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Personal versus institutional/cultural places and rhythms in preschool – conditions for positions in daily life (at preschool)

In my daughters class (primary school, 2nd class) the teacher give children's perspective a front position, at least she give them choices and offers possibilities to choose in different as well as many aspects of school life. She give them opportunities to choose in between different subjects as well as which techniques or learning tools to work with, to where and at what times to be studying as well as resting/playing. One example is that this class during several weeks have been moving around in the classroom, one week they sat in circles, another in small groups of tables, one week they had specific places, another they could choose from one day to another... They didn't seem to find a comfortable way of being in place, or being in class... When they ones again voted for how to sit and where to be, the pupils choose to sit alone, BUT at a specific place and with a personal table! So, the furniture were switched out, impersonal and modern tables went in the basement, fro m where they instead picked up old tables with a cover, beneath which you collect your own stuff (the ones WE use to have in school, several years ago!). Now they are satisfied since quite a long time. They put up their personal favourite pictures, drawings and small notes at the cover to their personal table.

What does this story tells us?

Most grown ups being told this story says Huh, can she really do this? She is experimenting with the kids! A common reaction is that kids doesn't go well with to many choices. To many opportunities makes them stressful and anxient. On the other side off course, the example shows us a need and an interest in having a personal as well as separate place in class. Impersonal tables as well as grouping them, reflect modern pedagogical thoughts and strivings as flexibility, individual rhythms/movements and social competence, while old personal tables separated from each other reflect old pedagogical thoughts as well as traditional ways of organizing children in the classroom. Research with children focusing on place and space tells us that children, out from a need and wish of control seek their own time

and space for positioning (for ex. Westlund 1996; Simpson 2000; Christensen, James & Jenks 2001). This research also shows how children use their bodies to create their own time and space and thereby manipulate the bodily culture of institutions of school and pre school, a child hanging over his or her books is supposed reading, while in fact this position gives him or her the opportunity to do other things...

The order of time and space as well as the organization of places, creates conditions for movements, relations and positions among kids at school and pre-school. Pre-school **as time and place for children** is thereby important to pay attention, reflecting interesting and revealing tensions/ between the preferences and agency of kids and adults' organization of pre-school, influenced as it is by conceptions of kids needs as well as pictures of the Child desired.

Modern ideas about children's needs and increased individualism both in school and in pre school can lead to a situation as the one in my daughter's class. Is this good or bad, or just an ordinary way of being in today's ordinary life of kids? Is it, from the perspective of the child, an affordance, an opportunity to follow personal needs, or is it a modern task of flexibility followed by both opportunities and uncertainty? The other day my daughter woke up telling me she have had a nightmare – someone had switched out their tables, taken away their personal tables with cover and replaced them with the modern and impersonal ones...

In the study I performed working with my thesis I focused on time as a cultural as well as personal condition for positioning in school as well as in life. Studying and working with older pupils with a long life history in school and of school-time they often brought up memories and feelings of being guided, not to say govern, in time as well as in place. When I meet them they have been offered new possibilities to guide themselves through school time, working on distance or with individual curricula. Posed in this new situation they suddenly saw and understood the scheduled time in different ways, not just as something unable to change and manipulate, but also as a time offering common social spots, and freedom from the often challenging task of planning a time which content is decided beforehand and by someone else, here: by school and comprehensive curriculum. Now they saw opportunities they couldn't see before. For some the common schedule in school offered them ways of controlling, both the time lived in school as well as how to position oneself among others in school. A planned and scheduled time also settled social places, meetings and possibilities to be seen and heard. Further, a scheduled and common schedule once understood and controlled could also be manipulated in ways that opened doors for personal rhythms and spots. Pupils

knew to which class one could be late, which deadlines one could stretch out and thereby follow a **personal rhythm**.

The study thus showed that, even if time and place are settled in advance some of the pupils could find space to create a rhythm of their own within school time. Others described a feeling of mistrust and frustration and hence felt hunted by a time laid out and planned beforehand.

Pupils working on distance where on their own, both in place and time, even though they were guided by a weekly specified curriculum given by school. A majority of them took up the common timetable of their family and friends, not to fall behind, but to position themselves in the temporal rhythms of others. BUT they also created a **personal rhythm in studying**. Some described how they started with the difficult task, *just to have it done*, while some started with the subjects preferred *just to work up and feel constructive...* They choose to work with one or two subjects per day, instead of switching between different subjects and tasks. Less variation but more personal! Further, they ate, took breaks and rested when needed, not when time told them to!

What does this story tells us?

The experience of time is personal, as are rhythms in learning, playing and living. The pupils' stories of time in school reflect both conditions in cultural/social ways of understanding and living through time, as well as personal preferences and differences in rhythms. By focusing on the phenomena of time and rhythm in research with children conditions for living as well as the kids themselves grasp

As in the first example these kids are offered new opportunities to orient and position themselves in time as in place, BUT always and in relation to an institutional setting as well as underlying rules and borders. As adults we must understand that the places, times and rhythms we offer children in everyday life is not understood, used and lived in the same way as we think, as well as want. How we guide the kids through the days and how they understand and make use of the same days, reflect images of cultural repetition, social needs as well as adults dreams of a content child, and children's dreams of personal as well as social spots, positions and ways of being. In re-organizing places for children by leaning on their own

choices and in the light of a modern curricula focusing flexible minds, individual learning and free as well as responsible kids, we must also look for new conditions, lost bonds and rules and another way of being a child, or to be more correct - an institutionalised child.