late and no explanations asked for and the children quietly join class activities.

In the section above we have seen how time keeping is negotiated within the community of the study class. Although other classes were without hand bells to signal the end of break and lunchtime we find that Helen took this a step further. When children were late she did not give them a telling off or discuss the matter with them. She makes it clear that she notices their lateness even if it is only by a look. By not admonishing or getting angry Helen does not open for excuses and thereby being the one who, through accepting or rejecting an excuse, defines the behaviour. In this manner she left the responsibility with the children.

How lateness is handled differs between teachers as we see when Alex and Rashid come in late to music lesson with Tommy. They apologise and say that they did not see us going in. They are then referring to the most common way of keeping track of when to go to the classroom. The teacher, Tommy, reiterates by saying that they know that they start at ten o’clock and they cannot arrive eight minutes late. He is quite upset and finishes the telling off by saying that he will write it on the board for Helen to see. Alex says that Helen does not mind and Tommy answers that they will see. He then leaves the matter and continues the lesson. When Helen starts the next lesson she does not comment the note on the board that says ‘Alex, Rashid 8 minutes’.

Tommy’s way of handling Alex’ and Rashid’s lateness is by getting angry and making their lateness a public issue. He then attempts to hand the responsibility over to Helen as a central member of the community, by threatening the children with her reaction. Although this is rejected both by the children, in that Alex claims Helen will not mind, and by Helen who ignores the message, this difference in reaction is something the children have to negotiate on a regular basis. This negotiation of teacher difference, together with inconsistencies by individual teachers, demonstrates both the awareness the children need of what to expect of each teacher as well as their need to be able to gauge the current mood of any teacher.
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By not having a school bell, or something similar, to mark the end of breaks and lunchtimes the duty of time keeping is effectively transferred from the school as an institution to the members of the class. This requires an awareness of time and of the passing of time. In I. Westlund’s (1996:108) study of school children’s experience of time she found that one ‘time lesson’ the children learnt was that of being aware of time. Having the duty of time keeping placed on them the children in the study class learnt to be aware of time, the passing of time and the need to keep time throughout their break and lunchtimes. This can be related to understandings of a ‘competent child’ who is self-regulatory and capable of governing its own time, space and body (Ellegaard 2004, Kampmann 2004, Kryger 2004).

As well as the time keeping needed to get to lessons in time Westlund (1996:171) points out that classroom activities are organised in relation to conventions about time. In these conventions we find understandings of frequency, sequence, and duration of work but also time frames such as break and lunchtimes and in the section below the flow of time–space paths in classroom activities will be discussed.

SUPERVISING TIME AND SPACE USE IN THE CLASSROOM

In the classroom I found that a large amount of teacher effort goes to planning and supervising time and space use. This is done in relation to the time–space maps (Gordon et al. 2000:149), i.e. timetables which contain traditional subjects such as maths, social sciences, natural sciences, Swedish, English crafts, art, home economics, music and physical education (P.E.). The time allocated for each subject is a political decision while creating functional timetables is an administrative matter. In the classroom these time–space maps are interpreted, adapted and negotiated by the participants (children and teachers) and in this process filled with activities (cf. Bergqvist 1990:17-9).

The time–space maps indicate that the class’ work activities are centred on the home classroom where the majority of their lessons are enacted. The routines of both space and time in the classroom are created by the class teacher, the assistant and the children. In the home classroom the children’s movements are related to both time and space. Although the furniture is regularly repositioned, and seating and seat partner changed, the children each
have a designated seat in which they at specified times are expected to be seated. Although the class teacher Helen also has a designated seat this is not repositioned nor is she expected to spend specified times there, doing so is voluntary on her part. The assistant Kristin does not have a designated seat, instead she has a chair that she moves to the place she wants to be seated.

The designation of furniture and seating partners was the privilege of the class teacher. When repositioning the furniture she almost always placed a few children on their own, either at the back of the classroom or with their desk placed right up against the whiteboard. Arriving one day to find that the furniture has been rearranged and that the children (and I) have new seating partners I ask my new seat partner Peter why Benjamin is facing the wall in front (where Peter used to sit). Peter tells me that it is because Benjamin did not listen, because he did so many other things instead, because he did not have ‘arbetsro’. This Swedish term, ‘arbetsro’, translates as ‘peaceful surroundings conducive to work’ but is often used as a descriptive term indicating whether an individual has the qualities that enable him/her to calmly concentrate on his/her work. To be described as not having ‘arbetsro’ is to be described as a person who lacks some individual quality that is needed for doing class work.

Although the classroom is the centre for work activities the children move regularly to other arenas. Break and lunchtimes are indicated as times when the children have to leave the classroom and spend time in the dining room and out of doors. Certain lessons are held in other classrooms so that the class as a whole changes venue as during physical education (P.E.). At other time the class is divided into groups that go to separate activities that are in different classrooms. This happens when they have craft and when they have an activity called theme \(^\text{37}\) during which each group had lessons together with children from other classes. This movement away from the classroom is regulated by the time–space maps and the children physically move from one arena to another at specified times.

Alternative time–space maps
There were also many occasions when individual children or small groups of children, often in special teaching groups (cf. Karlsson 2007), used alternative time–space maps. During one of my early fieldwork days I made a note saying

\(^\text{37}\) For theme the children were divided into groups studying a specific theme. The group I joined looked at theatre history.
that the main work activities slotted into place and around them were fitted extra activities for some children. During that day I noted children leaving the main group on five occasions.

Often children got ready quietly and left the classroom with no overt signal from the teacher. At other times it was apparent that keeping track of the extra activities involved both the concerned child/children and the teacher. In the examples below both Robert and the teacher are involved in space-time keeping when Robert is to go to extra maths lessons.

At five to nine, in the beginning of a maths lesson, Robert tells me that Margaret will be coming soon, that she comes at nine o’clock. I ask who Margaret is and he says that she is his teacher. Two minutes later he again says that soon Margaret will come. He then mutters that he does not know what to do (by this time the other children are working in their maths books). A minute later he walks out to the group room outside the classroom and then returns again. At three minutes past nine Helen says, ‘Margaret is here. Robert and David are to go’.

At the beginning of yet another maths lesson Robert is told that he might as well go and wait for Margaret. He then asks if she is coming now and Helen says ‘soon’. Robert checks the time and says ten minutes and then goes to wait in the group room. Quite a while later I hear Helen saying to some other children that they do not need to go to Margaret because she will not be there and shortly afterwards Robert comes back. We are told to work individually with some sums and Robert, sitting next to me, does not get much done.

In the examples above Robert starts the maths lesson by waiting. He cannot settle down to work with the other children but restlessly moves about and tries to be ready for his extra lesson. At the same time the class teacher Helen clearly is also keeping an eye on the proceedings as we see when she tells Robert and David to leave. In the second example there appears to be a sudden change of plans leaving both Robert and Helen unprepared with the result that Robert spends a restless lesson unable to attend to his work.

In these examples Robert’s restlessness indicates that he is not comfortable in his designated seat because he is in transition and should be changing venue and is aware of time. Robert is following a time–space path, or has a time–space map, that is not only alternative to the one followed by the main group of children in the class, but is also marginalised as it is he who has to adapt to the others’ time–space path. It is marginalised in that Robert has to
wait for his lesson to start while the other children are already working but also in that when his extra lesson encroaches upon the lessons scheduled in the main time–space map he is expected to enter the classroom quietly and slot into the work the other children are busy with.

Children following alternative time–space map are effectively placed outside time and space as used by the others in the class. Children who regularly follow these alternative maps may therefore become socially marginalised, especially as they may be forced to be absent during group work or when collaborative work is to be completed. An example of this is an occasion when the children are told to finish their stories about a desert island for the coming Friday. David tries to get Helen’s attention to point out that he is writing a story together with Harry who has left the classroom. However, while the children get ready to start working, Harry returns saying that Margaret, the remedial teacher, is not there. David looks pleased and asks Harry to join him, but Helen tells Harry that he has to go and look for Margaret. Again Harry does not find Margaret and returns. David calls him over to tell him that he is writing their story. Harry asks him something about the story and David starts to tell him. Helen comes over and angrily says, “Don’t talk to David, you are to be with Margaret.” She leaves together with Harry who looks disappointed and David finishes the story on his own.

While Harry’s alternative time–space path caused David to have to complete collaborative work on his own, it also removed Harry completely from the classroom space, and stopped him from completing set work initiated during a lesson where he had been included in the main time–space paths of the class.

**Movements to and from the classroom**

Children leave the classroom during lessons for a variety of reasons apart from the remedial lessons described above. Sometimes they leave the classroom for extra-curricular activities as when there is the dance and song competition arranged by Year 5. In the morning Helen states that Drew is to leave at nine thirty to be told about his job as jury member and that the two participating girls will leave at ten thirty to practise.

Another time it is Sandra’s turn. She represents the class during student council meetings and as the science lesson starts the wall phone rings and Helen says to the class, “Oh, of course, it is student council as well, I had
Path routinised, their need for remedial lessons, appears considerable. The alternative indication class returned back should go. In responsible parts of the lessons being conducted in the classroom. Are either homeroom to change described taken talking Alice returns, sits down and joins the lesson. Talks Social example, continue working. Notebook forgotten”.

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The children follow the time–space maps, but the teachers are ultimately responsible for planning and supervising activities in relation to time and space. In reminding, or being prepared to remind, the children of where and when to go, and by being aware of whether they have returned on time, the teachers shoulder this responsibility. Other aspects of the responsibility are transferred to the children as when after absences it is up to the child in question to slot back into the current work. In the last example above, the work sheets Alice returned with were to be completed using, in part, the information given the class while she was absent. As this was not alluded to, nor was she given any indication of what she had missed, it was clear that it was up to her to access the relevant information. This means that children who regularly follow alternative time–space maps, and often are absent from the classroom space, have the responsibility of catching up on work done there during their absence. The risk for these children to fall (further) behind, and conversely emphasise their need for remedial lessons, appears considerable.

As seen in the preceding text the dominant time–space path becomes routinised, but this routinisation frequently breaks down and the time–space path are both challenged and side-stepped (Gordon et al. 2000:150-1). This is
partly due to the alternative time–space paths some children follow but also through staff initiating changes in the existing routines, as well as the children being active in negotiating classroom order. In the following section some of strategies the children use to gain control over their time–space use in the classroom will be presented.

**Time-shifting – seeking control over time**

As discussed above, in relation to time–space paths and maps, both time and space use is planned and regularised in school. This means that the children need to access school space and school time. Although we have seen examples of negotiations of time and space above, the children also sought control in other ways. Gordon *et al.* point out that “students can hide and escape their limited autonomy in flights of the mind, enacting in the mental, as well as the physical and social space” (2000:136, also cf. Westlund 1996:177).

As children’s schooling takes place both in time, and over time, P. Christensen and A. James (2001:71) point out that schooling is based on a “particular view of time passing in relation to broader perceptions of children’s developing cognitive and physical skills and social competencies which are played out through the highly routinised rhythm and pace of children’s learning during the school day.” This view of time, they point out, has particular implications for children’s say over the way they spend their time. With greater power and control over time and space use being claimed by adults, Christensen and James (2001) found that the children in their study accounted for different strategies they used to gain some control over time at school.

These strategies, which include the flights of mind mentioned by Gordon *et al.*, Christensen and James (2001:83) called *time-shifting*. One way of time-shifting could be to affect the experience of time passing (slowly) by the children changing their own attitude or behaviour, but another way to reduce the teachers’ apparent control over their time was by stretching out or giving over time to other activities. Observing a relatively unstructured and unsupervised half hour intended for quiet reading Christensen and James (2001:84) found that ten of thirty-five children were actually sitting and reading while the others where involved in other activities, not too noticeably diverging from this for the teacher to interfere. This manner of stretching out or giving over time to other activities is a way of transforming activities and challenging teacher planning.
In the notes from a twenty-minute section of a maths lesson, presented below, we can see that together with maths activity the children are involved in a myriad of other activities.

At ten past eight when the maths lesson starts there is much movement with children going to ask Helen for help and fetching books and papers. By twenty past eight most of the children are sitting down and working. Ella and Monica work together discussing how to solve a problem. Rashid and Henry show each other how to squeeze marks on their arms and Benjamin talks to me instead of working.

Peter plays with his ruler and Rashid and Henry look at marbles. The room becomes quiet apart from the student teacher talking to Rashid and Henry. Monica goes to Helen for help and Jessica fetches her ruler. Harry talks to Paul. Monica and Ella fetch a large ruler and then go to the group room. Helen goes to Benjamin who then goes to Helen’s desk and fetches a string. Henry and Rashid talk.

Benjamin goes to one of the student teachers for help. Ella and Monica return from the group room. Harry talks to Rashid and Rashid talks to Henry. There is continued talk between Rashid and Henry. Rashid and Olivia go to the cupboard and fetch paper. Helen is helping Paul and Harry. The noise level has gone down. Ella and Olivia are working but talk of other things. Peter plays with a ruler by his desk, waving it. Rashid shows the student teachers a ruler that can be seen through.

During these twenty minutes we find that time is frequently given to activities other than the maths activity. The children chat, they move about the room and games are created as when Rashid and Henry show each other how to squeeze marks on their arms and later look at marbles, and as when Peter plays with his ruler waving it in the air. These activities can be compared to Woods’ (1990:175) conclusion that students “might seek to transform any dull activity into play” and to an earlier study of mine (1998) where I found that children accessed time by challenging the work goals of the teacher. This was done by

38 Challenging not only includes the deliberate choice a child makes in not following instructions or known rules, but also any action of the child’s that goes outside that expected by the teacher.
creating a variety of games but also through avoiding engagement in the work task and through failing to follow instructions.

Avoidance of set tasks and failing to follow instructions can be a way to stretch time and I noted how Robert stretches time by being slow when the children are to give their ‘week books’ to the teacher, Helen. When Helen points out that eight books are still missing Robert, who has been filling his water bottle, says ‘I will, I will. He puts his bottle on the desk and then slowly rummages through his backpack to get his book. Another time Peter is told to finish work he considers already completed. Peter tells me that he has done it but he does not know where he has put it. He takes out his textbook and starts to read but gets no further than to a picture of fish and chips. He then starts chatting to me about food, and keeps it up until the lesson ends without him completing his work.

A more deliberate accessing of time was noticeable during a session in the computer room during Year 6. The class is working on the class magazine but some children pursue an alternative agenda.

Drew and Dean are playing a computer game when Sandra notices them. She says, “I am better than you. Where do I find it?”

Olivia walks past and noticing them says, “We’re not allowed to.”

Sandra calls out into the room in general “Aren’t we allowed to?”

“No” says Olivia.

“Ruby may we?” Sandra calls out again.

“Hush,” says Drew quietly, not wanting Sandra to draw attention to what they are doing, and Sandra quietens and starts playing.

The above examples of time-shifting, where time is stretched or given over to other activities, can be subsumed under the term secondary adjustments and be understood as being a part of the underlife of the class, challenging the official norms of the classroom. The two terms, secondary adjustments and underlife, (1961) are used by W. Corsaro (2005) in describing how children challenge teachers’ rules. Secondary adjustments is defined by E. Goffman (1961:189) as, “any habitual arrangement by which a member of an organization employs unauthorized means, or obtains unauthorized ends, or both, thus getting around the organization’s assumptions at to what he should do and get and hence what he should be”. These secondary adjustments lead to the development of an
underlife, i.e. “a set of behaviors or activities that contradict, challenge, or violate the official norms or rules of a specific social organization or institution” (Corsaro 2005:151). Both secondary adjustment and the development of an underlife are related to recurring actions or activities that, often in secrecy, challenge norms or rules of an institution.

In the examples above we find that these challenges are not so secret and it appears that some of the secondary adjustments of time-shifting in the study class have become an accepted part of classroom behaviour. This is seen when I observe David resting his head on his arms and scribbling on his desk while the teacher, Helen who is helping his teammate ignores him. When the teacher leaves them David continues scribbling a little and then rubs it out and starts working.

In this section we have seen how the children transform or initiate changes in teacher-planned activities through time-shifting by ‘going slow’, inventing games, chatting or moving around the classroom. These activities can be seen as being part of the underlife of the class, as unofficial means of maintaining some control over time but also over activities. Through time-shifting the children challenge the teachers’ authority, and also to some extent challenge the power relationship present in the generational structure of the community.

**Summary**

In the previous chapter I showed how the study class could be understood as a community within the school. In this chapter we have seen how time and space combine in time–space paths, and how school activities are played out in relation to these. This means that the members of the study class find themselves in a context where time–space paths organise their actions, and where the generational relations in the class are played out in relation to time and space.

The time–space paths followed can be divided into a dominant path that is mapped by the general timetable of the class and alternative time–space paths followed by individual children. These alternative paths are subordinate to the dominant path and children who follow them are expected to seamlessly slot in and out the dominant path, accessing missed information and catching up on missed work activities.
Apart from these alternative paths for members of this community the possibilities to gain control over time and space allocations are unevenly distributed. Although subject to the curriculum and the administrative planning of the school, the adult members of the community can to a greater extent take control over their own time and space movements, and are able to monitor, access, withhold or grant the children the possibility of control over their own time–space movements.

The adults’ command over the children’s time–space movement can be seen as a method of discipline where, according to Foucault (1977), rhythms and activities are established and imposed. The strategies the children used to access their own time means, however, as Christensen and James (2001:83) say, that the children “do not perceive themselves to be ultimately subordinate by the temporal ordering of the school day”.

This means that time–space paths, ultimately ordered by adults, organise the children’s lives. They become a part of a generational order where the children have a subordinate position. The children, however, use a variety of strategies to by pass this subordinate positioning.

In the following chapter I will show how the children both claimed and, at times, were granted opportunities to have command over their school day activities.
In the two previous chapters the organisation surrounding the children’s schooling was focused. The study class as a context and the time–space paths within which the members of it find themselves were discussed.

In school we find a distinction between adults and children that is so commonplace that it at times is forgotten and not taken into account when looking at institutions such as compulsory schooling. Enter any school, though, and look at the activity there, and you will find that being either a child or an adult decides your possible roles. All adults in school have the role of adult but they may also be cooks, kitchen staff, cleaners, or headmaster, administrative staff, teachers’ assistant or teacher. Children in school have two interacting roles in relation to adults and the institution, that of child and that of student.

In this and the following chapter the child–adult relationship in the study class will be related to the children’s two roles. In order to discern generational structures, and the possibilities of action available to the children, their school day activities are focused.

During their school days children are involved in activities either organised by the teachers or organised by the children themselves. I found that while involved in these different activities the children generally moved with assurance and a sense of purpose, giving me the feeling that they had appropriated school as an arena for their own use. In this chapter I will show that the children’s display of assurance is related to an understanding of themselves as active and able participants. I will also show that the staff may support the children in this, both by assuming them to be able participants, and by organising activities where the children are to use their own initiative and thereby are positioned as able participants. In this way the children may both claim and be granted command over their school day activities.
BEING PARTICIPANTS IN SCHOOL ACTIVITIES

In their study of schooling Gordon et al. (2000:72, see also Gordon and Lahelma 1997) point out that although neither students nor teachers used the concept of competence in relation to the students, the skills displayed by the students show that they have competence as pupils. Gordon et al. coined the term professional pupils to refer to the skills the students displayed during their school days. Gordon et al. found that to be professional pupils the children are required to learn appropriate behaviour for both inside and outside the classroom. The children have to learn “the basic features of the pedagogic process, the hierarchical relations within the school, and the possibilities and spaces for, as well as limits of, student agency” (Gordon et al. 2000:72).

In this study being a professional pupil is related to the above skills but an additional component is seen as central to being a professional pupil – the ability to uphold the image of oneself as competent.

In Gordon et al.’s discussion of professional pupils their competence is firmly tied the to the school arena. Children’s competence has also been in focus outside the school arena. Within the sociology of childhood (see James and Prout 1990, Mayall 1994, James et al. 1998) the idea of children as competent and active creators of their own childhoods emerged in the beginning of the 1990s. V. Morrow’s (1994:132) study of children’s work and of children as responsible actors is an example of this. In her study she defined competence as an aspect of being responsible. Being responsible, she says, involves “being accountable, answerable, capable, competent, dependent, reliable, trustworthy and so on”. According to Morrow, childhood in the industrialized West, is defined and constructed as a period of incompetence and lack of responsibility. Thus the mentioned qualities are not usually associated with children.

Another sociology of childhood researcher, P. Alderson (1994:56), studied children’s rights to integrity in relation to medical procedures. She noted variation among adults where some would deny children’s competence and others respect it. She found that parents’ perceptions of a child’s competence would affect that child’s confidence. Therefore, she writes, “it could be argued that children become competent by first being treated as if they are competent.”

Conceptions of children as ‘developing’, and therefore as incompetent and irresponsible, says Morrow (1994:138), hinder us from “acknowledging the
extent to which children are capable, competent and have agency and responsibility in their own lives”. Although the concept of competence and the notion of children’s competence vary in the studies above there are arguments for seeing or acknowledging children’s competence.

Morrow (1994:138) relates competence to agency and responsibility while Alderson (1994:56) relates competence to confidence, and the assurance displayed by the children in the study class, in their activities and actions, was interpreted by me as competence. A dictionary definition of competence tells us that it is to be in possession of required skill, knowledge, qualification, or capacity and this skill can be related to a specific activity or context. As I see it, for the children in the study class the competence required of them is that of being able to navigate the different activities and relationships of their school days.

Although the children’s competence is related to the school setting, my understanding is that the children in the study class did not so much see themselves as competent students as they saw themselves as being competent. The children’s own view of themselves as competent I relate to Westling Allodi’s (2002) discussion of children seeing themselves as protagonists in their lives. As protagonist the children have the star role. Westling Allodi found that in their descriptions of school the children placed their personal activities and experiences in the centre (cf. Aronsson 1997: 179-95), and that they more often described activities that were seen as significant and meaningful than activities that were seen as unsatisfactory. In school, according to Westling Allodi, the teacher is both the sensible stage director and a role player alongside the children, and I would add that other children should be seen as fellow role players as well.

Seeing themselves as protagonist means that the children view themselves as active, resourceful participants who share responsibility for both classroom organisation and schoolwork with the teacher, and maintain break time activities with their peers. In other words there appears to be a shared assumption of competence on part of the children played out in the busy setting of school life and this competence was displayed by the children, expected of the children, and the children assumed themselves to possess it.

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In this chapter, the question I seek to answer is in what manner the children are
granted and claim command over their school day activities, and how to
understand the generational structure when the children are being positioned as
competent professional pupils.

Schoolwork activities

One of the main activities the children are involved in during the school day is
that of schoolwork activities in the classroom. Schoolwork activities are
generally planned and initiated by teachers and the question is what command
the children can have over these activities. In the text below I will describe
such activities and discuss the children’s participation.

To exemplify the schoolwork activities in the study class I will use the
fieldnotes created on a Friday early on during my fieldwork.

A day’s work

Entering the classroom the morning’s English lesson starts with a spelling
test. Then we are to read out aloud the text about the caterpillar that the
children had been told to practise at home during the week. We take turns
reading two sentences each twice around the room. After that we are given
new words to do with the hungry caterpillar to learn for next week.

Following this is individual work from a worksheet until it is time for
maths. During maths Alice sits with Ella and they try to stay on the same
sum or at least the same page. They do not show each other their answers
but Alice often asks Ella if she has the same answer and if she doesn’t then
Alice assumes her own work is incorrect and she corrects it.

After break it is time for the lesson called theme. The class is divided into
groups and joining Ella and Monica I ask them what theme is. Ella
answers ‘theatre and such’. We go to the next-door classroom where the
teacher, Tommy, has written Happy Birthday on the board and decorated
this with flowers and fireworks. He greets us and tells us that today we will
talk of birthday celebrations. He then asks the children where he was in the
story of Hephaestus and together the class recaps the story of how Hera

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40 In examples where I was included and was an active participant in the group
‘children’ who were doing school work I will use the term we in my presentations of
the work.
and Zeus throw their son Hephaestus out the window and into the sea because he is so ugly and how he grows up with the Thetis the sea goddess. The teacher now continues the story telling about a birthday party and about Hephaestus being reunited with his parents.

Thereafter a worksheet is given out with two exercises. Firstly sentences from the story are to be put into the right order and secondly we are to pick out who should be excluded in groups of three. When we finish this we are to draw one of the characters. Neither Ella nor Monica has finished when later we are told to skip the drawings if we haven’t finished. The answers are gone through and everyone who offers an answer for the first section has the correct answer. In the second section the teacher ponders each answer given and either elaborates it or just says it is all right.

Tommy, the teacher, then shows the class how to make masks and tells them that masks were used in the theatres in Greece. He hands out a short play and instructs the children to work in groups and to make masks for the characters in the play. Ella, Monica and I start to work together and as there are four characters in the play Alex joins us. We do not finish the masks before end of the lesson and they are put at the back of the classroom to be completed the next time.

After lunch Helen, the class teacher, asks where the News watchers are. Several children rush around looking for slips of paper on which they have question relating to news. This is a quiz where they ask us the questions and we get to choose between three answers. After the quiz Helen asks us to raise our hand if we had all answers right, and then if we had one mistake, two mistakes and so on.

After this Helen puts on the overhead projector a letter the class is to copy into their Weekly message books, which will be handed to their parents. When we start writing Ella looks at my writing and tells me the letter is not to be printed, we are to use handwriting.

Maths homework folders are handed out after we have written the letter home and then we work in a workbook. Helen is correcting English quizzes at her desk and the children call her name when they want something. The day ends with fun-time and the children play a game called Mafia after which Helen reads aloud for the last three minutes of the school day.
In the school day presented above we find that the day is largely spent doing ‘traditional schoolwork’ (cf. Jackson 1968, Granström and Einarsson 1995, Macbeth 2000). This includes a spelling quiz first thing in the morning, taking turns to read aloud, being given homework, doing seatwork with individual worksheets or workbooks and copying a letter to practise handwriting. We also find sessions where the teacher addresses the class, followed by a question answer session. Most lessons in the study class consisted of a short narration by the teacher, followed by a question and answer session before the children did seatwork, or the lessons were based on workbooks that were in regular use so the children would start their seatwork without an initial introduction of it.

Woods (1990:167) finds that work can be understood as “the activity that produces the desired outcome” and at his study school he finds that the outcomes are always decided by the teachers who would use various strategies to get students to “perform the relevant activity”. During the work activities in the example above the teacher in charge initiates and concludes activities, and defines the desired outcome of the work done. This gives the teacher a central position in the classroom around which the activities and the children’s attention revolve and it is possible to see the students’ position in the classroom situation as a passive one.

This would however, be to underestimate the activities of the children. As Woods points out, work is a ‘negotiated’ activity where the completion of a work task can become the main focus. The task can then be continually renegotiated between the students and the teachers in a mutual desire to complete the procedure. Taking a closer look at the work done in the study class we see that for the lessons to take place some sort of agreement has to be reached between the children and the teacher about the proceedings involved (Davies 1983).

For the spelling quiz to take place first thing in the morning the teacher’s point of departure has to be that the children have practised their words at home as instructed. Even if the teacher can assume that some portion of the children will not have practised, she has to carry out the activity as if they had, to uphold her side of the underlying agreement of work. It is also necessary that a fair number of the children have done the homework for the quiz to be seen as legitimate by the participants. Taking turns to read aloud can be seen as a fairly simple activity but involves a tacit agreement that any child not currently
reading is quiet, is prepared when his/her turn comes and at least gives the impression being attentive (cf. Macbeth 2000). When the children are given homework it is necessary to make note of it, remember to take it home and allot it the needed time.

The relatively simple task of copying the letter to their parents from the overhead projection into their weekly message books can be disrupted by children not having their book, by not remembering to use handwriting and by working slowly so that the time set aside for the task will be insufficient. The teacher’s task is to have written the original message, remembered to photocopy it onto an overhead sheet and set aside the appropriate amount of time for the work activity as well as chivvying and reminding children to keep to their task.

The activities in the classroom are, as we have seen, a collaborative effort between the children and the adults, which is constantly negotiated. Some of these negotiations will be shown below.

**Negotiating competence**

The negotiations in the classroom are about the work activities to be done, but also about who has the right to define a situation, to initiate an activity and ultimately who owns the activity.

For the children, inclusion in the activity of ‘doing schoolwork’ entails continually navigating and negotiating the teachers’ definitions of planned activities. These definitions may be resisted (Willis 1977) or contradicted and challenged (Corsaro 2005:151, Ayton 1998). Resistance in the manner described by P. E. Willis was not common in the study class but challenges to the teacher’s plans were frequent. By challenges I here mean both the deliberate choice not to follow instructions or known rules and actions such as misunderstandings or initiatives by the children that falls outside of that expected by the teacher. These challenges are a part of the negotiation of the work activities and through them the activities could be altered.

In the study class the challenges to work activities were enacted together with the work activities and at times altered these, but were seldom enacted in any kind of secrecy. As Goffman says, although secondary adjustments are ways for individuals to stand apart from the role and the self taken for granted by the institution, secondary adjustments can become “so much an accepted part of an organization that they take on the character of ‘perquisites’,
combining the qualities of being neither openly demanded nor openly questioned” (Goffman 1961:191). In this way the secondary adjustments become part of the negotiations between the children and the teachers.

Apart from actual work activities it was the children’s competence, their position as professional pupils that was negotiated. In the previous chapter we saw that the students displayed such skills in relation to time keeping that clearly justified dubbing them professional pupils. Looking at classroom activities we will see that not only do the children in the study class see themselves as competent, their teachers also appears to expect them to be.

This is demonstrated when children are to attend a function away from the classroom. They are seldom admonished to behave themselves or to go straight there and back. It is assumed that they will do what they are supposed to do, that they will go to the relevant place and that they will not be disruptive on the way there and back. When they come back they slot into the current class activities and their leaving and returning cause no more than a ripple in the activities of the rest of the class.

Apart from being accountable for their own actions the children are also expected to teach each other valid skills or behaviour. One Tuesday they are told to take out their bench books to read. The class teacher, Helen, then asks if there is anyone who needed to go to the library to get a new book. Some children raise their hands and Helen tells them to go and to take the new member of the class, Ivan, with them to show him what to do. I join them and Sandra instructs me on how to borrow a book by filling in a library card and giving it to Helen when we return to the classroom.

Another day when the class is busy working Helen says she has to go and photocopy the workbook so that I (the researcher) will have something to work with and for she herself to have an overhead copy. Alex says that he does not understand and as Helen walks through the door she turns and says to one of the other children, “Jessica, can you help Alex if he doesn’t understand?”

Another time when Helen again needs some photocopying done she turns to the class and says, “Will someone come to the front and do something while I’m away?” She leaves the classroom and some of the children immediately ask the assistant Kristin to please start a game of hangman, thereby in their turn delegating the responsibility to Kristin.

By delegating tasks to the children, by expecting them to help other children in various ways, and by expecting them to keep order through the use of
activities, Helen confirms that she expects the children to be active participants in the classroom and she positions them as professional pupils.

In the busy classroom the children are not only delegated but demonstrate competence and also claim command over the activities. This may be obscured by the appearance of chaos that can at times be noted in the classroom (cf. Jackson 1968) as in a maths lesson where Benjamin and David, wearing headsets, listen to music at the same time as they seem to be concentrating on their work. Sandra, who also wears a headset, is fidgeting with it as well as constantly involving herself in conversations. This means that she either talks very loudly, not hearing herself through the music, or she asks people to repeat themselves since she cannot hear them. Meanwhile Alex walks around the room stopping and talking to people at their desks, and there is quite a bit of talking between tables. The noise level in the classroom has been relatively high but suddenly it drops so the room is almost quiet for a few seconds, and then Sandra talks loudly as she still has the headset on. The noise subsides again and the classroom is quiet with work going on. Peter comes in from the group room and fetches a workbook and then leaves again.

During this session most of the children have moved to work with a friend since in the study class, although the seatwork was mainly done in individual workbooks or worksheets, the children would often collaborate. The collaboration could at times be organised by the teacher who would tell them to work in groups or divide them into groups, but often the initiative appeared to be the children’s. The children would either collaborate with the children seated next to them or move across to another table. In this way schoolwork planned by teachers is appropriated by the children, is altered, and becomes the children’s activities. This can be seen in the earlier description of a day’s work where we found Ella and Alice collaborating on their maths by attempting to stay at the same page and by comparing their answers. In this they have changed individual seatwork activities into a collaborative game and thus altered the teacher-initiated task.

During maths lessons seatwork was frequent, with the classroom generally having a busy sound from a low level of talk between children working together and discussing their work, as well as some chatting about other things (cf. Tholander 2002:26). We see this during a maths lesson where Sandra and Stephanie at the desk next to me are busy with diagnostic tests. David sits next to them, and one minute they are asking him for help while the next minute
they tell him to stop being a nuisance. The two girls are busy with their tests and they are reasonably focused but at the same time they are including David in their activities. They use him both as a resource in their work when they ask him for help but also as light relief when they accuse him of disturbing them as this gives them a break in their work. When the teacher, Helen, notices them she tells David that he is not allowed to help the two girls. They all ask why, indicating that they expect to be allowed to help each other. ‘Because you are doing a diagnostic test’, Helen answers. Sandra and Stephanie continue to collaborate over their tests once Helen leaves.

Through their collaboration the children changed the procedural goal of the activity, but the production of schoolwork is still in progress. This may be why their activity is either not noticed, or is accepted by the teacher, and that collaboration is a secondary adjustment that has become an accepted part of schoolwork in the study class.

Within the noise and bustle of the classroom, the children combine set work activities with unscheduled activity. The class teacher, Helen, often accepts this and in that way seems to accept the children’s interpretation of acceptable work environment. This can be seen during the lesson below when the class is busy completing a worksheet.

After some time Helen says, “The noise level is too high. If you cannot cope with working quietly together you will have to stop.”

At the end of the lesson she asks “Has everyone found the classroom quiet enough to be able to work?” and the class answers “Yes”.

“Because I feel that it has been too ‘talky’. Is there anyone who has not had enough peace and quiet?”

No one says anything.

“Oh, well”, says Helen and no more is said on the matter.

Expecting competent and responsible behaviour means that the children’s interpretation of what happens has to be respected and they must be granted command over their actions. The dialogue above starts by Helen claiming authority, positioning herself in charge by threatening to impose her will if the class is too noisy. Although the noise level continued to be higher than she deemed appropriate Helen did not carry out her threat. The exchange at the end

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41 The teacher uses the common Swedish term ‘arbetsro’ which translates as ‘peaceful surroundings conducive to work’.
of the lesson instead reflects her expectation that maintaining classroom order is the concern of both her and the children. Through this expectation she reinforces the children’s position as professional pupils.

Helen’s generally high acceptance of movement and noise may be part of this positioning of the children as professional pupils. Although she often does tell the class to be quieter, it is just as common for the noise level in the class to rise and sink and even disappear with no effort on Helen’s part.

In the study class we find that the teacher would delegate responsibilities to the children, thereby allowing them command over classroom activities. The children would, at the same time, claim control by allowing their own agenda to interact or interfere with the teacher’s planning. Here activities that could be understood as secondary adjustments had become parts of acceptable order in the study class.

Having looked at how the children’s competence could be negotiated during lessons in general, the following text will introduce activities that are more loosely supervised. In these activities an understanding of the children as responsible social actors was brought to the forefront, giving the children opportunity to demonstrate their competence and to position themselves as professional pupils.

**Loosely supervised activities**

Activities that I saw as more loosely supervised could be less structured, of short duration, added onto the beginning or end of other lessons, or have the appearance of games. One of these activities is *planning time* during which the children are divided into groups with different weekly tasks to be completed with a minimum of supervision. When the designated tasks within the groups are done the children are either to tidy their desks or complete unfinished work. They may also help the class teacher, Helen, in different ways. During planning time the children are divided into an *order group*, a *computer driving licence group*, a *news watchers group* and a *planning group*.

The children in the order group do tasks like handing out completed and corrected work, take down old pictures from the walls and put up new ones, and tidy different work areas. In Year 4 the computer driving licence group are busy doing set tasks on the computer so they will gain a computer driving licence allowing them more freedom in their use of the computer. In Year 5 there are two computers and during planning time one is used by the computer
Chapter Six

Driving licence group and the other one is used by the children writing the weekly message home. To do this they are given a hand written message from Helen and enter it into the computer.

In the news watchers group the children go through specially adapted student newspapers and look for interesting news items from which they prepare multiple answer quizzes. These questions are then put to the other children, at the teacher’s initiative, at some time during the remainder of the week.

During planning time there is also a planning group. This group is to plan how to amuse the class during fun-time, the time set aside for the children to initiate and carry out activities of their own choice. The planning group usually leaves the classroom to plan, both too keep the planning secret, and because organising games or practising mimes to music can be noisy.

Joining the planning group I am informed by the children that we are all to do something during fun-time. Peter says he wants to do the Mafia, a game that was played last Friday. Monica wants to do a game which entails getting someone to copy someone else’s actions and when they are doing this she puts a wet cloth on their seat so that that they get wet when they sit down. I am put in charge of a game that in some way involves a bar of chocolate. Ella decides she wants to mime to Charlie’s Angels and Monica joins her. They decide to ask Sandra to be the third member and she gladly accepts. She has to ask permission though as she is in the order group. She says, “I’ll butter up,” and getting permission she joins the mime.

During planning time there is a lot of legitimate movement with children moving about collecting and depositing various items as well as working in different groups. It may then take some time before Helen or Kristin realises that some children are not doing ‘first things first but fun things first’ or perhaps not engaging with the set activity at all, instead wandering around the room talking to other children. This can lead to the children being told off, and be told that they well know what they should have been doing.

Both planning time and fun-time appear to be activities designed to develop and stimulate competencies such as taking responsibility over their own work, planning and carrying out activities, and cooperating and collaborating. In these activities we find that the children are seen as competent, and their position as professional pupils encouraged.
Another way to encourage the children to appropriate the classroom arena is, I believe, by blurring the distinction between work and play, and introducing games and amusements into the classroom is one way to do this.

**Games and amusements**

Discussing work and play, Woods (1990) claims that teachers deliberately construct the learning process as a game. As examples he mentions that “a rather dry social studies lesson on ‘educational expenditure’ was relieved by sending pupils all over the school to get essential information from the caretaker, the cook, the secretaries, and so on.” Woods finds that the students enter these activities in a friendly and light-hearted manner and adds that these activities were all games, certainly not ‘work’ (Woods 1990:175-6). Using his own (1990:167) definition of work being “the activity that produces the desired outcome” the activities he sees as play must be related to the desired outcome. If, in the example above, the desired outcome was for the students to collect and collate information about school expenditure, then collecting this from various actors within the school would be work as it was the activity that produced that outcome.

In the study class there were activities where the distinction between play and work had been blurred. These activities can either be described as games, or they can be looked at as schoolwork that has been constructed in a manner to amuse the children.

If we use Woods definition of work we define these activities as work as long as they produced the desired outcome. What the desired outcome is may, on the other hand, be difficult to distinguish. In the activities below I believe there are multiple purposes, one of which is to encourage the children to claim competence and to appropriate the classroom.

One of these activities which was the fairly common was light-hearted quizzes, and one of these was the news watchers’ quiz, prepared during planning time. The news watchers’ quiz usually starts by the teacher, Helen, asking where the ‘news watchers’ are. The children concerned then rush around looking for the slips of paper on which they have written their questions. Standing in front of the class they then each read the couple of questions they have prepared. In the examples below I have emphasised the correct answer and we see that the questions were rather ambivalent and the answers not
always the only correct option. As can be seen below some of these questions would be difficult to answer without having read the same newspaper.

Many students in secondary school; quit, don’t do their homework, bunk?

The EU is letting the Swedes continue fishing; Baltic herring, perch, pike?

Where is president Bush popular? Sweden, England, USA.

Who are less ill? Aliens, animals, humans.

Is the first of May a holiday for; students, workers, children?

What do we do with the dead cows? Eat, burn or bury.

Apart from vegetables what do we need? Sweets, fat, meat.

The follow up of this quiz is that Helen asks the children to raise their hand if all their answers were correct. She continues by asking who had made one mistake, two mistakes, and so on. The activity can be seen to have multiple purposes in that the children in the group are to read the newspaper, prepare the questions and stand in front of the class to ask the questions. The questions asked and their merits are not discussed and so although the teacher initiates and concludes the activity, she in no way appropriates its content and it remains an activity over which the children claim almost complete command.

Other quizzes are designed and owned by the teachers. In some of these, as I will show below, the boundaries between work and play are blurred, with the purpose of the activity ambiguous.

One such quiz is presented during the theme lesson about theatre. The quiz is related to the story the class has been working with and the questions are so simple that everyone ought to be able to have the correct answers. It is also humorous in that there are questions like ‘what did Thetis have that Hera wanted? A jewel, an ear or a wooden leg?’

Another quiz by the same teacher, Tommy, is presented during a music lesson. The teacher tells the class that he has borrowed a music CD from their
class teacher, Helen. From this he has made a quiz for them and jokingly says, “So this is the music your teacher digs to at home.”

Starting the quiz he says that the first question relates to Antique’s song ‘I would die for you,’ which was Greece’s contribution to the Eurovision song contest.

“So,” the teacher says, “question one is: What is the colour of the Greek flag? 1) Blue and red, 2) Blue and white, 3) Red and white.”

He plays part of the song and then goes on to the next question, which is related to Bosson’s song ‘One in a million’, and the children are asked how many million people lived in Great Britain. Playing a Westlife song the third question relates the bands name and the children are asked which of the following countries is furthest west on the map with the choice of answers being Iceland, Finland or Denmark.

The quiz proceeds in this way and can be seen as having more to do with social sciences than with music. It is carried out in a light-hearted manner that indicates that one intention is to amuse the children, and throughout the teacher’s spiel there is laughter and smiles, and several children sing along softly to the songs played.

What the two quizzes have in common is that they appear to be designed, and are presented, as amusement for the children. As most quizzes in the study class, both the serious and the amusing quizzes, these are followed up by the children raising their hands to show how many correct answers they achieved.

Apart from being a break in more demanding classroom activities, I believe an aim of the quizzes and other light-hearted activities is to encourage the children to be active in their participation and to engage with the teacher. This would account for the variety of shorter lighthearted activities interspersed during the school days. Games incorporated into lessons and as with the quizzes they are not always related to the scheduled subject.

This is seen when the teacher introduces a game called ‘smurf’ at the start of a maths lesson. Being asked if they have played it before some children recognise it but cannot remember how to play. They are told that they are to try to find out what Helen is thinking of doing, by asking questions such as, ‘Can you smurf in the kitchen?’ ‘Do you smurf everyday?’ and so on. After a few rounds of the game Helen asks what type of words are used as ‘smurf’ words and the children say, “They are things we do”. Helen tells them that that is
what they are going to work with later on – words that tell us what someone did – and these are called verbs. In this example Helen changes a maths lesson into a Swedish lesson and uses the time to introduce the subject matter in the Swedish lesson as something fun.

In the section above the teachers add aspects of fun to the lessons. We cannot be sure if this is seen as play or work, but that may vary from activity to activity. It is also possible that no such distinction is consciously made. The loosely regulated aspects of some of these activities, and the entertaining aspects of others can be a way to insert pleasure into the school day, a way of producing pleasure and work (Fendler 2001:122).

In her scrutiny of the word motivation L. Fendler (2001) found that there has been a shift in the meaning of the word, and in more recent constructions “motivation is explained in terms of feelings, love, fear, hope, pleasure and aspiration (Fendler 2001:121-2).” The desire to participate becomes an essential aspect and by basing work ideas on an understanding of the ‘pleasure principle’ this motivation is thought to be achievable. Fendler talks of a ‘whole child education’ and claims that today it is the child’s entire being that is to be educated, including its’ desires, attitudes and wishes. This leads to educational goals requiring students to be motivated and to have a positive attitude (Bartholdsson 2003, 2007) as well as teachers attempting to create amusing and pleasurable learning environments.

As shown in the text above, these attempts to create a pleasurable learning environment can result in loosely supervised and less regulated activities that supply the children with opportunities to claim some control over their work as the teachers position them as professional, competent pupils during schoolwork activity.

The opportunities for positioning themselves as professional pupils were not, however, equally distributed among the children. As Harré and van Langenhove (1999b:30) point out the social order in a particular setting creates variations in the individuals’ capacity and opportunity to position themselves, and in the study class I found that some children would more often than others have their positioning upheld by the other children and the staff.
Upholding the positioning of Sandra and Peter

Although the children’s positionings would change rapidly during the day some children’s positionings were more constant than others. This seemed to be related to the teachers’, and the other children’s, perception of a child. In the section below the positioning of two children, Sandra and Peter, are presented.

Positioning Sandra as a professional pupil

During the woodcraft lesson the atmosphere was calm and the children seemed to know what they were to do. Sandra shows me how to use a lathe and she seems to enjoy instructing me and showing off her own knowledge.

Sandra was not a noticeable student in that she seldom asked for help, nor did she get into trouble with the teachers. She appeared competent and she appeared to enjoy being a competent, good student gladly showing off her skills. She presents herself to me as a good student early on when I ask her and Alice what the best part of school is. Alice answers “Nothing” and then changes her mind and says, “Break time”. “No,” Sandra says, “it’s learning things”.

One day in the library, Sandra sits down next to where I am standing and places three books on the table. I ask if she is choosing one. “I have read two other ones about Miss Smith”, she says, indicating one of the books. “But I think that I will take the blue one”, she continues, indicating one of the other two books. “It is the first of these two. It seems instructive (sw. lärorik)”, she says. She gets up and puts the other two books back on the shelf, takes down yet another book and shows me. “This is the first book about Miss Smith,” she tells me, “It is very good but difficult to read”.

Here Sandra first lets me know that in choosing a book she considers how instructive it is. She then lets me know that the books she has been reading, that by implication are less instructive, were good but difficult, thereby placing her in the category of people who read difficult books.

Not only does Sandra present herself as a professional pupil, Helen affirms her status in various ways. One morning Helen mentions to the class that Sandra has the new Harry Potter book and that it is ‘so thick’. She tells us that it contains about 750 pages and is so heavy that she herself cannot lie down when reading it. Jokingly she says that she and Sandra are competing to see
who will finish reading the book first. Sandra protests saying that Helen cheats because she started reading the book before Sandra did.

Another day the children have written short stories. Alice is the first to be told to read her story to the class.

“Why me of all people?” she grumbles, as she goes to the front of the class to read her story.

After her Ella reads her story and then it is Sandra’s turn. When Sandra refuses to come forward Helen tells the class that Sandra is worried that they will fall asleep since her story is so long. Her story is two full pages long while most children have written a page or a page and a bit. Helen tells them to promise not to fall asleep. After some more persuasion Sandra reads her story.

In the first example Sandra is presented as someone who reads books that are ‘thick’, ‘contain many pages’ and are ‘heavy’. Not only is the book of unusual size but it is also pointed out that Helen and Sandra read the same book. This can both indicate that Helen is youthful and on the students’ level and that Sandra is a good student who reads at the teacher’s level. In the second example Sandra is presented as someone who does an unusual amount of schoolwork. This is not only presented as positive though as the other children have to promise not to fall asleep. By implication Sandra has written too much but they should put up with it.

Although delegations of tasks is common Sandra’s standing is underlined in some of her tasks as when during a planning time session Sandra, who should be doing computer work instead helps Helen correct the class’s spelling tests. Another time when the class works in their workbooks Sandra, who has finished the pages that are to be done, spends the rest of the lesson going around the classroom helping other children who have raised their hand42.

Two specific incidents made me notice the special leeway given to Sandra. One incident occurs during a lesson in home economics. Helen piles up rubbish, empty cartons, packaging and empty bottles, on a desk. She then puts out slips of paper with headings such as ‘paper’, ‘soft plastics’, ‘glass’, ‘metal’ and so forth on them. Each child is in turn to go to the front, choose an item of rubbish and place it in the right place.

42 Compare with V. Walkerdine’s discussion of girls as sub-teachers (Walkerdine 1990:13). Note however that others have done this kind of helping on some occasion, it is the sum of Sandra’s activities that make her special.
Suddenly Helen says,  
“Sandra, wake up now, it’s your turn.”  
Sandra lifts her head.  
“That’s lucky”, she says, “Otherwise I would have fallen asleep”.  
“Yes I noticed”, answers Helen.

The other occasion was when Helen organised a game during an English lesson. Each child was handed a slip of paper that contained instructions in English to do something such as ‘shake hands with your teacher’, ‘count to ten’, or ‘sing a song in English’. As the game is beginning Sandra sits at her desk and peels and eats an orange. When she has finished she quietly goes to the front of the classroom and throws the orange peels into the rubbish bin. Helen glances at her but says nothing.

In the above examples Sandra breaks two classroom politeness rules. The children are expected to listen to their teacher and to the other children in the class. To be inattentive or to yawn can at times be seen as disruptive as talking out of order can be. To actually put your head on the desk and almost fall asleep is not acceptable behaviour. The interesting reaction here was not Helen’s, we have seen in other examples that she does not always tell children off if they misbehave, but Sandra’s. She does not act as if she has been caught in the act of misbehaving. She calmly says that she was almost asleep and that being called on to do her bit was to her benefit.

Eating in the classroom is not done, apart from the permitted sweets and snacks during fun-time. In spite of this Sandra not only openly peels and eats an orange, she then leaves her seat to throw the peel in the wastepaper basket that is placed in the front of the classroom where Helen is standing while conducting the lesson.

Sandra has a strong position in the community in relation to classroom order. She positions herself and is positioned by Helen as someone reliable and competent whose behaviour does not need to be monitored in the same way as other students’. This is in stark contrast to Peter whose attempts at positioning will be presented below.

**Peter’s positioning**

The noise level varies a bit, sometimes being loud and then getting quieter. I suddenly hear Alice say, “Can you think without
CHAPTER SIX

talking” to Peter and she says that she is tired of hearing him all the time.

These kinds of comments to and about Peter were common. Several children mentioned him when we talked of noise during the interviews and he was often admonished both by the other children and by Helen and Kristin.

During my fieldwork it became clear to me that Peter was often singled out in the classroom although I did not find him a noticeable child. It was because of the admonishments he received, not because I noted his behaviour, that he first started to appear in my notes. In a generally bustling and noisy classroom Peter was almost invariably told off. His telling off was usually slightly more elaborated than that of other children. While they might be told ‘David, be quiet’ Peter would be told to be quiet and then reminded that he really need to learn this, or that he disrupts the class too often, or that he has been told many times.

Being a knowledgeable child Peter was keen to display this. During a lesson with Tommy there was a discussion about how many people lived in London and the numbers 6.7 million and 9 million were being mentioned. Peter insisted that London had 6.7 and Greater London had 9 million. Some of the other children agreed with him and others were uncertain. Tommy was ending the discussion saying that 6.7 million sounded right for Greater London. At that moment Helen and Kristin appeared in the doorway and Peter called out to Helen asking if Greater London does not have 9 million people and she answered that yes, it does.

At other times these displays gets a different reaction, though. One lesson when she is going through the map of Sweden Peter corrects Helen when she says that ‘this is the Baltic Sea’. Peter says that ‘that is the Gulf of Bothnia’. Helen gets angry and says that she has spoken to him about this before. He is not to correct her. He is to believe what she says. The area she indicated is the Baltic Sea and it only becomes the Gulf of Bothnia further north.

Peter meets with a similar reaction during an English lesson when the children are asked about what they did the day before. Some of them played Swedish rounders called ‘brännboll’. On the board Helen writes, “I played ‘brännboll’”. Peter queries this saying “Shouldn't it be an ‘a’?” Knowing that ‘ä’ does not exist as a letter in English he suggest a solution of writing the word with an ‘a’.

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Helen gets very angry and tells Peter that she is the teacher and he is not to correct her. He is to trust that she knows her job and what she says is correct. For him to say “shouldn’t it be an ‘a’” is not right. He must learn to trust his teachers and that this is not the first time she has had to tell him this. In these examples it is clear that Helen experiences Peter’s corrections as challenges to her authority and makes it clear that she finds this unacceptable.

Compared to this it may be Sandra’s, and Jessica’s, presumed competence that makes it permissible for them to correct Helen during a lesson. When writing the correct answers to an English exercise on the board Helen writes ‘skirt’ instead of ‘shirt’ and several children make corrections. After some time Sandra asks whether Helen has not made a mistake. Helen looks at the board and corrects her mistake. She does not say anything. Later she writes ‘bird’ instead of ‘birds’ and this time Jessica corrects her and again Helen does not comment this.

While Sandra’s sidestepping of classroom norms is treated in the manner an adult’s discreet circumvention might be, Peter’s behaviour is understood as disruptive and he is often admonished in relation to a perceived history of non-adapted behaviour. Being perceived as a competent student, a professional pupil, Sandra’s actions are interpreted as competent actions while Peter, in his attempts to position himself as a professional pupil by showing his ability, is rebuffed.

We can see that although the staff may support the children in their positioning as professional pupils and assume that they are able participants, this support may not be available to all children. Some children may have a greater command over their school day activities than others.

In the text above the children’s command over schoolwork activities has been discussed. During their school days the children are also regularly engaged in break time activities. At break time the teachers’ engagement is low and the children organise, initiate and conclude activities among themselves. In this way break time activities are enacted in what I call a children’s arena. This does not mean that this is an arena independent of the generational structures present in school.

Using Alanen’s (2001:21) definition of children’s agency as a question both of being a social actor, and of the possibilities and limitations of their action, the question that emerges is what scope of action the individual child has
during break time and whether generational structures can be discerned in the organisation of break time activities.

**Negotiating Break Time**

Much recent ethnographic work with children has been located to school playgrounds or other places “occupied predominantly by children” (James et al. 1998). This, according to James et al. has, in part, led to a focus on a children’s culture separated from the adult world. This culture can, they say, only be found in spaces over which children have some degree of autonomy, such as the playground opposed to the classroom. However, the children’s control and power over playground activities may be overstated as these activities are enacted in relation to the school context. This context leads to interaction played out in relation to expectations of adult intervention (cf. Ellegaard 2004:185) as well as to school organisation, for example such as short periods of outside play breaking off lessons, a large amount of children in a rather small area, and different traditions of which groups of children ‘normally’ interact.

When I joined the study class in late spring there were two main break time activities popular among both boys and girls. One of these was marbles (cf. Evaldsson 1993:87-107), winning and losing them but mainly the actual playing, and the other common activity for both girls and boys was the game I call ‘4-square’ (cf. Evaldsson 2004).

As both boys and girls were engaged in these games, my first impression, as opposed to others (Thorne 1993, Eder et al. 1995, Karlson 2003) was of break time activities, to a large extent, not being gendered (Evaldsson 2004:335-6). In the same manner I did not immediately note that the children in the playground were divided in accordance to school class. A closer look at break time activities, however, shows that the context of school as described in the earlier chapters also has significance here.

The members of the study class, who earlier on were analysed as a community, do mix with children from other school classes in the playground. This generally occurs in games involving large groups of children. Looking closer we will see that there is either a division within the activity as when small groups of children from the class together move between marble games, or that the members of different school classes come together in a game such as
4-square, and either within the game or immediately afterwards split into differentiated groups.

That the school days are lived out in time–space paths impinges on break time friendship groupings. The different school classes each followed their own time–space paths where break times were scheduled. These did not always coincide with the break times of other classes and children from different classes would not always able to meet during break times. This together with the teachers’ penchant for adjusting break times to the classroom activities meant that friendships across school class boundaries was risky.

By risky I mean that any child choosing to have their main friendship with children from another school class faced spending break times on their own. To do so in a school context is generally not something children do voluntarily (cf. Karlson 2003:29, Bliding 2004:209-19) and the time–space paths thereby underpin the community of the school class. This meant that the members of the study class mainly looked for friendship and companionship within the class.

This, together with the inclination for school children to socialise in single gender groups documented by many researchers (among others Thorne 1993, Eder et al. 1995, Öhrn 2002, Karlson 2003), meant that close friendship and much of the break time activity would take place either among the boys or among the girls of the class.

I spent very little time observing the all-boys constellations as they generally consisted of games of football initiated at the end of a lesson and going on till the end of break or lunchtime. In retrospect I suspect I would have found interpersonal dramas played out on the football field but unfortunately I do not have notes covering this.

As the girls generally included me, my notes do however cover many girl-only activities played out among the eight girls of the class. Among them

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This inclusion could in reality be of different kinds. The girls sometimes asked me to join them to show me something, i.e. being the knowledgeable ones, they also included me to show me off i.e. having a ‘tame’ adult, they included me to have an audience, and occasionally I believe they included me to make fun of me. These various types of inclusion did make their activities available to me. On occasion they excluded me and I would then observe discreetly from a distance until I was found useful again. The boys found less use for me; they did enjoy their role of teaching me marbles and 4-square in
Alice, Jessica, Ella and Sandra, were identified as the class’s leaders by the student teachers in their study of group dynamics, and according to the class teacher, Helen, their struggle for leadership in the early years of school had led to “daily dramas”. Of the other four girls, Monica, Olivia, Stephanie and Hanna, Monica generally spent her time with the four leading girls although not fully included; Olivia and Hanna aspired in different ways to be part of this group, whilst Stephanie seemed to ignore them.

Apart from displaying skills needed to engage in games such as marbles or 4-square we can ask whether, and if so in what manner, the girls, during break time, display skills relating to being professional pupil and how any generational structures are navigated.

Interaction sets
In V. Furlong's (1976) study Interaction sets in the classroom he states that interaction sets are not the same as friendship groups or peer groups. Interaction sets can occur momentarily and either include or cut across regular friendship groups. Furlong shows that friends can choose to join the action in an interaction set, or not, depending on the situation. The choice of action is the individuals even if the general situation is interactively defined (Furlong 1976:162-4).

Looking at the girls’ activities during the break and lunchtimes it is seen that interaction sets can arise suddenly, can vary in their constellations and differ from the constellations of the friendship groups. The two friendship groups were one large group, including the four leading girls as well as Monica, and one twosome consisting of Stephanie and Hanna. Olivia was a free flowing agent who might join either constellation. This general pattern was not static as both within and between these groups there were games, teasing and roughhousing where the groups came together and apart, breaking into different interaction sets.

One lunch break I am standing on the step with Stephanie and Hanna when Alice comes out of our cloakroom giggling. She tells me that ‘they have been holding the toilet door shut so that they can’t come out’. It takes me a while to find out that she means that she, Jessica, Monica and Olivia have pushed the
door shut so that Ella and Sandra cannot come out. They then locked the door from the outside but the girls inside still believe that the door is being held shut. So although they now would be able to unlock and come out, they stay in there trying to push the door open.

Here the group of the four leading girls have split up and two of the more marginal members of this group, Monica and Olivia, have been given more central positions. Alice also enrolls me by asking me to join them by the toilet door. As I do so Jessica, whispering, start to explain the situation to me but Alice proprietarily hushes her and tells her that I know that. They then call out to the girls inside asking why they don’t come out and tell them that they are no longer holding the door shut. ‘Katarina can tell you how it is’, they say and ask me to tell them44. I say ‘no, we are not holding the door’. After some more laughing and taunting the girls on the outside ask the locked-in girls why they are not unlocking and the two girls then unlock the door. They are all laughing, even Ella and Sandra. Jessica then takes hold of the door and locks them in again. Giggling they leave the cloakroom and go outside.

Although all the girls above were involved in the same activity there seem to be two interaction sets involved, the set that is locked in and the set that locked them in. We cannot assume that the two sets interpret the situation the same way. The interaction sets above do not follow the usual friendship groups but temporarily give central positions to more marginal members. Having been included in this roughhousing Olivia now takes the initiative and starts a game by bouncing a bouncy-ball and get Alice, Monica and Jessica engaged in this. Ella and Sandra come out and stand on the steps. Hanna and Stephanie come back from somewhere and as they do so Ella and Sandra leave the steps and go down and talk to the other girls. They return to the steps, though standing on one side while, Hanna and Stephanie stand on the other side. Although Ella and Sandra talk to the other girls they do not join their game but keep apart. Neither do they join the other two girls on the steps; instead these two groups keep firmly apart.

Another lunchtime the girls sit with Helen and they discuss boyfriends, games of handball and the Eurovision song contest. After eating Hanna and

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44 By using me as a resource the girls use their knowledge of generational structures as they assume that the girls who are locked in will believe my statement about whether the door is locked or not more than their own.
Stephanie stand on the steps as usual. The other girls (not Monica who is ill but including Olivia) play a game among the pillars holding up a roof outside the dining hall. After a while the girls divide into Olivia and Sandra who go and talk to Kristin and the other three who walk off and again the constellations in the larger group varies as interaction sets changing situationally.

This tendency for friendship groups to break up into short-term interaction sets can cause some insecurity. One break time Olivia and Hanna and I stand outside the dining room and poke at the snow with our feet. Suddenly the other girls from the class rush out and join us and Jessica suggests a game. Olivia and Monica are keen but Alice and Ella both say ‘count me out’. This puts Jessica in a position of either playing the game with the more marginal girls or backing down and pretending she really did not mean the suggestion, that it was a joke, and this is what she does.

**Exclusion**

Together with the switches in interaction sets there were deliberate inclusions and exclusions (cf. Biding 2004) among the girls. Here aggression and power play, instead of becoming voluble as it could be in the conflicts between the groups of boys and girls, was expressed in small ways, often too subtle for staff detection. This subtleness may have been necessary as I. Karlson (2003:87) found that conflict and power play was mainly displayed within same-gender groups and also that staff mainly concerned themselves with problems occurring within same-gender groups.

Among the girls in the study class I found that a common power play strategy was exclusion. Excluding others from current activities or conversations can be done in subtle ways. One day as a group of girls walk toward the classroom from the football field Jessica, Alice and Ella start to huddle close together. It becomes obvious that Sandra, walking close to me feels very frustrated by this and she mutters something about letting “them into the gang”. It is noticeable that Monica also realises that they somehow are being excluded but she looks more resigned. The three girl’s slight withdrawal becomes more distinct as Sandra now walks on ahead and enters the cloakroom. She then emerges to stand on the step on the inside of me to avoid the other girls. I ask her how she is and she answers, “Bad”. The signs of exclusion were not very obvious and I could have missed what was happening if Sandra’s discomfort had not been so apparent.
Another day the girls are on the step and I hear them tell Ella that they did high jump during PE the day before when she was absent. After a bit they admit that they did not and they walk off and start to play 4-square. Ella does not join them straight away but watches them for a while before she joins the game. On these occasions it is apparent that even the most integrated member of the group can be distressed by exclusion and that the methods used can be very subtle. In the first case there was a slight withdrawal during the walk to the classroom and on the second occasion a tease enacted on a child who had been absent. On both occasions the exclusion only becomes noticeable to an outsider through the actions of the child excluded. On the first occasion Sandra makes her discomfort clear to me and on the second occasion Ella hesitates before joining the game.

As mentioned the four girls who joined the class after its formation were not included in the leading group. Stephanie, who left in Year 5, seemed totally uninterested in the others’ break activities. Until Hanna arrived and became a close friend of Stephanie’s, Olivia appeared content to spend break time with her although they mainly spent their time silently hanging about the steps. When Hanna and Stephanie became close friends Olivia was left on her own and as mentioned earlier she tried to solve this by becoming the researcher’s, i.e. my, friend. When Stephanie left the school Hanna became lonely and tried to be included in the larger group of girls.

This kind of manoeuvring could seem acceptable for the new girls, but Monica had been a member of the class since sometime in the second year. To have such a precarious position after such a long time seemed to make her more vulnerable. The other girls’ methods of exclusion were again subtle enough to avoid detection by members of staff.

An example of this was when Monica chooses to hang about the steps while the others play 4-square. She had earlier asked some of the girls if they were going to play football again and has been given an offhand “don’t know” as an answer. This apparently made her feel excluded and she does not join the 4-square game. Another day after P.E. Monica, who has been absent, asks where the stone\(^45\) is. “I don’t know where it is”, Alice says, winking exaggeratedly. Monica insists that she wants to know where the stone is as they are on the

\(^{45}\) They are playing a game where the girls are playing against the boys and they are hunting a treasure symbolised by a stone.
same team and Alice and Jessica tease her saying they don’t know and thereby making her position in the team noticeably marginal. There is also the occasion when music is played during classroom work. At the beginning of a track Jessica smiles towards Sandra. Monica then guesses that the song playing is the one they are using for their show but Sandra denies this. Alice then says, “Let her believe what she wants!” A while later Alice and Sandra are whispering and I see Monica watching them.

Exclusions like these are often about withholding information, i.e. information about plans, about aspects of games played and about the others’ activities. The power of these subtle exclusions became clear to me on an occasion when I came upon the girls in a huddle outside the dining room. They seemed to be deciding what to do during the lunch break but the circle did not open to let me in and after hovering for a minute or so I left, feeling excluded.

In the descriptions of interaction sets and deliberate exclusions above we find that break time is a time of constant positioning among the children. During the two main activities, shooting marbles and playing 4-square, the children spent time positioning themselves as skilful players, others attempted to position themselves as less skilful but ‘good sports’, yet others were positioned as bad losers, or even as insignificant participants.

Attempts at positioning, now as friend or non-friend, was also apparent in the small group of girls in the study class who, due to the divisions by gender and between school classes, were dependent upon each other for companionship and friendship during the school days. In their manoeuvring the girls display great skills at keeping their negotiations and conflicts concealed from adult eyes.

This need to conceal conflict and aggression can be related to the generational structures where the adults in school have the rights to define appropriate behaviour and to enforce it. In school, appropriate behaviour is to include everyone in play interactions (cf. Evaldsson 2004:336) and for children always to be kind to each others. Concealment of exclusions becomes a necessary skill for professional pupils to acquire if they are to act outside approved conduct and still be able to uphold the image of themselves as competent.
Central to this chapter has been descriptions and discussions of how the children within school may be positioned, and position themselves, as professional pupils. To be professional pupils within the generational structure of school necessitates knowledge of appropriate behaviour and the skill to use such knowledge. This is a competence the children may display. To demonstrate such competence displayed by the children, and the expectations of competence by the teachers, examples have been taken both from the classroom and from the school playground.

As we have seen above, the children display a variety of interaction skills during break time in activities over which they have most control. In these activities we can see the children positioning themselves in relation to other children but also in relation to adults, although they were generally not physically present in the playground during break time. This means that the student–teacher, and the child–adult positioning may appear to be of less importance at the same time as the adults’ presence was ever-present.

The generational structures could be discerned in the overt adult presence. This was found in the staff exertion of authority in questions of order and when adult presence was invoked by the children during conflict. It was also discerned in the inescapable but invisible adult presence noted in the children’s time-keeping activities, described in the previous chapter. This, we saw, often revolved around keeping track of adult movement. As Ellegaard points out, children’s self-governance take place within a generational power relation, a structural relation that shows itself in everyday interaction. This can be seen in the implied adult presence which made it necessary for the children to conduct conflicts inconspicuously enough for the adults not to notice them.

To be positioned as professional pupils, or not, is central in schoolwork activities. These activities are negotiated between the children and the teacher and as shown there has to be some agreement between them for activities to be accomplished. In these negotiations we have seen that the teachers can choose to position the children as professional pupils, i.e. as competent participants.

One way to understand this is by investigating ideas of the competent child. In their exploration of the concept of the competent child H. Brembeck, B. Johansson and J. Kampmann (2004b:7) find that this child is seen as “reflexive, autonomous and robust” and capable of interacting with adults on
equal terms. According to Brembeck et al. the idea of the competent child seems to be a fundamental part of most Nordic countries’ modernity projects and one arena it can be related to is school. In pedagogic rhetoric the terms accountability and sociability have become central in describing the child, and this child is reliable and well worth listening to (Brembeck et al. 2004b:20).

We can also find this child in the curriculum for the Swedish compulsory school, Lpo94 (Skolverket 2006). Here we find the statement that the “democratic principles of being able to influence, take responsibility and be involved should embrace all pupils.” Although the text goes on to say that this is in relation to the students’ development, we are told that they are to be able to exercise real influence over their education (2006:13).

The professional pupils found in this chapter are able to be professional when they position themselves and are positioned as responsible and involved in their work. Their competence as professional pupils, and their confidence in the role, may be related to the possibilities granted them to act as professional pupils (cf. Alderson 1994:56).

Nevertheless it is difficult to see them exercising the deliberate influence over their education asked for in the curriculum, and this may in part be because they are not only positioned as competent, professional pupils but also as children. If, as Brembeck et al. (2004b:21) say the competent child “resides at one end of a continuum, the notion at the other end being that of the vulnerable, ignorant and incomplete child” it may, in part, be this “vulnerable, ignorant and incomplete child” that surfaces when the children in the study class are positioned as children.

Situations in which the children are positioned as children within a child–adult relationship will be explored in the next chapter. Here I will discuss in which situations and in what manner the adults’ controlling activities become visible, and how the children react when their competence is questioned.
CHAPTER SEVEN

ADULT AUTHORITY – BEING POSITIONED AS CHILDREN

In the previous chapter we saw the children appropriating school and positioning themselves as competent participants, as professional pupils. We could also see how the teachers encouraged the children’s appropriation of school through assuming them to be able participants and by organising activities where the children are to use their own initiative.

Coexisting with this there are frequently occurring occasions during the school days when the adults are positioned so that their authority becomes visible and the children are firmly positioned as children in relation to this. In this chapter I will argue that the role of being a teacher, which includes the obligation to control and sanction student action, builds on and reinforces generational structures. This means that just as the teachers may position the children as professional pupils, with the recognition and promotion of their competence that this entails, they may also position the children as children in relation to adults. Here the term children contains the connotations of childhood as a period of incompetence and lack of responsibility (Morrow 1994:132) and of the “vulnerable, ignorant and incomplete child” (Brembeck et al. 2004b:21) as opposed to the competent child.

During school hours children interact mostly with adults who are teachers or assistants, and the relationship between students and teachers/assistants to a large extent signifies the child–adult relationship at school. According to Davies (1984), children recognise the constraints placed on their talk and actions “by adults who disallow adult reasoning and adult behaviour in children” (Davies 1984:276). Davies points out that equality between adults and children is something the children can understand and practise, but for the teachers such equality would “involve giving up the traditionally held

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46 As discussed in the methodological chapter I will in this context italicize the term children.
assumptions of adults’ superior rights over children” (Davies 1984:281). The children in her study continually encountered adults who could, or would not accept children behaving as equals with responsibilities.

A. Pollard (1987) points out that the teachers’ obligation to control and sanction students tends to make children feel vulnerable at school. The children’s concern with the personal assessment they are subject to, and the control exercised over them, is reflected in the way children often describe teachers – “strict/soft, fair/unfair, good/fun/boring” (Pollard 1987:4).

Refuting the idea that teachers have power in the classroom in the sense of power as an object that you either have or do not have, Manke (1997) defines power as a “structure of relationships” and says that it is this structure that shapes peoples actions and can be called power. Understanding power as a relationship, she says, means that teachers and students are “jointly responsible for constructing power in the classroom” (Manke 1997:1–2).

J. A. Kottler (1997:55) gives the teacher a central role in creating the classroom culture by pointing to what he calls the teacher’s personal culture. This personal culture, he says, “refers to all the aspects of a teacher’s disposition on any given day, or even at any moment in time”. G. Colnerud and K. Granström (2002) reinforce this by pointing out that although the collective aspect of being a student gives the students an apparent strength, the students are most vulnerable and it is easy, they claim, to forget the actual power relationship being that of the teacher as a professional whom the student is dependent on.

As discussed earlier Ekstrand (1990:123-6, 255), looking at conceptions of childhood, found that among the Swedish adults the term independence was brought up in discussions of both positive and negative aspects of the children’s behaviour. There was an ideal of independence towards authorities, including having an opinion and daring to express it, that can be related to the pedagogic rhetoric about children’s competence where they are pictured as “knowing and searching, mature and rational and equal negotiation partners to adults” (Brebeck, Johansson and Kampmann 2004a:19-20). This was the type of child, a professional pupil, which was encouraged in the previous chapter.

However, Ekstrand points out, there was a hidden ideal of obedience in that adult’s expressed ambivalence in regard to the children’s independence, finding them too independent if they did not listen and if they questioned the adults’ authority.
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DULT AUTHORITY – BEING POSITIONED AS CHILDREN

Being spaces where children are placed to enable the general communication of one teacher with a large group of children (Jenks 2005:80), classrooms are spaces where it is assumed that adult authority needs to be enforced. Although the term power relationship suggests classroom order actively constructed by all concerned, not only established via formal rules or rules elaborated by adult authority (Allard and Cooper 2001:155), as James et al. (1998:176) point out, school is an age-based institution, hierarchically organised into age classes. Classrooms are thereby part of a hierarchical structure where the staff, especially teachers and assistants, have the right and responsibility of controlling the students (Bendelowe and Mayall 2002, Colnerud and Granström 2002, Gordon et al. 2000) and sanctions are in place because students are assumed to contest order. In schools we can therefore expect to find that children’s independence at times can be seen as something negative.

Within the routine everyday interaction between children and adults, the adults may be positioned as adults with a right to control students, stripping the students of their appearance of competence and positioning them as children who are understood as needing to be controlled.

This occurs within a variety of activities and arenas and the question raised is in which situations and in what manner the adults’ right to control becomes visible, and how the children react when their competence as professional pupils is questioned.

Talking about order

During interviews with both the children and their class teacher I found that they expected the teacher to be ultimately responsible for keeping order. This expectation in itself positions the children as less responsible and competent, as dependent, i.e. as children.

During an interview with Hanna, Ella, Alice and Jessica the question of order was raised. Hanna tells us that in her previous school the children were disorderly and that she feels more secure in this school. The others claim that the coming change of teacher means a risk for disorder. They explain that Helen is both strict and kind, and that the class needs a teacher who is strict and

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47 Although age-integrated classes have become more common (Vinterek 2001), these are not formed with a disregard to age, instead age division is simply done with larger intervals.
kind. Asking Benjamin, Robert and David about this during another interview they agree. Benjamin claims that Helen is different from other teachers and tries to explain in what way:

Excerpt from interview

Benjamin – She is not as strict as the others.
Katarina – She is not as strict?
Robert – No.
David – Even though she can get angry.
One of them – Yes.
Katarina – She can get angry. Some, that I interviewed, said that Helen was kind and strict and that you needed a strict teacher?
All of them – Yes.
One of them – That is what I think.
Robert – Like, like that she can be, that she tells us, so that one learns, there are many that have learnt from it.
Katarina – Okey. But when you say she is not as strict, how do you mean?
Benjamin – Well, that they, that they, the 4A and 4B’s teachers, are not as kind as Helen.

As discussed above Pollard (1987) sees the allocation of the terms kind/strict about teachers as an indication of the children’s feelings of vulnerability within the student–teacher power relationship. The children above say that they need a teacher who is both strict and kind but by assuming that a change in teachers

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48 In Swedish:
Benjamin – Hon är inte lika sträng som de andra
Katarina – Hon är inte lika sträng?
Robert – Nej
David – Fastän hon kan bli arg
En av dem – Jaa
Katarina – Hon kan bli arg. Några som jag intervjuade sade att Helen var snäll och sträng och att ni behövde en sträng fröken?
Alla – Ja
En av dem – Det är så jag tycker
Robert – Så så där att hon kan bli att hon säger till så att man lär sig det är många som har lärt sig av de
Katarina – Okay. Men när du säger att hon inte är lika sträng hur tänker du då?
Benjamin – Jaa, att dom, att dom, att 4A och 4Bs fröknar är inte lika snälla som Helen.
would mean a disruption of order they position their teacher as the adult in control, and themselves as children who contest order. In the excerpt Robert, on the other hand, attempts to reclaim responsibility and position the children as participants by stating that many children have learnt from Helen’s action. 

During the interview with Helen I ask her about her thoughts of discipline:

Excerpt from interview

Helen – Well it is something that one can discuss. Discipline I think is an ugly word or something if you understand what I mean but well one has to be clear here, inside, how one wants the classroom to be and all the time be consistent even if one does not always have the energy to one must try. Katarina – You have to have thought out how you wants things? Helen – Yes

Katarina – Mm

Helen – I want calm and peace conducive to work and I want the children to have their things in order and even if I don’t always have that I try anyway but it’s important to me that we have a calm and positive environment in which to work and then one tries to arrange so that that is what we have and it’s so that in this class not so much in this class but in many groups here at school there are children who do not have any structure or any rules with them from home.

Helen first makes clear that she does not like my choice of word; discipline. She then tells us that she expects a certain kind of order in the classroom. For Helen, order means a calm classroom, a positive atmosphere and a good work
environment. This does not seem to be straightforward as she tells us that although she does not always manage keep her things in order, and that the energy to be consistent is not always there, she finds it necessary to try. It also appears that Helen, just as the children, believes that the creation of order is her responsibility (cf. Pollard 1987) and she positions herself as adult.

In relation to the understanding that the teacher is to create and uphold order there is the expectation that the children will contest order. This is most apparent when there is a break in routine such as when the craft teacher is going to be absent. Before letting the class out at the end of the lesson the craft teacher tells them that there will be a substitute teacher the next week. She points out that she will write a letter with instructions to the substitute teacher and those instructions are to be followed. She tells the class that here is therefore no point in trying to fool the substitute teacher into doing something else. The class is also told to behave properly.

The same expectation is present during the spring term when the class has two student teachers doing their practical training. Having left the morning’s English lesson to the student teacher Amanda, Helen asks Kristin whether the lesson had been good. Kristin replies that Amanda was not satisfied.

Helen asks why this is so and Robert raises his hand and says, “It was noisy and rowdy”. Helen wonders what it will be like on the next day when Amanda will be acting as substitute teacher. She then goes through tomorrow’s timetable and tells the class that she will be at the school correcting tests. She will therefore be able to come and tell them off if necessary. “But it won’t be I think!”, she adds.

When it comes to order, the members of the study class seem to be in agreement that the adults are responsible for upholding order and need to prevent the children from contesting order. In this we find asymmetry in the power relationship, which positions the children in the class as children.

**ASYMMETRIES**

To illustrate how asymmetric relations between adults and children in the study class may materialize during school activities, the occasion of a national general knowledge contest is described below.
The contest

After lunch on a stormy autumn day the children line up outside the library. When they are let in they are told to take their jackets and shoes off. I note that the four adults who are supervising keep their shoes on. Desks are standing against the back wall and chairs stand in a semi-circle around a television. The children find seats, some placing themselves at the desks in the back. They are told that the desks are needed as seats and therefore cannot be used for writing. Several children say that they need to have something to write against but are ignored or not heard.

Because of the storm the television picture keeps cutting out but the sound is fine. Several children insist that the TV must be fixed but are told that wind is causing the problem. The children are handed a multiple-choice answering sheet and the class teacher Helen takes one as well, saying she will create an answer key. Teasingly one of the other adults asks if she is sure to know the answers. She replies that she is confident of her ability to answer questions aimed at Year 5s.

Later, while the answer sheets are being collected, I overhear Helen and the P.E. teacher discussing how to compensate for the time loss from the scheduled lessons that have been disrupted by the competition. The question is whether there is still time for P.E., how much time to allocate to P.E. and what time the children should return to their classroom. The children are only told to quickly go and collect their P.E. clothes and hurry to P.E.

During the P.E. lesson while the teacher is explaining an exercise I hear Ali muttering that it is time to go now, that the lesson is over. Shortly afterwards Olivia asks me if the P.E. lesson should not have been over by now. I tell her that I had heard something about “five to eleven” but that I do not know for sure.

After P.E. there is a scheduled break and while getting dressed the girls discuss break time activities. For once Olivia is the central character as she is trying to arrange a 4-square game including only herself, Jessica, Alice and Sandra, deliberately excluding all other children. When arriving at the classroom to leave their P.E. things they are told to go inside as break has been cancelled.
The sequence of events depicted above is in no way unusual; instead they are a regular part of school life. In them, through assumed lack of knowledge, through lack of information and through differentiating rules, often unspoken, we can see the student members of the study class being positioned as children. The differentiating rules described here are that the children are to line up outside the classroom that the adults enter on arrival, and that the children are instructed to remove their shoes while the adults keep theirs on. When their class teacher, Helen, assumes herself to be able to answer the quiz questions without difficulties, she accentuates an adult–child differentiation where adults are understood as more knowledgeable. In the reorganisation of lessons and break time the teachers did not keep the children informed and thereby undermined their ability to act as professional pupils, instead positioning them as uninformed and dependent, that is as children.

**Differentiating rules**

Differentiating rules are common in the school context. Such rules regulate the children’s access to the different buildings and to school equipment. The children’s personal property also becomes subject to regulation if brought to school. This includes edibles brought to school by the children where fruit is allowed while sweets and snacks such as crisps are not. Using their skills as professional pupils, the children in the study class succeeded in making such items available to a limited extent. This was done by Alice putting the issue on the agenda for a class council meeting in Year 5. Arguing that the parallel class are allowed, Alice suggests that the children in the study class should be allowed to bring sweets to eat during Friday fun-time. After a short discussion Helen decides that they will be allowed to bring sweets if fun-time contains an activity during which it seems appropriate to eat snacks. Helen will check with the planning group before each Friday to see what they will be doing and then she will decide whether it is appropriate to bring sweets. With this decision left with Helen the children are, and will continue to be, positioned as children who need to ask permission to bring edibles.

The food in the dining room is also subject to differentiating rules where both the combinations of foodstuffs as well as the amount eaten by the children can be monitored. When Peter makes himself a double burger out of two hamburger patties and one and a half bread roll, Helen gets angry because he
has not asked permission, and when the food is not popular children can be told off for not taking enough food or for only taking bread.

While the children’s food may be regulated in various ways, members of staff at times bring food from home that they eat in the dining room with the children. One day when he does not like the food served David says that he thinks that the teachers should have to eat what the children eat. “Sometimes Helen even has a baked potato”, he says. Another time the children point out that it is unfair that Kristin may bring food from home.

Knowledge and information
During the school day a myriad of decisions are made that influence the order of the school day, such as the ones above where lessons and break times were rearranged. Such changes in the timetable, cancellations of planned activities and introductions of new activities are largely made by the staff, but although such decisions impact on the children’s activities they are not always informed.

Combined with this is the knowledge adults are assumed to have, as Helen showed when she expected to be able to answer the quiz questions in order to make an answer key. The knowledge she assumed herself to have is the cumulated knowledge gained over time. The children also expect the adults to have this type of knowledge and this assumption is frequently present in my interaction with the children where they position me as this knowledgeable adult. It shows itself in that I am asked to help spell a word, do a sum, or asked the answer to schoolwork questions. That I do not always live up to these expectations can be seen when Robert asks why I have not got further in my work. He says that as an adult I should be able to do the maths ‘super’ fast. Before I have a chance to answer Ella explains, “She isn’t here all the time so we catch up”.

This expectation of an asymmetric relationship between children and adults in regards to knowledge leads me to initiate cheating. Being seated next to Ella she mouths, “Do you know?” to me during quizzes and I either nod or shrug. This cheating started since I believed her to assume that I, as an adult, would have the right answers. I feared she would therefore make sure her answers were the same as mine. As I often did not have the right answer I initiated cheating by exaggeratedly making faces to show that the questions had me flummoxed. I do not believe Ella generally cheated during schoolwork or quizzes but, since one of the duties adults have in school is to provide correct
answers, copying my work would not seem to be cheating. This means that Ella’s interest in my answers is a part of an asymmetrical relationship, between the children and adults, present in the school context.

*Mitigating asymmetries*

As shown, the distinctions made between adults and children create an asymmetrical relationship. Through joking and through sharing out-of-school interests with the children, the asymmetry is at times sidestepped (Aronsson and Evaldsson 1993). The class teacher, Helen, often uses such strategies in her relationship with the children in the class. She will at times joke about her own role as when they have home economics in the afternoon. The lesson is about sorting refuse and Helen ends it by saying that she is going to give them homework. They all protest before she has a chance to say what the homework is and David says “It’s most probably something terrible since you’re the one who’s decided it.” Helen immediately replies, “That’s because I’m a dictator”.

More commonly Helen approached the children through sharing their interests. All the way through Year 4 and 5 she read aloud from the books about Harry Potter. That this was an interest that she genuinely shared with the children became apparent one morning when Helen tells everyone that Sandra now has the new Harry Potter book and that she and Sandra are competing to see who will finish it first. Another time I hear Rashid, Drew, and Robert discussing someone who is getting too fat and needs good care. Not knowing anything about the computer creature occupying their thoughts I wonder to myself whether they were talking of a pet or a person. Later on when Rashid says that he mended the internet connection Helen immediately asks, “You took care of your gladiator?”

“Yes, and he is getting too fat”, is Rashid’s response.

“Did you give him too many crisps?” asks Helen. “Mine’s all sulky”, she continues.

Related to this lighthearted way of approaching the children are the activities, discussed in the previous chapter, where the distinction between play and work is blurred. Apart from encouraging the children’s claim to competence, the activities’ purpose also appears to be to amuse the children. In these attempts to turn lessons into games the children are generally positioned as professional pupils. When the games are redefined as work, the positioning
of both adults and children change and asymmetries in their relations are created.

Redefining games as work
Identifying lessons that appeared to be constructed as games, Woods proceeds to claim that these were “certainly not ‘work’” (Woods 1990:175f). In contrast to this, K. Bergqvist (1990:37f) points out that the interpretation of the meaning of a school task is in part determined by the immediate context. In the study class, the children in interviews defined school as a place for learning, and learning was defined as work activities. If the activities of the class are understood from their outward defined role as work, then work may be defined through the actions of the class. In this way a game introduced in the classroom may be interpreted or redefined as work as we see in the examples below.

Toward the end of a lesson the assistant Kristin introduces a game with synonyms where the children are each given a card with two words on. The procedure is that the first child reads one of the words on his/her card. Whoever has the synonym on their card reads it and continues the game by then reading the other word on their card. The activity is not over when it is time for break and there are some muted mutterings. When they have exceeded the lesson time by three to four minutes there are some louder comments by some children, but Helen, who is at her desk, looks sternly at the class and says, “Hush, you’ll soon be finished.”

Although the activity above can be seen as an attempt to make the lesson amusing, it appears to be characterised as work by the children, who protest when their free/break time is appropriated. As shown by Helen’s reprimand, the children’s participation in games initiated as a classroom activity is not voluntary. In the examples below this compulsory aspect of classroom games can be seen.

English lessons usually revolved around the set book but, as seen below, this was at times interspersed or replaced with other activities. At the start of the lesson Helen says that they are to play a kind of charades. The children are handed slips of paper containing instructions to do something such as ‘shake hands with your teacher’, ‘count to ten’, ‘sing a song in English’. Most of this is done in good spirits but Ali immediately says that he does not want to participate. When his turn arrives he is still was very reluctant and it transpires that he is to sing a song in English. In the end he mimes a song but is told to
CHAPTER SEVEN

sing at least one line of it, as no one could hear the language. He complies and sings it very quietly. When Drew’s turn arrives he also protests and does not want to follow the instructions given. Helen says that they are really silly, presumably meaning Drew and Ali, as they are the only ones who have protested. She then says that if Drew himself does not pick someone, he would have to make do with her. When Drew does his charade we find out that he has been instructed to hug someone.

During the charades the table where Harry, Robert and David sit is singled out as Helen calls out to them “Are you with us or are you going to sit there and laugh?” She does not sound pleased with them. Finding them staring out through the window later on they are again singled out, as Helen tells them to look towards the classroom as this is where the charades are acted out.

Introducing charades during an English lesson is to bring in an activity which in another context is a party game. In the context of a lesson the boundary between games and work is instead blurred. By enforcing participation in the game, not only by following the instructions on the notes but as an involved audience, Helen’s position as someone in authority comes into focus and in relation to this the children are positioned as children.

That Helen can redefine games as work is again shown during a game arranged by a student teacher during an English lesson. The class is divided into teams and a game called ‘Read, run and draw’ is introduced. The competitors are each shown a word in Swedish, they then have to run to the whiteboard to draw a picture of their word while their team guesses what it is and writes it down in English. There is an immediate hitch in that this is a competition with two teams and there is only one pen! The children start to grumble and groan; how can we do this without a pen; there is only one pen and so on. Helen gets cross with them and tells them not to sulk because she does not like it when they sulk. At the end of the lesson the student teacher wants to know what the children thought was good and what they thought was bad about the exercise. They answer that having no pen was bad and that drawing was fun. While the student teacher agrees that having no pen was a rather grave difficulty Helen shows some irritation at this answer, indicating that the object of the game was not the amusement of the class. Rather, as part of a lesson, the game was work.

If we relate the teachers’ introduction of games into lessons to Fendler’s discussion of motivation, from the previous chapter, we can note an attempt to
“produce pleasure and work”. To do so is to produce in the children “a desire to participate”. When the children do not fully participate, or show a desire to participate, for example, by having a “positive attitude” (Bartholdsson 2003:131f, Fendler 2001:122-3), this has not been achieved.

In the examples of classroom games that have been presented we find that both the children and the teacher may redefine these games as work. The children redefine them as work when their free time is appropriated. This can be related to the compulsory aspects of the games, which is accentuated when the teachers redefine the amusement offered as work to be done.

Appearing to try to balance the idea of using games to motivate the children, with an understanding of children as incompetent and lacking responsibility (2004b:21, Morrow 1994:132), a student teacher creates a game with a ‘check’ within it during a maths lesson. Divided into groups the children are given sheets of paper on which there are clusters of boxes with numbers in them. The student teacher explains that each number is a letter of the alphabet and we are to work out what it says on the paper. Alice, Ella, Harry and I work together. Alice organises us and gives us each one word to do. We quickly get the words done. There is a word that appears to be a name but that seems very strange to me and I say that I wonder if it is correct. “Don’t worry”, says Alice, “they usually make some mistakes. There is another one further on”, she points out. After handing in the sheet of paper we do a multiplication exercise while the student teacher checks the results. Having done this she asks the class to be quiet and tells us that Alice’s group won, explaining that this was because we had included the mistakes she had make. “I made a deliberate mistake so that I could see if you just guessed what it said instead of solving it”, she says.

Arranging a game within the maths lesson is a production of pleasure. That the student teacher placed a ‘check’ within the competition to enable her to see whether the children proceeded in the correct manner shows that the student teacher assumes an asymmetry where work, and work procedure, is something determined by the teacher and challenged by the children.

That the relationship between adults and children in the class is asymmetrically organised is, as a statement by Robert shows, visible to the children. During an art lesson the planning group has arranged a competition where the class is to draw a fantasy animal. Robert, sitting beside me, claims that, “people like different things so you can’t choose one that is the best”. When I am handed a paper to join the competition, he says, “They are going to
suck up to you because you are an adult”. That my poorly done drawing won third prize indicates that Robert had correctly assessed the situation.

In the above discussions of games and amusements in the classroom it is seen that these are introduced, defined and enforced by the adults, that is, teachers, assistants and student teachers. It appears that through these activities the adults attempt to downplay their authority and that the activities are, in part, introduced to mitigate the asymmetric relationship between them and the children. As seen above, this positioning could be changed in an instant with the adults positioned as an authority and the children being positioned as less responsible, as *children*. In the following section we will see that the teacher positions herself as being in authority in the classroom in a variety of ways.

**Overt authority**

Helen’s expectation of being in charge was explicitly stated on several occasions and although the following exchange between her and Alice was conducted in a joking manner there was a kernel of truth in it. On this occasion the children were writing stories and reading them aloud to the class. Having finished her story and being told to practise reading it aloud Alice says, “What if I don’t want to read aloud?” “Din vilja sitter i skogen i en grantopp”, Helen answers jokingly (Your will and wants are on top of a tree in the forest)\(^5\). “I want to find it”, says Alice with a smile.

Another day, having reordered the classroom seating, Helen tells the children that those who have been moved to tables by the window must move their belongings to the drawers in the back of the room, and those now sitting at tables in the middle of the room are to put their things in the drawers in the group room. Alex, who is not affected since he has a desk with storage under the lid, says that he wants his things in the drawers. Helen tells him “I’m the one in charge here”. Alex tries to turn this into a joke by saying, “But what if I give you a kiss?” Helen replies with a ‘No thanks’.

Both Alice and Alex try to make Helen change her decisions through joking protests. In neither case are they successful; instead Helen reiterates her right to be in control.

\(^5\) In Swedish will and want is *vilja*. The saying implies that children have no power and should obey.
Alex’ attempts at getting his own way can be less cute and Helen’s reactions more forceful than that above. During a lesson the noise level is higher than she finds acceptable and Helen moves Alex’ desk away from his neighbour’s saying, “Now I’m tired of hearing the two of you talking the whole time.” “No”, says Alex loudly. He then gets a fierce telling off for talking back and Helen finishes of with, “You can go and sit out there. In here I’m the one in charge.” She then turns towards Sandra and helps her with her work.

When the class is arranging a disco one of the children point out to Helen that she had said that they were to go around to the other classes telling them about the disco. Helen’s reaction indicates that she feels her authority is being questioned. “We will”, she answers, “But five classes are watching the musical so there isn’t any point. I haven’t forgotten. You must trust me. I have everything under control.”

In the same way the children assuming to know her plans before she states them can be a challenge to Helen’s authority. After a spelling test the class is given new words to learn. Helen has written them on an overhead sheet and the children copy them. While doing this Alice says something about learning the words for Friday, which is the usual day for spelling tests. Helen’s response is, “It’s not certain that they are for Friday”, and after a short pause she adds, “You’ll find out which day the words are for. It could be Wednesday or Tuesday, you don’t know that.”

Another time the children, knowing that they are to have maths after English, take out their maths books. Helen firmly says “We don’t work with books on Thursday.” She then adds, “I didn’t tell you to get your book out”.

In the above examples it is clear that although it appears that Helen in many ways try to involve the children in classroom management, she ultimately expects to be the one in charge, positioning herself as adult. In the first example Helen uses an old saying to enforce her right to make decisions. In the following three examples Helen explicitly says; ‘I’m in charge’ or ‘Trust me, I have everything under control’.

In the last two examples the children attempt to position themselves as professional pupils by assuming Helen intends to follow well known routinised work order. On these occasions Helen sees this as a challenge to her position of authority and in her reactions refutes their attempted positioning, as professional pupils, and position them as children by assuming them to be less knowledgeable than she is.
In the above examples Helen’s positioning of herself and of the children was quite forceful. Mostly the positioning in the classroom is performed in less dramatic form, as in the regular monitoring of order.

Keeping classroom order
The most common method of controlling the class is the constant monitoring of the children’s actions where teachers’ position themselves as adults who are in control of the situation. In the study class the two main concerns were those of noise and movement (cf. Sigsgaard 2003:101). The class teacher, Helen, uses several methods to monitor and control the noise level in the class as we can see below.

Entering the classroom after break there is quite a bit of noise. Helen watches the class and waits. When the noise dies down she says, “Finally it’s quiet.” At other times, when the noise level is deemed too loud, Helen may clear her throat, or raise her head and stare at the class, and this may be enough for the noise level to be reduced. Just as often other types of comments will be used as examples from my field notes show:

1. The classroom is noisy with the row of boys at the back talking. “Come on now, let’s quieten down a bit”, says Helen.

2. When the noise level gets really high Helen raises her voice and tells everyone to work. It gets very quiet but shortly the noise level goes up and Helen says “Sh”. The class is now quieter.

3. Alex keeps talking and Helen says, “I’ll soon get angry.” “It’s much quicker if everyone isn’t talking – David! Drew! Rashid!”

4. Before starting the lesson Helen asks, “Has Henry finished talking so I can start?”

5. “David if you have something to say I want you to put your hand up”

6. “Have you finished talking down there?” Helen asks Alex and Paul.

The monitoring comments vary from being very general, as the first two examples show, to being directed at specific, named children. In this way the responsibility for the disorder can either be perceived as collective or as
individual. Although the monitoring comments blend into the general bustle of the classroom the children seem to anticipate them and notice them as is seen by the lowering of the noise level that generally follows the admonitions.

Monitoring the noise level is often combined with monitoring the children’s placement in the classroom and the telling off may be more explicit:

1. Gradually the noise level in the class rises and suddenly Helen tells someone to face forward and to get on with their work. Immediately the room is silent.

2. “It would be very good David if you could sit still on your bottom and stop turning around. What you’re doing is very irritating.”

3. Apart from going across to Helen for help the children were expected to sit at their desks and work during this lesson. As Robert goes towards David with his booklet Helen without looking up asks, “Where is Robert going?” and Robert immediately returns to his desk and no more is said.

4. There is quite a high noise level and Helen raises her voice a couple of times. She sits down by Alice and the line of children waiting for help moves over there. The noise level continues to be high and Helen again tells the class off. Henry leaves his seat and Helen calls across the room “Henry, get your bottom back onto your seat” and two children who have met up at their drawers in the back of the room are told to stop chatting and go and sit down.

5. Helen says, “The noise level is too high. If you cannot cope with working quietly together you’ll have to stop. Now it’s ‘sit in your place time’”, she says loudly. The noise level goes down and there is less movement. Helen is handing out pictures. “Quiet, attention, who recognizes this zebra? Can everyone sit in their places as I said two minutes ago!”

In the first three examples Helen’s admonitions are aimed at individual students. As the first example shows this can be enough for the whole class to react and quieten down. We can also see that Helen relates the rising noise level to the children’s body positions. She indicates that the preferred position,

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51 The Swedish ‘ni’ is used which is a plural you
and the one apparently conducive to quiet, is seated at their desks facing forward. In the last example the noise level has been seen as too loud for a while and Helen uses both general and individual reprimands to recreate the order she wants.

In the examples of how order in the classroom is monitored by the teacher, we can see that the children’s attention is partially geared toward their teacher while they are busy with a variety of activities. In chapter four I claimed that the children’s attentiveness makes the teacher a pivot around which the activity centres. This can be related to the generational structure present in schools and the skills of “distinguishing adult sound from immediate action sound” that Mandell (Mandell 1988, also cf. Waksler 1996:49) says children acquire as they learn to expect and listen for the teachers announcements interrupting ongoing activities. These interruptions can be seen as positioning the teacher as an \textit{adult} and the children as \textit{children} within the hierarchy of the classroom.

\textit{Being questioned; protests and compliance}

In the section above the children appear to have accepted the position of \textit{children} and they themselves position the teacher as a person in command of order, as an \textit{adult}.

At other times the children position themselves as competent and capable participants, as professional pupils, as we could see in the previous chapter. When this position is challenged or questioned the children’s reactions make their feeling of vulnerability visible. Direct challenges to, or questioning of, their positioning or their competence as found in the examples below occurred more often during lessons such as sewing craft or P.E. with teachers who had a comparatively peripheral role in the community of the class and who might therefore not have as close a contact with the children.

The organisation of sewing craft assumes a certain degree of competence on behalf of the children. When a lesson starts they are to collect their work from their lockers and start working on their current projects. This can entail getting sewing machines out and threading them, collecting cloth and cutting according to pattern or get their crocheting and continue whatever item they are working on.

There are certain items to be completed during the school year and when a child has finished s/he moves on to the next one. During one lesson Henry, then
in Year 4, crocheted a bag. Twenty minutes before the end of the lesson he says that his bag is big enough now. The teacher, Anna, answers that “if you work well these last minutes I will also consider you ready”. Henry rushes back to his seat and starts to slam things noisily. He packs his bag and heads for the door. Anna tells him to come back and he obeys while grumbling that “I’m not allowed to decide anything, not even how big my bag is to be”.

Another time there is a temporary teacher, Karen, during sewing craft. During this lesson Sandra finishes her crocheted doll and is to start sewing a soft toy. She spends some time looking through pattern books and then chooses a pattern. When she shows the teacher what she has chosen and wants help to get started she is told that there is not enough time to finish this before the end of term. The toy she has chosen is too complicated – it has too many parts. Sandra looks angry and comes back muttering, “Anna (their ordinary teacher) would not have been so mean. She would have said ‘no, it takes too long’ and then I would say ‘couldn’t I continue next year’ and she would have said ‘yes’, but she (Karen) is really bad and mean”. Sandra keeps up this kind of muttering during the lesson and designates this teacher as the worst she has had and mutters about her discontent continuously in a half-loud voice. She spends almost the whole hour and a half of the lesson looking through pattern books and discarding the toys in them. When there are about fifteen minutes left of the lesson she finds a toy she can consider making and chooses material for it.

When Henry is told to continue on his crocheted bag he reacts very strongly. I suspect that he does not enjoy crocheting and that coming as far as he had with his bag had been an effort. But his protest was about the indignity of not being thought competent to judge the size of the bag. When Sandra is told that her choice of soft toy could not be completed before the end of term her reaction is also strong. She seems to be reacting against her own lack of choice and the lack of dialogue between her and the teacher. Both children had positioned themselves as professional pupils, with a competence to make decisions in regards to their work, but through their teachers’ actions they are positioned as children, without rights over their work.

When this happens both Henry and Sandra display their displeasure quite adamantly. Henry packs his bag noisily and threatens to leave the classroom. He makes a noticeable commotion but his verbal protest is not directed at the teacher, his comment is said in a low voice to a general audience. Sandra’s protest is not direct either. She mutters to a general audience and she disrupts
work order by not choosing another pattern and starting work on it. This disruption does not really involve anyone else but together with her continuous muttering it does show her displeasure. In their strong reaction and their continued mutterings, and by not getting down to work, the children resist (Willis 1977, Ayton 1998, Corsaro 2005:151) the teacher’s definition of the situation. At the same time the two children did not direct their protest directly at the teachers; instead, they made it appear as if they complied. Sandra went back and started looking for another pattern and Henry sat down.

In an ethnography from a Swedish school where R. Thornberg (2006) focuses on rules and the use of rules he found that students would mutter, groan or make faces as a criticism to teachers, but they would seldom verbalise their complaints directly to a member of staff. Thornberg (2006:239, 60) coins the term pseudo-compliance to describe this, and believes that the explanation of the phenomenon is the students’ understanding of the power asymmetry between teachers and students (2006:239). I believe that through their surface, or pseudo-compliance, the children also gave the teachers the choice of not taking such issues further.

Protests were at times directed at the teacher as in Year 5 during a P.E. lesson. The children are seated in a circle when their P.E. teacher, Jasper, looks in the box of wallets and jewellery that has been collected for safe keeping before the lesson and he finds a mobile phone. “Technical gadgets are forbidden,” he says, sounding very strict, “You must have a permission slip if you are to bring a phone.” One of the children says that they are allowed to have them if they are not switched on. Jasper then says that there is supposed to be a rule about this. Another child claims that Helen, their class teacher, knows and has not said anything. Jasper continues and says that a permission slip is needed and there has to be a special reason to be allowed a phone. He also adds that he will speak to Helen.

Knowing that they are to place any expensive items in the box provided, the mobile phone has been placed there. When this leads to a telling off the children start out by asserting their own interpretation, and invoke their class teacher’s interpretation, but they do not persist in the face of opposition. When the P.E. teacher continues to state that the phones are not allowed and explains the rules about this at length the children stay quiet. They gave me the impression of politely waiting for the teacher to stop talking about this issue and to get on with the lesson.
In this situation the children had used their competence as students by placing valuable items for safekeeping. When the teacher tells them off and then does not listen their explanations he positions himself as adult and the children as children. The children then attempt to position their class teacher as adult, with a right to define the situation, but the P.E. teacher dismisses this. The children’s strategy thereafter is pseudo-compliance where they appear to be leaving it up to the P.E. teacher to define their right to use mobile phones. My interpretation is, nevertheless, that they did not at any time agree with his definition of the situation.

When the children’s competence is questioned they often comply even if they do no see any logic in the teachers’ request or demand. This can be seen when Robert is told to put his work away. He gets up and starts to leave his desk to fetch the folder to put his paper in. Helen says “take the paper with you”, sounding a little like he is missing something obvious. Robert says something like “oh yes”, takes the paper and walks to the back of the classroom where his work drawer is. He then comes back, carrying the paper and the folder, sits down and puts the paper into the folder and takes the folder and walks to the back of the room again. As Robert brought both paper and folder back to his desk Helen’s admonition of taking the paper with him did not fill any function, but Robert does not give any sign of noticing this. I believe that his compliance is due to the asymmetric relationship, and his acceptance of it.

**Complying to save face**

The children in the study class often handle potential conflicts with adults, and having their actions and their interpretation of a situation questioned, by complying or letting things blow over. As discussed above compliance does not mean that the children agree with the adult’s interpretation of a situation, as was clear in the examples from craft, it does however mean that the children acquiesce to adults’ rulings (cf Thornberg 2006:239). Through their pseudo-compliance, or acquiescence, the children avoid open conflict with the adults, conflicts that they are not in a position to win. By instead directing their complaints to the other children, and by acquiescing, they also provide the opportunity for the adults to make the choice of avoiding conflict.

The children’s competence is not only questioned in regards to schoolwork. Standing on the steps with Olivia, Hanna and Stephanie on a cold autumn day we are joined by Kristin, the assistant, who asks if I am not cold and should we
not be in the sun? I answer that I find it less cold than the week before. She says that the wind makes her cold and she then asks Hanna if she’s not cold, and should she not wear a jacket? Hanna stands with her arms pulled inside her sweatshirt but she shakes her head and says no she is not cold. Again Kristin suggests that we move to the sunny area where it is warmer, and I follow the girls as they move into the sun. Kristin’s insistency implied that the girls were not competent enough to judge whether they were cold or whether they needed to go and stand in the sun. By complying the girls did not get into conflict with the assistant and could thereby, after spending a short time in the sun, without breaking any promise or any request made, quietly drift back to their preferred spot on top of the steps.

When the children’s competence and their view of themselves as active, sensible participants is questioned, the power relationship (Manke 1997) between adult/staff and child/student becomes visible with the adults’ right of interpretation coming to the forefront. In this power relationship the children have, as Gordon et al. (2000:163, also Jackson 1968:32) point out, less institutionally sanctioned power than the adults/staff do. Pollard (1987) points out that children “act strategically in classroom situations in order to ‘cope’ with them”. He says that children use a variety of methods to protect their dignity and that they try to avoid the humiliation of “being ‘told off’ and the threat of ‘shouting’” by learning the tacit rules of the classroom and monitoring their teacher’s moods and use of power (Pollard 1987:4). The acquiescence we see when the children comply and do as they are told, instead of defending their standpoint, can be seen as a resistance strategy used to minimise discomfort and at the same time make the children’s subordinate position within the power structure of school less visible.

How easily, and maybe thoughtlessly, the children’s claims to competence may be denied can be seen in the following action by Kristin. As discussed in the previous chapter, the planning group is in charge of fun-time activities. During fun-time the members of staff usually keep busy with work such as correcting workbooks or planning lessons.

This Friday fun-time starts with a game of musical chairs and Sandra, from the planning group, calls out, “Alright who’s joining?”

Kristin looks around and calls out, “David and Robert! It is the class’s time now and that’s for every one and then you should join in as well. You always have your own class time.”
The two boys say, “No, we don’t,” and start to put away something they have in front of them.

Kristin says, “Yes, often,” and waits for the boys to join the game.

On this occasion the assistant appears not to consider the children capable of maintaining the level participation she deems necessary and intervenes. We can see that the intervention was intended to persuade the two boys to join in. At the same time, by intervening, the assistant positions herself as the adult being in charge, and denies the children officially in charge of the activity their claim to control and competence as professional pupils. Instead she positions them as subordinate to herself, she positions them as children.

This positioning as children has been presented as something that the children in the study class either accept or struggle against. Below I will show that the position as child can also, on an individual level, be seen as desirable.

**Positioned as Child – Given a Wider Scope**

Alex gets one sum done with Helen’s help. He then says that Ella has given him the wrong answer earlier and walks across and tells her this. I point out to him that he copied the sum wrongly. He puts his hand up and calls out to Helen ‘I wrote the sum wrong’. Helen comes up to him and puts a mark next to the sum and says, “Well that doesn’t matter because I have corrected it and it is correct”.

First Alex does not get his work done without attention from the teacher. He then walks across the classroom and interferes with other children who are working. Although he does put his hand up he proceeds to talks without be given the word and the teacher moves to his side when he calls out.

I have earlier introduced Alex as the most noticeable child in the class. He was noticeable because he seldom stayed quiet, nor did he sit still at his desk for long. Alex often spoke without raising his hand first and when he did raise his hand he would then speak before being given permission to do so. If he were not noticed immediately he would call out ‘Helen!’ across the room and usually be acknowledged.

Alex was often on the move. He might have legitimate reasons such as sharpening his pencil but would enact his own agenda along the way. One day,
watching him go to the front of the classroom, I see that he stops by David’s desk and slowly, looking at David, takes hold of his headset and raises the volume. David protests and Alex smilingly walks off. Having sharpened his pencil he turns back and stops by a temporary male assistant, sits down behind him and tickles his back. He then returns to his seat. Sitting down he hides behind me while he gets Peter, sitting on the other side of me, agitated by pretending to shoot him and they then commence ‘shooting’ at each other. This leads to a discussion about shooting but as Helen approaches they quieten down. Alex tells Helen,

“He talks all the time!”

“How surprising”, counters Helen, and corrects Peter’s sums. Another time while the class is working Alex leaves his desk and goes to the front of the class. Standing in the front of the class he holds an eraser and a pair of scissors up high.

“I will cut it in half – brotherhood”, he says.

He cuts the eraser and holds up the two pieces and says,

“Share alike”.

He then offers a piece to Paul who declines, saying he already has an eraser. Alex then hands it to Tony who puts his other one away and start to use the one he receives from Alex. Rashid tells me that he wishes he had been given it.

On these occasions Alex was not told off or interfered with but would either be given a quick ‘Alex, pipe down’ or he would get into little half joking exchanges with Helen as shown below.

It is after break and the class has settled down. Helen instructs them saying,

“I want you to complete all artwork you have begun.”

“Does one have to?” asks Alex.

“Yes, one does,” replies Helen.

Another time when the class is noisy Helen, makes a play upon a known Swedish saying of letting your food quieten your mouth.

“Hush! Let the maths (sw. matten) quieten your mouth” says Helen.

“The food (sw. maten)” says Alex.

“It was the maths (sw. matten) this time” replies Helen.

A minute later she turns back to Alex and says,

“I want you to start your maths, Alexander”.

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“I am” he replies.
“Oh, I thought you were talking,” says Helen.
“Yes” replies Alex.

Helen does not only give Alex a wider scope, she also encourages the other children to indulge him as seen in examples from fun-time. In the first one a blinking game is played. Chairs are placed in a circle and half the children are seated and half standing behind their back. One chair has to be empty and the person behind that chair winks at a seated child who moves across to the empty chair. The person being left is supposed to grab the child to stop him/her from leaving. When the game starts, the four girls who are playing are in pairs with one seated and one standing. The boys start the winking and as they only wink to seated boys. This means that the girls are excluded from the game for the whole first half, and only when they swap over so the sitters get to stand up does someone wink at one of the girls and they can join in. At the same time Alex calls out that he wants to wink. As he has a child in front of him it is not his turn, but he keeps saying that he wants to wink. After a while Helen says, “He wants to start the game, don’t you understand.”

The other children say ‘okay’ and Alex gets to restart the game by being the first to wink.

Another fun-time Alex does a card trick. He makes a mess of it and it takes a long time but everyone is quiet and attentive. During the trick there is a discussion about whether he made a mistake or not but Monica tells him to finish the trick and when he does he gets applause. In the children’s patience with his fumbling I noted especial indulgence aimed at Alex.

During the interview with Helen she talked at length about some children and their difficulties, but about Alex the only thing she said was that he has moods swings. She said that she has never before met a person whose moods could change so rapidly. So although Alex was disruptive and had difficulties with his schoolwork, the leeway he was given appears to be seen as pertinent. Helen’s attitude towards Alex seemed to have influenced the children who, although they named him as disruptive, did not appear to find him as problematic as they found Peter, whom I described in the previous chapter.

Alex has been defined as someone who cannot help being disruptive, he is positioned as a child and thereby he is understood to behave as one. This means
that although he is seen to need help to modify his behaviour, admonitions are often given in a gentle or joking tone of voice.

**Summary**

During interviews both the children and the teacher express an expectation of teachers as responsible for classroom order. This obligation to control and sanction student action is included in the official role of teacher. The class teacher, Helen, does not appear completely comfortable in being positioned as an authority, at least not with the use of the word discipline. She does however consider herself to be responsible for defining and keeping classroom order and, to some extent, expects the children to contest the order established.

The relationship between adults and children in school is asymmetrical, both due to aspects of the formal roles of teachers but also due to the generational structures where adults have rights and obligations relative the children. Being responsible for order and the planning of schoolwork is an aspect of what it is to be a teacher, but the asymmetrical organisation of knowledge, information and the differentiating rules are, I argue, grounded in generational structures.

The difference in knowledge is largely due to adults having lived longer, and therefore having more experience of life, as well as being more educated. The asymmetry in access to information during school days is not a necessity in the teacher–student relationship. It would have been quite possible to inform the children of the changes of plans after the national general knowledge contest described in the beginning of the chapter, instead of letting them find out a little at the time. If the students had been adults the chances are that informing them would have been matter-of-course. Differentiating rules can be related to the teacher–student relationship or child–adult relationship, as when the children are to wait outside. The reason can be that the doors are normally locked, or a school rule stating that children are not allowed in the classrooms unsupervised. Such a rule, in itself, accentuates the asymmetrical adult–child relationship. It is harder to find a formal school reason for the children being expected to remove their shoes on entry and for the teachers to keep theirs on.

Although asymmetries between adults and children can be sidestepped and negotiated, they are seen in the assumption that the adults have the right to decide what the children may presume to know, what the acceptable noise level
is at any moment and whether the current order is acceptable order. It is also seen in the assumption that adults have the right of interpretation.

During their school days the children are also subjected to open adult authority, most noticeable in the classroom. The continual monitoring of noise levels and of the children’s movements mean that the children always need to be aware of their teachers’ whereabouts and to be constantly listening for her voice, and this positions them as subordinate, as children.

We also find that when the children attempt to position themselves as professional pupils, or assume themselves to be professional pupils, others may remind them that in the study class, in the community of this class, it is the teachers who are in control and who makes the decisions. By having their competence questioned, they are repositioned as children.

When an adult in school challenges the children’s position as professional pupils, it was found that the children seldom protest directly to the adult in question. On some occasions they would make their feelings clear, quite loudly, but even then their protests were either directed at the other children or just as a general complaint. Mostly the children did not even go this far in their protests but complied with adult requests and acquiesced when fairly, or unfairly, being told off. This indicates that the children, in the power relationships adult–child and student–teacher, in the school setting, positioned themselves as subordinate.

By acquiescing the children saved face since the telling off, the repositioning, would be over more quickly and the child in question would then be able to reposition him/herself as competent, i.e. as a professional pupil. A child being subject to adult displeasure was helped in this repositioning by the other children’s tendency to direct their gaze in another direction (cf. Sigsgaard 2003:171). In this way the occasions of being positioned as a child could be played down.

In the next chapter I will discuss the children’s participation in their schooling, specifically through looking at the children’s positioning and agency in the school setting. This will be related to the generational order and the institutional organisation, and both teacher and children agency will be discussed as choices, restrictions, and possibilities for participation in the school setting.
CHAPTER EIGHT

LIMITATIONS AND POSSIBILITIES

Focusing on activities and actions, I have in this thesis explored children’s pupilness by analysing their position relative to adults in school. Using the concept of generation and positioning theory, I have shown that in school the children’s positioning relative to the adults occur within two sets of relations, generational and institutional. The institutional staff–student relationship is firmly related to the school setting, and the child–adult relationship is linked to a generational order.

According to Alanen (2001:21) it is in a practice, or a set of practices, that the two generational categories of children and adults are recurrently produced. In this thesis we have seen that in the practices of this school class, the institutional organisation regulates the staff–student positioning in school activities and designates areas of responsibility for the two categories of participants. At the same time the participants are producing and reproducing a generational order, positioning children and adults in relation to one another across settings.

In this chapter I will discuss the children’s positioning and agency in the school setting and how the generational order is upheld in concurrence with the institutional organisation in school practices. First, however, I will briefly summarise the earlier chapters.

Summary

The overall aim of this ethnographic study has been to explore the participation and positioning of a group of children in a school setting. Set in a mainstream school class, the study’s focus was the restrictions and possibilities for action available to an ordinary school child. In particular the concept of generation and the concept of positioning was used, and the participants’ agency was explored through looking at the membership of the school class, negotiations of time and space, and the positioning of the children as either competent, professional pupils or incompetent children.
As presented in chapter two and three, the main data were fieldnotes generated during two shorter and one longer period of fieldwork together adding up to a year. During fieldwork I joined the school class positioned as a student. In this position I participated in both classroom and break time activities. In addition to this, interviews with the children and the teachers were conducted on two occasions. The children were asked to describe school to someone who does not know what it is, and reflect over what would happen if there were no schools, and they were asked about their class and what made them happy or unhappy during a school day.

In the study the concept of generation, which incorporates ideas of structure and power, is used to explore the social organisation of generational relations within the study class. The individual relations are further explored through the use of positioning theory, where positioning is considered always to take place within specific contexts where the rights, duties and obligations of participants are in place (Harré and van Lagenhove 1999b:23). Together the two concepts allow for a multiplicity of relations and emphasise the fluidity present in the ways children and adults can be constructed in the school setting.

Previous research has shown that in the school setting age is of significance. Looking at this from a generational perspective we see that, as Mayall (2002:30) argues, the children find themselves in a setting organised for them by cohorts of people older than themselves, who to do so draw on their own experiences and conceptions of school and understanding of the proper relationship between children and adults in school.

Age also has significance in that schools generally are organised according to age, with a separation between those categorised as adults and those categorised as children. Age is also used to organise and separate the children, either by constructing school classes containing a single year, or through age integrated classes where the age span is slightly larger. This division by age, together with the custom in Sweden of keeping school classes together for a long period of time, reinforces boundaries between school classes. These boundaries encourage the closeness found in the study class, with the main interaction being within the class, and in chapter four the study class has thus been discussed as a community.

I have further shown that the closeness of this community can limit the children’s scope of action, seeing that individual children or groups of children may be ascribed characteristics, such as being talkative, moody, hard working
LIMITATIONS AND POSSIBILITIES

or competent, that they constantly have to negotiate. The expectations of behaviour this leads to may not leave room for changes in the children’s positioning within the class. This can been seen in chapter six where Peter’s attempts at positioning himself as a professional, competent pupil are frequently dismissed and he is repositioned as a less competent child.

Another dimension of importance when it comes to children’s positioning in school is the organisation of the school day’s time and space. Within school time and space are organised in time–space paths and the members of the study class find themselves in a setting where timetables, called time–space maps by Gordon et al (2000:149), organise their actions. Looking at how time and space are negotiated, and how the children are positioned in these negotiations, I have in chapter five shown that the possibility to gain control over the time and space allocation is unevenly distributed.

This uneven distribution is found both within the group of children and between the children and the adults. Time–space paths are mapped out by a dominant timetable where school activities are organised and the use of school buildings, the school yard and areas surrounding the school are regulated. Although this dominant time–space map is what is referred to when discussing the timetable, I have shown that there are alternative time–space paths and maps and that children who regularly follow these are placed outside the time–space paths used by the others. These children are at times obliged to be absent during group work or when collaborative work is to be completed, and may in this way become socially marginalised. In chapter five we saw an example of how the alternative paths could impact on collaborative work when David had to complete, on his own, the story that he and Harry were co-authoring.

As shown in the empirical chapters, the adults have greater possibility to gain control over the time and space allocation. Although the time–space paths and maps regulate the adults’ use of school time and space, there is a difference in how the children and the adults may use these. The adults are to a greater extent able to take control over their own time and space movements than the children. This they can do within the institutional organisation by, for example, changing the time–space paths, either as a temporary or as a permanent measure. However, I have also shown that the adults claim privileges that their position within the generational order allows them. This means that they may sidestep time–space paths. We have seen examples of this in chapter five where
we could see staff allowing themselves to be slightly late for lessons, or to extend their lessons and encroach on the children’s break time.

The accessing of the children’s time–space movements can also be seen as a method of discipline (Foucault 1977:138-57), and as creating a generational structure, with the children subordinate and adult authority normalised. As has been shown, however, the children daily negotiate and navigate the relation between themselves and the adults. Using a variety of strategies, they to some extent access their own time and do not see themselves as ultimately subordinate. In the empirical chapters it has been shown instead that the children view themselves not only as competent participants, but also as central to school life, playing an active role in school activities.

The children’s view of themselves as competent, active participants has been exemplified in chapter six, where we have seen the children positioning themselves as professional pupils in their collaboration during schoolwork, in their negotiations of break time relations and in their skill in time-keeping. In this the children, both during break time activities and in schoolwork activities, display a variety of interaction skills, for example their ability to negotiate and dissemble. The children’s negotiation skills were seen in their ability to interact and negotiate action plans with their peers when deciding on a time plan before leaving the schoolyard, in their ability to collaborate during schoolwork, and in their ability to switch between work and play. We saw an example of this in chapter six when Sandra and Stephanie, while being busy with a diagnostic test, use David both as a resource in their work, asking him for help, and as light relief when they accuse his of disturbing them.

Although the class teacher in the study class frequently chooses to reinforce the children’s position as professional pupils, their positioning was at times challenged by both children and adults. When this happened the children were instead positioned as children, i.e. as not competent, and as subordinate to adults. Commonly the children’s reaction to this was outward compliance. We saw this in chapter seven when Sandra had positioned herself as a professional pupil by proceeding to the next scheduled activity during craft. Being told that her choice was not valid, she was positioned as child, a position she adamantly resisted. Her resistance was, however, not directly aimed at the teacher, instead it contained a large measure of dissemblance as she made the movements required – looking through the pattern books – while refusing to make a choice – thereby resisting the teacher.
The children would seldom openly resist being positioned as child – instead they appeared to go through the motion, wait, and then reposition themselves as professional pupils. This was seen in the activities of the girls, also in chapter seven, who left their spot on the steps to stand in the sun at the insistence of the class assistant. They complied and promptly returned to the steps once the assistant had lost interest in them.

In the empirical chapters I have shown how the children strive to position themselves as professional pupils. However, in chapter six and seven I show that on an individual level some children had difficulties in getting their positioning as competent accepted, and that other children seemed to desire the position of child.

In my thesis I have shown that positionings occurs within specific contexts. The positioning of the children in the study class, as professional pupils or as children, occurs within a compulsory institution that is also an everyday social setting where the children meet friends and acquaintances. It is an institution with official goals that reach into the children’s future education and careers, and it is a compulsory institution where the children as students are generationally and institutionally subordinate to the adult staff.

In the section below I will discuss the implications of the positionings, the institutional organisation and the generational order found in the study class as presented in the summary above.

**Institutional Organisation and Generational Order**

In the studies presented earlier of children’s everyday life at school with a wide interest in children’s pupilness (Jackson 1968, Woods 1990, Bartholdsson 2007), the relationships between staff and children have been discussed as power relationships with a focus on the teachers’ role of assessing and monitoring the students. The children are varyingly described as subordinate, as conforming and as agentic. The agency mainly ascribed to the children is that of furthering their own interests, which appears to be understood as being different from the official goals of schooling represented by the staffs’ organisation of school life.
In this thesis I have shown that the relationships between students and staff, and between students and the institution, occur within two sets of relations. These are the student–staff relationship of the institutional organisation and the child–adult relationship of the generational order. While the staff–student relationship is specific to the setting, the generational order is not dependant on a specific setting – instead it interplays with the setting so that we are seldom just adults and children. This means that we are adults and parents, children and customers, and in school, adults and staff and children and students.

Within the institutionally organised staff–student relationship there are positions available to the children that can be seen as being within a continuum from the competent, mature, self-governing student through to an immature, incompetent student who needs to be controlled by staff. In this set of relations the teacher is also positioned within a continuum. This spans from being the provider of discipline and authority, with an obligation to control the students and provide good working conditions, to that of the democratic leader of equals. Although, as discussed in the introductory chapter, focus in Sweden has been on democratic ideals, the current Swedish national curriculum, Lpo94 expresses understandings of teachers being both the providers of discipline as well as democratic leaders.

Apart from this institutionally organised relationship between students and staff, there is the child–adult relationship found in the generational order. Here there is an interdependency between the categories of children and adults, and within this relationship the children are also positioned within a continuum. In this relationship it spans from the position of being competent, self regulating, robust and reflexive, to being immature, incompetent and uncontrolled. The adult positionings available are similar to those of the staff/teacher, that is within a continuum between an authoritarian adult and a democratic, equal, adult.

This means that in the school setting, the rights, duties and obligations of the participants are related both to the generational order and to the institutional organisation. This interrelationship was demonstrated in my difficulties in deciding what term to use when discussing the participants in this ethnography. In the methodology chapter my decision to use the term children was related to the children themselves using the term child or school child. In retrospect, both my hesitancy about which term to use, as well as the children’s use of the terms child and school child, can be related to the two sets of relations discussed
above. Whereas the term student is related to the institutional organisation, the term child describes children in relation to adults in all settings. This means that the category child is something that children carry with them between settings while the term student can be left in its context. The children’s use of the term school child can thus be understood as a way of keeping their fundamental position as children while acknowledging that they are placed in the school setting.

In the introductory chapter, studies exploring children’s positioning in institutions such as school and pre-school were presented (Mayall 1994, Devine 2000, Ellegaard 2004, Moinian 2007). In Mayall’s and Moinian’s discussions of children’s positioning in school, they present schools as settings where specific power relations and expectation are created. Devine, on the other hand, distinguishes more clearly between a child–adult and a student–teacher relationship, and Ellegaard sees two relations, which he calls patriarchal and bureaucratic, interplaying within the institutional setting. However, the focus of Ellegaard’s discussion is the distinction between how the children are positioned relative to their peers and relative to adults. In the studies presented, the power relation between students and teachers is understood as related to the relationship between children and adults, but seen as a relationship specific to the school setting.

In my study I similarly found that the generational order relates to the institutional organisation. More specifically, I argue that the generational order merges with and reinforces the institutional organisation, as the categories of child and adult are more constant and wide reaching than those of student and staff. That the two sets of relations merge and reinforce one another creates an unbalance in the power relationship between adults and children as, within both, the children may be positioned as subordinate to the adults.

Although subordination is found in both the generational order and the institutional organisation, it is not necessarily perceived or enforced at the individual level. At the individual level the positionings of both adults and children can compensate this subordination.

**Positioning the children**

The merging of the generational order and the institutional organisation, discussed above, created two dominant conceptions of the children in the study class. The competent child merged with the good student to become, and be
treated as, the professional pupil, and the immature student merged with the understanding of the incompetent uncontrolled child.

This merging indicates that we should not envisage and discuss children at school only as students. Instead it is important to relate their pupilness to the generational order in order to fully understand their positionings. In the study class the children were, in relation to the generational order and the institutional organisation, alternatively positioned and repositioned as professional pupils or as immature children.

Earlier studies (Johansson and Johansson 2003, Ekstrand 1990, Eckert 2001, Halldén 1992) have shown that varying conceptions of children or childhood could be found within any one person’s statements or actions. These conceptions could restrict or create possibilities for children’s actions as they were found not only to be present as ideas but as guiding both children’s and adults’ actions.

In the institutional organisation of school a framework is created for school day activities, for the use of time and space, for the relationship between children and adults, and for the social relationships between children. In the empirical chapters I have shown that within this framework teachers continually positioned and repositioned the children, and that the positionings available to the children varied depending on the teacher.

The class teacher that the study class had in school Year 4 and 5 frequently positioned the children as competent, and together with the children established positions as professional pupils, making classroom management a joint responsibility. At the same time, as shown in chapter seven, the class teacher upheld the authority of her institutional and/or generational position. This was apparent in the constant monitoring of the class where a running commentary of what was understood as appropriate behaviour, and admonitions to named or unnamed students who had transgressed such behavioural rules, became part of the general classroom activities. It was also seen in the class teacher’s taken-for-granted right to make changes in the timetables and her assumption, both tacit and explicit, that she was in charge.

The class teacher’s regular positioning of the children as professional pupils is a way of counterbalancing their subordinate position in the generational order and the institutional organisation. This is seen in the way the children’s timekeeping was handled, as shown in chapter five. The children generally came to lessons on time, but if they were late, they simply entered the
classroom and slotted into ongoing work. Late children were not positioned as incompetent, as resisting school or as challenging the teacher. Children arriving late were instead positioned as competent, professional pupils who knew what to do without being told. This enabled the children to sit down and start working with a minimum amount of disruption to the other children’s lesson, and they themselves missed as little as possible of the work being done.

Another example is the frequent collaborative work in the study class. This was at times organised by the teacher, but would often be initiated by the children – an appropriation of teacher-planned work that was generally accepted by the teacher. The noise level of the classroom was handled in a similar manner. The teacher would monitor this but would also be influenced by the children’s definition of a tolerable noise level. In this way the class teacher would allow the children both agency and the opportunity to position themselves as professional pupils.

Agency in the form of choices and the possibility to carry through choices is both dependent on the generational order, the institutional organisation and on the individual teachers and children. That the class teacher was able to position the children as professional pupils with joint responsibility for classroom management while not relinquishing her authority, shows that within the framework of the institutional organisation there are possibilities for both teacher and children agency.

Teacher agency is expressed in choices made when creating the ‘order-that-is-to-be’ in the classroom. Thereby the class teacher’s authority is related to teacher agency and to the possibilities available to her to position the children as professional pupils. For the children we can see that their agency, the possibilities, limitations and choices available to them, is related to the ‘order-that-is-to-be’ in their school class any one year.

Although this ‘order-that-is-to-be’ is built up by teachers and children together, I have shown that if the teacher, both as an adult within a generationally ordered relationship and as a teacher in an institutionally organised relationship, neither positions the children as professional pupils, nor reinforces such positionings by the children, then the position of professional pupil would not be available to the children.

At the same time the children must claim such positions, and in the empirical chapters I have shown that the children are active in their positioning, in their participation and in their schooling.
CHAPTER EIGHT

AN ORDINARY SCHOOL CHILD

In studies of children’s pupilness, it is often aspects that are seen as diverting from the ordinary, or seen as problematic, that are explored. This is seen in studies that focus on class (Willis 1977, Ambjörnsson 2003), ethnicity (Evaldsson 1995, 2000, 2002, Narrowe 1998, Runfors 2003), gender (Thorne 1993, Lundgren 2000, Karlson 2003, Evaldsson 2004), or problematic school situations (Hellberg 2007, Karlsson 2007).

In this thesis however, focus has been on activities and actions in a mainstream school class and the children’s pupilness has been explored from a generational perspective by looking at the children’s participation, the relation between school and child, and the children’s positioning relative to the adults in school. In this I have explored how an ordinary school child may be constituted in this mainstream school setting. An ordinary school child would need to have the qualities typical of a child in school. Understanding qualities as accomplishments and attainments rather than character traits, I have in this thesis explored what these typical qualities may be, what skills an ordinary school child within the Swedish comprehensive compulsory primary schooling needs.

I have shown that the children find themselves in a setting where both the generational order and the institutional organisation position the ordinary school child as subordinate. Being positioned as subordinate does not, however, mean that they are without agency. In the study class I find that the children are both positioned and position themselves as agentic, claiming command over their school day activities and choosing to use the possibilities for action afforded them. In their interaction with their class teacher the children in the study class find that this positioning is frequently accepted, and thereby reinforced, resulting in their display of confidence and assurance. This means that the position of school child includes both subordination and agency.

As has been shown in the empirical chapters, the children’s agency can be seen in everyday choices of how to organise their work, in minute actions such as transforming maths seat work into a collaborative effort as Alice and Ella often did, by using the bathroom more often than strictly necessary, as Robert was accused of, or in thinking of other things while the teacher reads to them.

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52 This means that these qualities are something one does. Just as we talk of doing gender, I believe that the children do school child.
More noticeable actions can be the discussions of private matters, either while still doing schoolwork or instead of doing the work, or work collaboration entailing a move straight across the room where work partners appeared to be chosen in relation to work task rather than friendship ties.

Another agentic act is Sandra’s actions during sewing craft discussed earlier. Through her apparent compliance while refusing to make a new choice of soft animal, Sandra skilfully remains within the framework of the institutional organisation. In this way she upholds her positioning as professional pupil.

We can also see agency on occasions where the children’s subordination is brought to the surface. In chapter five there is a description of some girls nagging and begging to be let into the classroom to practise their dance routine. Being aware of the restrictions, they verbally try to manipulate the assistant into letting them use the room. When they fail, they move on to other activities in the knowledge that although they do not have the free choice of entering the classroom, they have exercised their right to attempt to gain access.

The position of child accentuates the children’s subordinate position, and throughout the empirical chapters we have seen the children attempting to position themselves as competent, as professional pupils. Does this mean that it is only in the position of professional pupil, in being perceived as competent, that the children are agentic? I argue that it is not. Just as there is agency in the children’s display of competence, I find agency in Alex’ reflexive positioning as child.

In chapter seven I have shown how Alex in his position as child takes over the classroom, or an activity, by moving about, questioning activities, and needing and expecting constant help. On the occasion when he, during seat work, went to the front of the classroom and solemnly divided his eraser in half, he initiated and enacted an activity outside the set work activity, an agentic action. I also believe that this action was accepted, that no one intervened or commented on his activity, because it was seen as agentic. Alex thus chooses to positions himself as child, a positioning I find is reinforced in that the class teacher asks the other children to be extra considerate to him, thereby encouraging his positioning as child.

In their activities we see that the children are aware that they find themselves in a setting where they need to be constantly aware of the adults’ presence, expectations and organisation, as adult authority may abruptly
become visible and strip them of command, thereby positioning them as subordinate *children*. This means that although I have shown the children to be competent, to be positioned by others as competent, and to position themselves as competent, they are not always positioned so that they may express this competence.

In the empirical chapters I have shown that an ordinary school child navigates the school setting, and this necessitates multiple skills. Straining to be seen as professional pupils in their schooling the children need to be able to uphold the image of themselves as competent. To do this they not only need to be able to learn school routines and regulations, they need the social skills that enable them to differentiate between different teachers’ rules and between teachers’ moods. They need the skill and flexibility to adapt to constant changes and be aware that they can take no rule for granted. They need the skill to know when not to take an issue further when in conflict with a teacher, and they must know when to allow themselves to be positioned as *children*. In other words the children need to be schoolwise\(^5\). Being schoolwise, ordinary school children need the ability to both conform to and convert expectations upon them.

\(^5\) As compared to *streetwise* which means that one has the experience and resourcefulness needed for survival.
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LINKÖPING STUDIES IN PEDAGOGIC PRACTICES


