Concentration in Ethiopian Classrooms

A study of salutogenic factors affecting children's attention ability

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ABSTRACT

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Concentration Ability in Ethiopian Classrooms – a study of salutogenic factors and how they affect children’s ability focusing in lessons.

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This is an ethnographic study, highlighting protecting factors for children’s ability to focus.

Schools must do its very best for children, increasing their possibilities to concentrate, since this has a significant impact on both school performance and social interaction. Schools have limited resources. Can knowledge and experience from a developing country give useful and interesting input? Are there health factors for this group of pupils in an African school? The purpose of this research is to study children’s attention abilities and investigate supporting factors for pupil’s possibilities to concentrate as well as to determine the usefulness of these experiences in a Swedish school.

In this study I found five salutogenic factors, which seemed to have a positive impact on children’s ability to concentrate: Having possibilities to study makes a big difference if you are living in Ethiopia, so the importance of expectation is one of the factors. Expectations, from both society and families encouraged the pupils to do their best. Children are seen close to each other in bare classrooms. One can see them helping each other to focus during lessons. Cooperation and fellowship seemed to provide security and happiness, and thus, in turn increased the children’s possibilities to pay attention and absorb knowledge. Learning at appropriate level in a collective learning process possibly helped pupils with problems in the area of attention/concentrate.

In addition to these environmental, salutogenic factors figured the use of a drug. In countries around the Horn of Africa is use of the herb “khat” common. Some of the children self-medicate themselves to increase their concentration ability.

Conception to notice: Salutogenic factors, Ethnography, Concentration ability/disability, Expectations, Collective learning processes, Khat, Ethiopia
FOREWORD

This paper is written in the special education research field. In my profession as a teacher in the Swedish school system, I often meet pupils having problems in the area of attention and concentration. I want to learn more about the phenomenon. As I read the literature I became aware of how little attention has been paid to the subject of children’s ability to concentrate. Most academic works focus on difficulties and shortcomings. How does the phenomenon in a society different from ours appear? Thanks to a scholarship from SIDA, (Minor Field Studies) I got the opportunity to spend two months in Ethiopian schools.

Thanks to all informants in Awassa, for so willingly sharing your experiences with me.

Thanks Gunvie Möllås and Elsie Anderberg for professional and educational support during the writing process.

Thanks Ida-Karin and Hilda-Maria, my daughters, because you followed me on my mission.

Thanks Josef, my husband because you support me in my project.

Thanks Marie Fullsta for being so committed helping me to seek and receive MFS scholarship.
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1 INTRODUCTION

Ethiopia is one of the world's poorest countries, with a population of over 70 million inhabitants but social inequality in society is large. Modern urban people gather at cafes and restaurants. Mobile phones and laptops are used by those who can afford it. This is a developing country with a strong focus on education. People use small moments of inactivity for homework and studies. Fruit vendor writes vocabulary in her notebook as she waits for customers. Older men, working as guards, are doing their homework when it is quiet. Street scene is chaotic and intense. Small shops sell anything from a few small piles of potatoes, grilled corn and slices of pineapple next to the hairdresser who washes their customers' hair on the sidewalk using soap and a bucket of water. How is the situation for pupils in Ethiopia? This study is focusing concentration abilities in Ethiopian classrooms. Are there health factors for this group of pupils in an African school and can we in the West receive knowledge from their school activities?

Who I am and why I became interested in this subject

I have got, through my childhood, a natural affinity in an African village as daughter to missionaries. After high school I decided to become a teacher and have been working for more than thirty years in Swedish schools. At the end of the 90s, I got a degree as teacher for special education. The past ten years I have worked in a child psychiatric team, investigating children with attention disabilities. According to my experiences I wondered if children, with or without ADHD, would have had an easier/more difficult life situation in a community with other living conditions.

A source of inspiration for the study was a survey conducted in Addis Ababa, 2008. The screening of 5000 children showed lower prevalence of child psychiatric problems than in other comparable groups.

This aroused my curiosity. I wanted to see if there are conscious or unconscious knowledge in the environment supporting the children in a positive way.

For whom is it interesting?

The results may be interesting for teachers, school developers and parents.
2 PURPOSE AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The purpose of this research is to study Ethiopian children’s attention abilities and investigate supporting factors for pupil’s possibilities to concentrate as well as to determine the usefulness of these experiences in Swedish schools.

The research questions

How do Ethiopian children concentrate?

What kind of protecting factors for the attention ability, can be found in the culture of Ethiopia?

May experiences from the Ethiopian schools contribute knowledge development in Sweden?
3 BACKGROUND

The following chapter is based on concentration/concentration disorders research. In both educational as well as medical research there are a lot of studies on children's attention deficit disorders. This chapter describes both supporting factors from a social perspective and studies from a neuropsychiatry perspective. Literature studies include researches drawn from studies on children diagnosed with ADHD along with those of normal variation in the field of Concentration Ability. The theories from those two fields are described in parallel but have been selected to illustrate supportive factors at different levels.

Finally two African studies of child psychiatric perspective are related and the school system in Ethiopia is described.

Concentration Ability

According to Kadesjö (2000) being focused means to seek as much useful knowledge as possible in an efficient manner, evaluating the information so that all important information is retained, while everything irrelevant or disruptive is excluded. Kadesjö’s interpretation of the concept is the one used in this paper and is formulated as below.

In order to concentrate on one task, the children must be able to:
1. Address their perception, thoughts, and feelings towards data
2. Excluding irrelevant stimuli
3. Get started, maintain work and complete the task (Kadesjö, 2001, p 16)

Kadesjö describes the importance of a meaningful interaction between the child's inner life and external reality. Experience, acquired knowledge, intellectual level, emotional and motivation are factors that affect ability to concentrate. For a child having a good ability to pay attention at school, the likelihood of succeeding in various tasks is obviously high. If a given task corresponds to the child's developmental and emotional condition, there is an increased probability of the child to get started with the task, continuing with it and finishing it. Attention usually shifts from one object to another. We can, as we know, only be attentive to a limited amount of things at the same time. When many stimuli are competing for attention, the most attractive ones win. These attractive stimuli can be the interesting things, those which stand out from the mass, or those which in other ways insist upon the individual’s attention.

Imsen (1998) claims that there are qualitative differences within attention and terms them as surface-directed or deep-directed attention. The surface-directed attention focuses on decoding and representation of a text, while the deep-directed treats the content of a text from a holistic perspective in relation to the message mediated by the text. The quality of the learning result then relies on the direction of the attention. Crucial to a child's ability to concentrate is that there must be an emotional match between the impressions from the outside world and the child’s own conditions and needs. If the teacher has given clear, concise and, for the child interesting instruction, the child will have a good chance of focusing.
The more often the child has succeeded in similar situations, the greater the chances are for succeeding, therefore praise and positive feedback favors the learning process. “What you enjoy doing, you usually do well. What you do well, you feel better about doing” [my translation] (Iglum, 2008, p 307). According to Barkley (1997), attention ability includes a variety of brain functions and is part of our thinking. It is affected by other brain processes such as perception, memory, language and motor skills. Many researchers have, together with Barkley, a clear biological perspective. A common approach is to think of concentration as something personal, which is inside the individual but the ability to concentrate is a complex web of biological, psychological and social functions. The concept of concentration is usually described in the literature as focused attention, but can be described from different perspectives and thus is an umbrella term for a number of psychological phenomena. Several factors can affect the phenomenon which makes it difficult to measure. Concentration problems during childhood are linked both with the brain's capacity for attention/concentration, and the stress the child has been exposed to. Ingvar (2010) highlights the complexity of the phenomenon of attention, where the child's own expectations and strategies, affect the level of performance.

Attention ability is difficult to assess because the term encompasses several sub-functions, as the ability to perceive new information correctly, maintain focus on the right thing and be able to move your attention to something new. Subsequently, the attention is affected by the desire to concentrate. Also, the tendency to use different strategies for learning may affect how well attention capacity is estimated to [my translation] (SOU, 2010:52).

Good attention in school not only facilitates learning but also social interaction and varies greatly from motivation level. If the children can pursue their interests the attention can be very high even among the pupils who usually have difficulties in the area. It may be difficult to break the task and move attention to something else.

**Executive functions**

Executive functions such as the ability to overview and to plan are central. Many children need help with this up to quite high ages. Barkley (1997) explains in “The new theory of ADHD” the executive functions as the primary problem for children with ADHD. Nowadays, one often sees that attention disorders and problems with oversight and planning, impulse control and time perception are brought together under the term "executive dysfunctions". It also includes important functions as: shifting (change focus), inhibition (avoid undesirable stimuli) and monitoring (up-dating of information stored in the memory).

Obviously, this varies greatly between different individuals and different contexts. Stressful situations make it difficult for anyone to control their emotions and actions. A predictable school with good opportunities for a positive connection is of great help. Working memory function is also developed with age in most people. Young children often find it difficult to hold a thought and easily forget what was supposed to be said or done. A pupil with poor working memory can be one that often interrupts others, without it being about insubordination and indisclipline. For some, this difficulty may retain up to older ages. The capacity of working memory determines how long information can be stored, which in turn affects how instruction can be understood and implemented and how its own work can be planned. Good capacity facilitates significant learning strategies such as counting and reading. Computerized training of working memory is
used nowadays to some extent within the schools.\(^1\) We now know that the characteristics associated with the executive functions are linked to neurological problems in frontal function, and not because the child chose to do so (Attwood, 2007, page 273). A good structure of home and school, effective study skills and familiar routines combined with other pedagogical adaptations is still the recommended arrangements.

**Primary difficulties**

Children who are described as having primary difficulties when lack of attention ability, difficulties in finding a suitable activity level, impulsivity and so on, are not causes of environmental circumstances, but are believed to be caused by biological factors. The condition is due to congenital or early acquired deficiencies in brain function. These children will not have the same opportunities as their peers to cope with the stimulation and information flow at school. Attention Deficit is the main symptom of ADD/ADHD. These difficulties often show early in life, especially in social situations that require adjusting the level of activity. The child can be dreamy and passive or active and ramble around. Barkley emphasizes the degree of distress for this group.

As attested to by the numerous scientists signing this document, there does no question among the world's leading clinical researchers that ADHD involves a serious deficiency in a set of psychological abilities and that these deficiencies pose serious harm to most individuals who possess the disorder. Current evidence indicates that deficits in behavioral inhibition and sustained attention are central to this disorder—facts demonstrated through hundreds of scientific studies. And there is no doubt that ADHD leads to impairments in major life activities, including social relations, education, family functioning, occupational functioning, self-sufficiency, and adherence to social rules, norms, and laws (Barkley, 2002, p 1).

Recent research in neuropsychology and neurophysiology has shown us more about the causes of ADHD and given us a broader understanding of what may underlie such as attention difficulties. Scientists today agree that there is no single cause that explains everything, but many possible, which may interact. Many of the background factors are difficult to study and the results of the studies are partly contradictory. ADHD is considered today to have a biological basis but the interplay of factors and other stresses in the environment is of great importance. There is intensive research in advanced technologies in the search for biological parameters, such as variations in blood flow and thus brain activity, EEG patterns and biochemical tests.

**Attention Disabilities**

Writing about the phenomenon of concentration without mentioning the term diagnosis ADHD/ADD is difficult. Denscombe (2000) argues that by examining a deviation, we can see the specific factors much more clearly. Our knowledge of the concentration potential is strongly linked to the knowledge of the deficiencies in capacity. All young children have a limited attention span and sometimes do things without thinking. Only a few of these children meet the criteria for Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) or Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD).\(^2\)

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\(^1\) In the Swedish market are for example programs as RoboMemo and Minneslek

\(^2\) Criteria for ADHD/ADD see Appendix 2
**Treatment of attention deficit disorder**
The primary difficulty in concentration cannot be cured, but barriers can be reduced and compensated. The measures recommended in literature are the combination of psychosocial and medical interventions. Treatment for ADHD is complex and may include drug therapy, behavioral management, psychological counseling and family support groups. Treatment using medication is fast and - in many cases - effective, but research suggests that using a multifaceted approach ensures a greater success rate. “There are different types of medicine licensed to treat ADHD. Those that contain the active ingredient methylphenidate are Concerta and Ritalin. Strattera contain the active ingredient atomoxetine” (http://www.netdoctor.co.uk/adhd/adhdmedication.htm).

**Prevalence of Concentration Disorders**
Attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder is the most common child psychiatric disorder in Europe and the United States of America, affecting 3 – 10 % of primary school children (American Psychiatric Association 2000). ADHD is found to be as prevalent on the African continent as in western countries (Meyer, 1998). A basic question is to what degree behavior and its disturbance are affected by culture. From two studies in the Limpopo Province of South Africa, it is suggested that ADHD is caused by the same fundamental neurobiological processes, probably caused by genetic factors expressed independently of cultural differences. It is common that primary concentration problems occur in certain families and follows the family for generations. Heredity is considered to be an important factor for the occurrence of ADHD, but biology and environment are notoriously insoluble interconnected. Researchers in the field agree that both genetic and environmental factors are central to how problems in ADHD are development.

**Secondary difficulties**
The same symptoms, in the field of attention/concentration, may occur in children but that there are no biological reasons. “Secondary difficulties in concentrating are described as a result of, or reaction to, the deficiencies in the child's upbringing situation. A combination of background factors are also occurring”, as Kadesjö notes (2009, p.9) He marks unstructured home or school environment, emotional causes of the child being or having been exposed to traumatic experiences. Uncertain identity may also affect the child's possibility to pay attention. A child who has a very uncertain identity is always looking for confirmation. This may be perceived as lack of concentration as the child has difficulty carrying out their requirements filled if it does not always receive encouragement. Additionally, the factual concentration difficulties occur in specific situations, for example when learning material is too difficult, or when the classroom situation is not clear and well organized or when structures and routines changes to fast. A child who is emotionally overloaded because of a different reason such as ostracism or bullying can have difficulties to regulate their activity level. If the situation could be changed for the better, the child's troubles decreases, why the identification and investigation of the child's situation is of great importance. All researchers in the paper “International Consensus Statement on ADHD” (Barkley 2002) points out the importance of adjustments in the child's environment. Pupils with pronounced learning disabilities should receive particular attention as they may seem to have problems with attention/concentration without that being the case. The symptoms can be similar as for children with primary difficulties. The same can be applied to a pupil with low levels of
proficiency in mathematics. When this support function is absent interest is lost in for instance problem solving and the pupil can perceive the lessons boring and uninteresting. Another example would be children with perceptual difficulties. If the child is hypersensitive to sound, light or other external stimuli such as physical contact, it may be restlessness and perceived by the surrounding as attentively disturbed. Adaptations in the environment are in such cases necessary and the result might be that concentration increase.

**Gender Differences**

Previously, attention difficulties have been considered to be significantly more common in groups of boys (Martin 2010). Estimations that ADHD is several times more common in boys have now been dismissed as due to an overrepresentation of boys, and a reinterpretation of past findings has been undertaken. Boys are more likely to externalize their lack of adaptation; therefore lack of attention in girls’ education becomes less visible than boys’. This gender difference in symptom recognition means that boys are more often referred to investigation and treatment than girls (Ingvar, 2010). The child’s development of the ability to maintain the desirable behavior occurs gradually during childhood. The difference in maturity between boys and girls can be a good explanation for this result (Ingvar, 2010). A population-based study indicates that the prevalence of ADHD in girls varies between 1.5 and 10.3 percent. A study confirms that the incidence varies depending on who underestimated the symptoms. According to the parents 2.5 % of the girls and 7 % of the boys met the criteria for ADHD. The teachers however, took the view that fewer girls than boys had ADHD; 1.2 percent compared to 10.5 percent for boys. The differences between the teachers’ and the parents’ assessments became even more pronounced for the group that predominantly had attention problems (Kopp,S., Hellgren,L., Pettersson,A., Rehnqvist, N. 2005). The school obviously marked gender differences. Teachers report of fewer girls with ADHD problems. The girls’ situation has been observed in research more recently. Their problems are more often seen as lacking in attention and less in terms of impulsivity and motor hyperactivity. Girls respond to a greater extent with low self-esteem and depression. There is a risk that girls with problems in the area are not addressed as much as boys. The pedagogy should be guided by the well-proven methods, available for children who need support in their ability to concentrate. Loud boys are recommended short shifts, movement breaks, audio and visual stimuli, a private workspace and so on. Girls with attention deficit disorder need it in equal proportions.

**Supporting functions**

Our ability to concentrate depends on many different factors. The biological factors of importance are well studied, whereas this study highlights the particular importance of social factors. Children react differently to the same environmental factors. Sensitivity varies over time and in combination with several factors. The child with difficulties to concentrate, to organize and plan easily loses mental energy on things that their classmates do automatically and need support not only on individual level.

**Supporting factors in society**

The term “education revolution” occurs in many international documents, particularly those describing the developing countries increasing their educational standard. Many countries in the so-called third world make great efforts to reach the educational goals for the year 2015.
The status of high education is an international phenomenon, more and more acknowledged in global contexts, but above all, this is being revolutionized by the study motivated pupils in developing countries. It reduces poverty and boosts socioeconomic development. An education opens doors to jobs and credit. According to UNICEF one year of schooling can increase a person’s earnings by 10 per cent. Six internationally agreed education goals aim to meet the learning needs of all children, youth and adults by 2015.

**Adjustments at school**

Kadesjö (2002), guidelines to find environmental support: Some basic factors must be met for an effective school situation. Children need a well structured school day. Structure allowing children to grasp subject matter and predict what will be happening next. Rules and instructions should be clarified with signals or notes. Card schemes, where information is gradually presented, may be a positive way of imparting concrete data. Children consistently require fast, frequent and clear feedback and action. The teacher may help to become aware of its approach to the child, so that no irritation and negative responses predominate. The environment in the classroom should be examined and the child's placement in the room considered. There is a clear consensus in society that inclusion is preferable to exclusion. Pupils in need of special assistance are recommended participating in the normal school environment. Still it is often believed that the child is responsible for creating the problem by its deficiencies and abnormalities. Both (Kadesjö, 2000) and (Steinberg, 1993) agree that the factors contributing to non-concentration are shortcomings in both nursery environment and/or school environment. A good structure of the school day is good for all children but necessary for those who for some reason are more vulnerable than others. Green (2003) tells about the difficulties children with attention disabilities have when it comes to changes and unpredictability. He calls them “explosive and inflexible”. The goal for his theories is to train them in frustration tolerance and to feel more comfort in inflexible situations. He also talks about the importance of adults to regain authority and guidance.

There has for example been some apprehension that new media will replace the school as an intermediary of knowledge. Iglum (2008) has pointed to causes other than digital media which affect children’s motivation for doing school work. Simplification, repetition, fewer factors each time, time to reflect is often good motivation techniques. Other factors that often reinforce motivation are supervision, a sense of achievement, good self-esteem, an understanding of what is expected, confirmation and encouragement from others [my translation] (Iglum,2008). Confirmation, predictability and belonging seem to be very important factors. In school the child needs to meet people who provide stability and forward planning. The teacher’s attitude is what matters most for the child who has difficulty in the neuropsychiatry field. “From 8-10 years of age, the child becomes aware of the gap between demands and their own ability.” (Kadesjö B., 2000).

During the first years of schooling, most children have difficulties in suppressing impulses and reactions. At an age of eight, a normal developed child matures and uses their frontal lobes to suppress a reaction and think for before he or she decides what is appropriate to say or do (Attwood, 2007 p272).

Praise and feedback in combination with the clarity of both rules-setting and learning objectives are mentioned in the summary of knowledge “Children who challenge ”(Kadesjö, 2010). Ericsson (2003) refers to Mead’s idea about attention being of basic social character and it constitutes a
process where one organizes consciousness. According to Mead, the child’s consciousness and thoughts grow in relation to meaningful persons in the surroundings (significant others). The ability to concentrate might so be assumed to be dependent on the social ensemble which children develop in social interaction with persons important to them. Children growing up with unsatisfactory contact with adults can become restless and develop attention problems, that is, develop secondary concentration disabilities (Ericsson, 2003). Expressed with salutogenic terminology, this could be understood as children being given good possibilities for social interaction with significant others and consequentially have better chances to form – for learning – important supporting functions such as concentration ability. Kadesjö (2010), uses the term "school ties", comparable with the term “Parental tie” to emphasize the importance for children to meet adults who "cares about them, conveys acceptance, systematically encourage the positive and gives them security" (p. 48).

Many children with attention disabilities are sensitive to noisy and messy environments making them stressed and disorganized. In a classroom many different things happen, both obvious and subtle; things that are heard, seen, and things which are not. Subtle, and difficult to detect, are the emotional factors. Some feel exposed or vulnerable among their classmates, not sure of what break time will be like. This is only one example of many emotional factors, some of which we can identify and others not, that may distract a child in the classroom. We recognize these children as having problems with undertaking tasks if they do not receive extra positive reinforcement. If a child’s difficulties are due to its upbringing and social circumstances rather than a biological inadequacy, then concentration difficulties will tend to decrease if the child’s growing environment is changing in a positive manner and if the child receives the external stability which it formerly lacked. The school is a significant part of the child’s upbringing and has a major responsibility to ensure children feel safe and secure. Breaks between classes can be a sensitive issue for many children and concerns about what may occur during the break may disrupt focus from the lesson.

**Family support**

The programs being most successful are those that combine psychosocial with medical interventions - such as training for parents, behavior modification techniques in school and training of the child's social skills, combined with medical treatment. Parent education programs, in which parents learn strategies for how to structure the daily lives of the family, has proven to be good for children with attention difficulties (Kadesjö 2002). This can be done in individual interviews or in guided groups for parents. Research has shown that parents' explanations for their children's difficulties have an important impact on their emotional and disciplinary approach to their children. The courses are manual-based and participants learn the methods in steps. It is important the children themselves have insight into their own difficulties to find explanations for why it gets complicated in situations where others do not experience any difficulty. This can already in the early years cause trouble when it comes to self confidence and security in social situations. By understanding the strong sides, compensatory opportunities can be seen and the importance of having good structure and a routine, etc. can be obvious. This helps life become more manageable and meaningful.
Researches in Africa

How is the phenomenon concentration ability described in various cultural discourses? Are there, in literature, descriptions of more-or-less natural cultural features which facilitate or impede the child? Desta (2008) shows the surprising result that urban children in Ethiopia, despite difficult circumstances, have a lower proportion of behavioral problems and mental health problems than comparable groups elsewhere. A study was conducted in an urban setting of Ethiopia to look at the prevalence of child psychiatric disorders and their correlates. The most prevalent condition was enuresis (12.1%) followed by simple phobia (5.5%). The prevalence rates of all other identified conditions were below 1%. The fact that the thesis studies show lower incidence of behavioral problems than what would be expected - beyond pure methodological issues – can be interpreted in two ways: first, the reason may be that problems exist, but that parents have difficulty recognizing and reporting them, which results in inaccurate findings. The second interpretation would be that the child psychiatric problems do occur to a lesser degree in Addis Ababa compared to for example the West. If Desta’s thesis (2008) can be confirmed by further research I suppose it would be of great interest, since in this case there is much to learn about the factors that protect children from interference. Professor Meyer at the Department of Psychology, University of Limpopo, South Africa has found that ADHD is as prevalent on the African continent as in Western countries (Meyer, 2004). Results from the study from South Africa are very similar to those reported in Western countries. Inattention occurred in 3.3% of the investigated children in Limpopo Province. The South African researchers suggest that ADHD is caused by the same fundamental neurobiological processes, probably caused by genetic factors expressed independently of cultural differences. The predominant Western approach to understanding mental disorders is based on a biological perspective and regards primary syndromes as universal and similar across diverse human cultures. The basic question was to what degree behavior and its disturbances are affected by culture.

School system in Ethiopia

Primary education in Ethiopia is normally eight years. Children are supposed to begin school at age of six but different circumstances can make them start at any age. Classes in Ethiopia have children in different ages because of different starting points and the pupils have to achieve a score of at least 50% in order to continue to the next level. At the end of grade eight, pupils take a national Primary School Certificate exam and a two year of general secondary education follows. At the end of grade ten, pupils take the Ethiopian General Education Certificate and can continue to University (www.ethiopia.gov.et/English/MOE/Information). The educational language in the field of this study is Amharic supplemented by English and local language. The different regions can add to the curriculum local subjects to strengthen the traditional culture of the area and the conditions that exist in the landscape. Children learn about local agriculture and trade commerce, traditional dances and songs etc. Educators are working with one subject each even in the first classes and they are strongly controlled by the state curriculum frameworks, including the lesson level. National tests occur every year. If the pupil fails to knowledge level, she/he remains in his grade until goals are achieved. Teachers follow the many pupils performance in accounting ledgers. Class size varies greatly.
4 METHOD

This chapter will describe the study design and how the research was carried out according to research questions and methodological literature. The methods used are both traditional ethnographic methods; participant observations and interviews supplemented by questionnaires. Further there is a presentation of gatekeepers, informants and participating schools. Through the study design, there is a line from the level of organization and group to the individual level. Data collection will be described schematically. Last of the chapter describes the study's credibility, the research role and some ethical considerations.

Methodological starting points; hermeneutic and ethnography

From the two great branches of science, positivism and hermeneutic, the focus of this study has been the latter. Hermeneutic is the most frequent research method within humanities such as culture and civics. The term has its roots in the Greek mythology. Hermes was a young man with a duty to interpret messages of the gods. In the spotlight of this study, the hermeneutic aim is to interpret informants’ perspective of their pupil’s life, and from what is observed in the classrooms. The aim is trying to understand which processes in the children’s lives supports their concentration ability. Hermeneutic studies stress the meeting between people. The driving force in the paper is based on the meeting with pupils both during school observations and how they come up in conversations with school staff. These meetings sought an understanding of the processes taking place during school hours and in context of their lives. For this purpose the ethnographic approach was chosen. The study’s purpose is to identify factors promoting pupils' ability to concentrate. As in all ethnographic studies data is collected on the “field” and processed in reflections and validating interviews which generate renewed observations and interviews completed by questionnaires. Several ethnographic techniques have been used, and according to Alvesson & Sköllberg, (1994) a variety of different technologies, gives a broader and richer content.

In its most characteristic form it involves the ethnographer participating, overtly or covertly, in peoples’ daily lives for an extended time, watching what happens, listening to what is said, asking questions - in fact, collecting whatever data are available to throw light on the issues that are the focus of the research. (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995, p 1)

This study has mostly a qualitative research approach. Qualitative research seeks to clarify a phenomenon in nature or characteristics, while the quantitative research seeks the prevalence and incidence (Widerberg, 2002). At one school a screening of 371 pupils were used and this part of the data collection can be classified as quantitative but was complemented with exploratory interviews and in that way tangled in the qualitative approach. Hammersley and Atkinson (2002) look to the ethnographical research as users of work methods and systems, but lift them analytically and deepen them in theory. Ethnography has its own terminology, such as gatekeepers, field notes, informants etc. and is used in this study. On basis of an ethnographic design I hope to understand and describe the environmental conditions interacting with the child. A good pre-understanding about the research questions, including observation of habit, hopefully is an advantage for the study. The word salutogenesis is frequently used. It was coined by Antonovsky (1991). The term describes an approach focusing on factors that support human health and well-being, rather than on factors that cause diseases.

Design of this study
Three schools were included in the collection of data. Observations were the starting points followed by interviews and individual screening at two of the schools. A survey and interviews were used in the third school. Five validating interviews finished the field work.

**A short description of the settings**

The study was conducted in Awassa, a town with about one million inhabitants. All names of the participators and schools are fictitious. Awassa, in the province of Sidamo, is a fast growing, wide spread city, surrounded by a crowded rural area. People come from all over the country to settle down in this town. The rumour tells about a friendly and peaceful place.

The weather is comfortable in Awassa, mostly 25 degrees Celsius during the year. Some hours of rain, now and then, turns the savannah green and fruitful. Still the wildlife is extremely interesting. Southern Ethiopia is one of the most species-rich areas in the world when it comes to birds. One can enjoy all sorts of them, from the large marabou storks and eagles to small humming on the lakeside promenade, where sea birds and hippos get along with fishermen in their papyrus canoes. The town is developing quickly. New constructions of houses are all over the area, even luxurious hotels. Wealthy Ethiopians build large houses along the lake. The middle class starts to improve economically and even the poorest can see some development as electricity and water routed to their houses. In the rural areas huts are still constructed. The city of Awassa has in fifty years grown from being a village of nomadic herders to a city with about a million inhabitants.

**Investigation schools**

**School number one:**
The first school is a private school, newly built, educating children from kindergarten to grade eight and takes a monthly fee. The school fee is 150 birr, the national currency. The average income of Ethiopians is 190 USD, 1000 birr. (www.gapminder.org)

Most of the pupils are from wealthy families but 10% are from poor families, sponsored by the owner of the school or other donors. Number of pupils in classes varied from 20-40 pupils. Classrooms and expeditions are made of cement. Library, staff rooms and coffee houses are built in traditional way as large, airy huts. The schoolyard is open lawns and two soccer goals.

**School, number two:**
This is a church-operated school for pupils in grade one to three, with intention to give children from poor families a good education. Most of the children are sponsored and get economical help from abroad, paying school fee of 80 birr. The classes have 30-40 pupils. The environment is similar to the previous school.

**School, number three:**
This is a governmental school with no school fee, having classes from grade one to eight. Some classes have 80-100 pupils. The buildings were constructed by support from Sweden in the sixties and have a huge schoolyard for sports and breaks. The data collection consisted of a survey in which ten teachers took their pupils' strengths and weaknesses. 371 pupils in grade five and grade eight were scored.
Informants:

- Headmasters and head teachers: Mrs. Zehai, a young female headmaster of school number I. Mr. Alemo, school director school number II. Mr. Zacharias, head teacher at school number III, former teacher trainer and school developer.
- Children in observed classes.
- Gatekeeper, Mr. Berhanu in Addis Ababa, a coordinator for various humanitarian relief projects and organized practical issues on accommodation etc.

Field Work

Contact with the first school took place before departure. Information about this school was found on the Internet. The other two schools were contacted during field studies in Ethiopia. Out of the observations from school number one and two, teachers and headmasters were interviewed. Five of the observations were suitable for individual screening, by a standardized form: SDQ, translated to the national language, Amharic (See Appendix 4). Ten teachers of the third school were asked to screen the strengths and difficulties of their 371 pupils (see Appendix 6).
Data collection

The data collection was conducted as the model below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School number I.</th>
<th>Six pupils are observed in five classes, followed by interviews and in three cases by Questionnaire SDQ</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ababesh ♀.</td>
<td>Grade 4 Observations, Interview, Questionnaire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Azede ♂.</td>
<td>Grade 6 Observation, Interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Niguse ♂.</td>
<td>Grade 5 Observation, Interview, Questionnaire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haile ♂ /Heruth ♀</td>
<td>. Grade 2 Observation, Interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daniel ♂.</td>
<td>Grade 1 Observation, Interview, Questionnaire</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School number II.</th>
<th>In grade two four pupils are observed and followed up by interviews; two of them more deeply by Questionnaire SDQ.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leah ♀.</td>
<td>Observation, Interview, Questionnaire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yenna ♂.</td>
<td>Observation, Interview, Questionnaire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Johannes ♂.</td>
<td>Observation, Interview, Questionnaire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gabriel ♂.</td>
<td>Observation, Interview, Questionnaire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent validation, Headmaster</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School number III.</th>
<th>Data collection was made by two interviews, one pilot study and one survey with ten teachers. Head teacher Mr. Zacharias is the main informant and one of the ten teachers as well. Five of them are teachers in grade 5 and five in grade 8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interviews and Pilot study</td>
<td>Survey, 371 pupils in grade 5 and 8.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Validation Interview with Head teacher</td>
<td>Validation Interview with social worker and mother of two children: Eve</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Validation Interview with gardener / father of six children: Alemu</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Validation Interview with pupil in grade 10, Jonah ♂</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Observations

The study began with me and my daughter/ research assistant giving the host school a short presentation of ourselves. I introduced the main questions and the purpose of the study and discussed how to implement the observations and how the results would be validated with the informants later. The headmaster provided a review of the school's external framework; number of pupils/teachers, catchments area, teachers’ education, school fees, etc. Observing classes in Ethiopian schools are surprisingly easy. I feared our presence in the classrooms would affect both children and teachers to a greater extent than it did. The observation began with quick information about us and the purpose of our visit in their town. Usually we were greeted with applause and “Welcome Mrs.” in chorus by the pupils. The classrooms were sparsely furnished. The walls were mostly bare cement block walls. Blackboard was used extensively. The teacher filled the blackboard and the children wrote in their notebooks. The sessions were 45 minutes.
long. Children stayed in their seats waiting for next teacher to come. No breaks before lunch. From my work in Sweden I am used to observe individual children at school. It was not a big difference in Ethiopia. After the first acquaintance with the class lesson, individual children were identified and followed more closely. Time tags, to grasp such behaviors as social interaction, attention span and activity level, complemented the field notes. These records were transcribed the same day.

**Interviews:**

Each observation was followed by an interview, which can be categorized as semi-structured, (Kvale, 1997). The interviews followed question forms but allowed new questions to be brought up during the interview as a result of what the interviewee says. The same basic questions were asked to all informants and gave informants equal chance to respond about the same issues, based on both research questions and current observation (see Appendix 3). Besides depth interviews, we heard the informants in natural conversations. Interview responses were included in the query document, directly into the laptop by the secretary. Even me as an interviewer made quick notes which were cleaned up later the same day with reflections on today's field notes. Three different kinds of interviews occurred in the study. The first introduction included the socio-economic situation of pupils and their families, school and class size, teaching conditions etc. The 2nd interview was focused on each case of observation, including an individual screening in five of the cases. Finally the validation interviews were conducted.

**Questionnaires**

**SDQ:** Five of the cases were followed up by questionnaire SDQ “The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire”, (Goodman 1997). It is a two-sided form, screening children’s mental health and exists in versions for the child itself, parents and teachers. SDQ is translated to several languages, even Amharic, the national language in Ethiopia (See Appendix 5). The form contains 25 questions about the child involving five different areas: Hyperactivity/concentration problems, behavioral problems, peer relationship problems, emotional symptoms and any questions about the child's social forces. SDQ is free to use.

**Survey:** We got the Headmaster's permission to conduct the screening of two of the school's team. The survey (See Appendix 6) was tested as a pilot study with Mr. Zacharias. We met the team in our housing. The teachers brought their ledgers where they could follow the pupil’s performance in. A very common type of population research is the two step study which in screening of a wider population is followed by in-depth examination of screen positive cases. Instead of this recommendation, interviews and observation where starting points, then continued with a wider research, survey 371 pupils. Observations and interview results gave deepened understanding but a curiosity of how a larger group of teachers would answer on an anonymous questionnaire aroused. “Survey 371 pupils” is a questionnaire copied from a research of 800 pupils in Karlstad (Kadesjö, 2001) and contains ten Ethiopian teacher’s scoring of 371 pupils at school number III. Each teacher was asked to estimate the first pupils in class. Many classes have over one hundred pupils, but the study contains only the first names on the class list. The questionnaire covers five areas, indicating no problems (0), some problems (1) and major problems (2) for each area and for every child separately.
Problem areas:

- Attention (regardless of activity level of child)
- Social interaction (with other children and adults)
- Learning ability (in general terms and specifically reading and writing)
- Language (comprehension and expression skills)
- Emotion (anxiety-depression or aggressive-acting out behaviors)

Copying the questionnaire (Kadesjö, 2001) was supposed to give an opportunity to compare a group of Swedish school children with an Ethiopian group. I also thought about using the same questionnaire as Desta (2008) but these questions had sharper focus on child psychiatric conditions from a parental perspective, so the Swedish model from Karlstad (2001) suited this research better. After the principal of the school approved ten teachers to participate in the study, head teacher Mr. Zacharias was interviewed on two occasions. The first was to give a picture of the school and its pupils. Then the questionnaire was constructed and a pilot study was conducted with Mr. Zacharias. This turned out to be a good idea when he could be instrumental in the instruction to the other nine, thanks to the pre-understanding he received in the pilot study. The instructions and explanations were translated from English to Amharic.

**Triangulation**

By using different methods of data collection (data-source triangulation), the study extend and accuracy of results increases. With the five validating interviews I have sought to ensure results.

Respondent validation represents one kind of triangulation: the checking of inferences drawn from one set of data sources by collecting data from others. More specifically, data-source triangulation involves the comparison of data relating to the same phenomenon but deriving from different phases of the fieldwork, different points in the temporal cycles occurring in the setting, or, as in respondent validation, the accounts of different participants (including the ethnographer) differentially located in the setting. This last form of data-source triangulation can be extended indefinitely by showing each participant the others’ accounts and recording his or her comments on them (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2002, p 230).

**Ethical views**

The original plan was to follow children both at home and at school for one day, but during our stay we had noticed that though Ethiopian families are very hospitable and friendly, the poor or middleclass families hesitate to ask us home. Halfway in the research it felt like disturbing the integrity of the families so the research plan was changed. Instead two validating interviews with parents and one with a pupil in grade eight were performed. Photography in the participating schools was avoided for various reasons, mainly to avoid disruption of school activities but also to protect informants' identities. All the names of people are fictitious. Survey results from 371 pupils, yielded surprising results, may be due to unfamiliarity reflecting on aspects other than pure knowledge questions. It was tempting to follow-up the survey with observations, validating teachers' responses. This was not conducted, when it could perceive insulting and discrediting not relying on teachers' data. The respondents were informed that participation in the survey is confidential and strictly voluntary and those they, at any time could choose not to participate.
Researchers role

Not having access to the Internet and well-stocked library to the same extent as in Sweden, obviously complicates acquisition of knowledge and interaction with supervisors, etc.

Neither I nor my informants are native English speakers. This made it difficult especially interviewing and prevented in some cases a deeper discussion. The observations were less influenced by the linguistic barrier. Having some knowledge of the Ethiopian language made contact with specially the children, easier.

To visit so-called developing countries is often accompanied by shattering encounters with poverty and the harsh reality that much of the world's population live in. Ethiopia is no exception and gives experiences, many thoughts and emotional broodings: Should beggar be ignored? But the disabled man seems to need my fresh bread more than I do. Street children who are well-developed street smart, having charming conversation in English, shall I give them some coins? Am I encouraging wrong behavior? Is it not better she takes some of the aid community efforts to give these children? Questions such as these takes time from work but it also gives information. Being in an environment that strongly differ from the own, ingrained, tempt to describe phenomena overly exotic or to idealize/reject the phenomenon that emerges from a study like this. I have done my utmost to reduce the effect by daily reflections with my companion. Impressions from excursions, walks around town, conversation over a cup of coffee, etc. gave a broader picture of children's life world and influenced the interpretations.

In Ethiopia, time is measured differently than in the West. When the sun has been up one hour in the morning, Ethiopian watches show one o'clock, our shows seven in the morning. This mean the school starts at two o'clock in Awassa. Of course, it gave rise to one and other misunderstandings. Eight o'clock in Ethiopian time mean two o’clock for us. So we had to check time up properly!

The process of analysis

In ethnography the analysis of data starts in the pre-field phase. The formulation and clarification of research problems are the starting points. “Formally, it is embodied in the ethnographer’s ideas and hunches. And in these ways, to one degree or another, the analysis of data feeds into research design and data collection” (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2002, p 205).

Already in the research description there was a salutogenic approach, which has been the filter through which the study has been processed. After the fieldwork was completed it was time for the hermeneutic work of interpreting data collection. “Memory is an inadequate basis for subsequent analysis. Of course data recording is selective and always involves some interpretation, however minimal” (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2002, p 203). There were strong impressions during fieldwork. Not only influences from the school days had to be processed, but also what happened in the spare time. Excursions by boat on the crocodile sealed water, weddings in the crowded church, coffee ceremonies in homes, everything needed to be processed.
The purpose of qualitative research is according to Widerberg (2002) to generate new ideas, concepts and understanding through a creative and fruitful research process. The hermeneutical spiral crafting knowledge and understanding through again and again attack the research questions.

The raw material was printed; after each day on “the field” reflections and rapid field notes were transformed into “thick prescriptions”. In the analysis phase, these prints have been read over and over again, in order to find answers to the study’s research questions. The raw materials were processed from the first data collection days and affected the next day’s collection. How do children concentrate? What affects their ability? What is noticeable? Will the same thing be seen in interviews as in observations? Some categories stepped forward from the start, some in the middle of the field work and in the final reconciliation interviews highlighted an additional category forward. Actually these categories remained in their shape even after completion of fieldwork, when raw material was processed with color selections and clippings.

**Reliability**

Reliability is the gauge that decides if the investigation actually has measured what the study considered measuring. The word is Latin and means strength. Reliability is measuring the accuracy and trustworthiness of the study. One way of strengthen the validity and reliability of an ethnographic study, is to let the informants of the research take part of and react on the interpretations and result.

The value of respondent validation lies in the fact that the participants involved in the events documented in the data may have access to additional knowledge of the context – of other relevant events, of temporal framework, of others’ ulterior motives, for example – that is not available to the ethnographer (Hammersley & Atkinsson, 1995, p 228).

One of the informants, the head teacher of the Government school changed some details during validation. “Respondent validation represents one kind of triangulation: the checking of interferences drawn from one set of data sources by collecting data from others.” (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995, p 230). Different data collection techniques are used to higher the validity. This data source triangulation hopefully, deepened the results. “One major advantage of ethnographic studies is the possibilities to correct what appears to be doubtful. Ethnographic studies are, especially with the continuous analysis, a research approach that has a naturally “built-in” correction. Uncertainty grows for safety through the analysis” [my translation] (Kullberg, 2004, p 105). I reflected on how informant’s knowledge of the aim of the study affected the outcome of the results. I decided that my informants would be kept informed of the study’s purpose. Already at the first observation the teacher gave the pupils information about why we were there. He urged them to keep the focus on him and nothing else. I wondered if I would affect the children’s behavior and the teachers approach, but the very same lesson, I realized the lesson’s tempo and discipline meant the children reacted to our presence only in minor ways. I chose to stick to the original presentation. The teachers were informed about theories of attention, and why this study was placed in Ethiopia. The salutogenic approach pleased the majority of respondents significantly. The reliability of this study is strengthened by my profession and habit of observation.
5 RESULT

How do Ethiopian children concentrate and what kind of protecting factors can be found in the culture of Ethiopia?

In my search for answers to the questions of this research, factors at different levels of pupils' life emerged. Pupils have expectations from their families and sponsors to perform well in school. The school is governed by national documents, education is strongly controlled. In classes with hundreds of pupils, lessons are detail-controlled by the state. Classes are being driven in a collective process with the teacher as conductor and pupils go side by side in a highly structured school day, mostly free from textbooks and technological equipment. Pupils in Ethiopian classes differ in age but are at the same level of knowledge. In this study both supportive and obstructive factors appeared and will be described below. In the next chapter I will discuss how experiences from those African schools can be contributing to knowledge development in the West. This chapter also includes a short report on the health situation in the area and pupils' use of the herb khat. First, an excerpt from one of the field notes to provide an experience of the environment where the study took place.

A visit to School number II, grade two

School number II is a new built school operated by a local church. The school has 120 pupils out of which 110 are supported by a charity organization. The school day starts with a flag ceremony in the school yard, when the children sing the national anthem and some other songs loudly and rhythmically. During the national anthem, the pupils lined up and stand strictly straight. But when they changed songs, they moved more freely and in time to their clapping hands. At 8.30 am the first of seven lessons begun. Mr. Alemo starts to teach, Leah, Yenna, Johannes, Gabriel and their 34 class mates. The children are encouraged to cross their arms, which quiets the class. The teacher writes sentences on the board. The pupils are expected to fill in missing words and then copy the full sentences in their notebooks. Many of the children are eager to answer. They wave their hands, stretching their bodies as far over the school bench as possible, seemingly desperate to be chosen as the answerer. The lucky one rises. If the answer is incorrect, the pupil sits down and another child gets a try. Those who are right are rewarded, sometimes with loud applause. This class is alert and active; many are really focused. However, some are less capable in staying concentrated. A girl, whom we can call Leah, has a sun bleached yellow sweater and a necklace with white plastic pearl. She is chewing a candy paper. She is noticeable. Her eyes are sparkling and she talks to her fellows now and then. She is catching their attention while constructing a bow from her necklace. Also, she is eager to answer the teacher’s question. When other children get to answer, she whispers the correct solution to them. Another pupil is a boy, Yenna. He is dressed in a school uniform: a pink shirt and a vest. Yenna is frisky and almost crawling on the bench. He is playing with a wooden stick, at the same time as he is struggling to follow the lecture. He gets to read out the task in front of the entire class, standing up, and has some tics while reading. When finished and sitting down, the teacher encourages and even applause him. The tics continue for a short while. Johannes sits at the first line. He is focused and eager to follow the lesson. It is hard not to look at him because his eyes are shining from energy and curiosity. He is often the first to wave his hand for answering. He recites with a high voice. At his side Gabriel is sitting. He is quiet and seems to have difficulties in cope listening and following the lesson. He is agile and changes his body in different positions. When it is too hard for Gabriel, Johannes puts his arms around his shoulders and show him what to read or write.
Supportive factors

This study has a special educational model with the analysis of organization oriented level, followed by group level and finally, at the individual level. Therefore, I will mention international educational goals and national efforts intending to increase public education. This seems to affect both the young and the elderly.

1. Education Revolution

Education has high status in Ethiopia. The authorities strive hard to achieve the UN’s educational goal of 2015, and an/the educational revolution has reached Ethiopia and is visible in the streets and schools of Awassa. Public schools use their buildings well. Teaching is done in shifts; one group of children in the morning, another in the afternoon. The evenings are the adults’ chance to receive education. Pupils in the observed classes gave the impression of high school motivation. Good education is one step from poverty and disease. When searching for international studies with focus on developing countries' school systems, the term "educational revolution" was encountered, especially in reports from UNESCO and other International Aid Organizations.

Over the last decade, consensus has grown about the kinds of changes needed if learning is to occur. More important still, these are not ideas dormant in academic papers or debated at international conferences, but they are being put into practice all over the world, in pilot projects and at the national scale. Nor are the resulting success stories isolated events that would be impossible to replicate in other contexts or cultures. Rather they are practical proof of the ‘education revolution’, whose principles are now broadly understood and shared and whose central elements are emerging in varying configurations around the world. (Bellamy, 1999)

2. Desire and expectation

Pupils have high expectations from their families and in some cases also from sponsors to do well in school. This obviously affects children's self-motivation in their schoolwork. Every morning at the flag ceremony the headmaster makes a speech to the children. He reminds them of the national examinations and their duty to study hard. Children promise in front of the flag to do their best during the school day: "This we owe our families, our sponsors and our country", they shout in chorus before they rush into their classrooms.

The significance of expectations appeared early in the field study and seemed to be an important part in the search of salutogenic factors in Ethiopian schoolchildren's lives. Pupils have high expectations from home to succeed in their studies. Not everyone can deal with the high expectations families have on the young. Mr. Alemo, headmaster from school number II, tells of an eight year old girl:

She was a pupil in our school. It was hard for her to pass exam. She did not like the pressure in school, she would not sit still. We talked to her mother who was equally worried. In the end, she ran away from home and stopped going to school. Today, I see her with other street children here in Awassa, but she runs away from me when I want to talk to her. (Interview, school number II)
3. Security and cohesion

Affection, closeness and affinity are words describing the impression from classroom observations. Children in big classes, sitting tightly on narrow benches, help each other. The classrooms are crowded and the children can hardly move. Their schoolbags and other material are put on a small shelf under their workbench.

Gabriel, a quiet and shy boy of eight years old, is sitting next to Johannes. They are friends and always go together, according to their teachers. When Gabriel loses focus, Johannes puts his arm around his friend. When this does not help, he grabs Gabriel's writing hand and helps him get started, while he himself is very attentive to the teacher's tutoring. (Class Observation VI)

Naturally, the boy with attention difficulties has an assistant friend. In a sparsely equipped school, children are close together in what appears to be an emotionally warm climate. Security and affinity are factors of great importance for the child's ability to absorb knowledge. The family is of high priority in the Awassa region. We met Mrs. Zehai at a cafe in town. She gives us an example of the importance of family life to her. The purpose for the interview was to talk about one of her pupils we met earlier. The interview lasted an hour. We had a good time and wanted to continue an interesting discussion but dinner with family was waiting. It is highly respected in Ethiopia, she told us and even if she enjoys time with us or at other times with her friends, she is always eager to join her family for dinner. The extended family creates strong and healthy children, according to one of the informants, headmaster Mrs. Zehai:

The extended family is a strong family, and creates strong children. Ethiopia in general is a very social society and we really love each other here. We are physical with each other, close, and socially strong. We drink together, we eat together; and the food is organic, from no factories or supermarkets. It is always fresh and homemade. Because of the volcanic areas around, the soil is rich in minerals which affect the food’s nutritive value. That, together with a social life, gives very strong children. Last year, we had pupils from the United States, and they were so weak, probably because of bad food and lack of good social life! (Interview, school number I, observation III).

The extended family seems to provide security and cohesion. In large families the children are sharing space with both cousins and siblings. Children have many to relate to, both adults and peers. To help each other is a matter of survival for many families. The sibling or classmate, who finds it difficult to keep attention for a long and monotonous school day, is supported by other children. Eve, a Swedish social worker, living in Awassa, tells about the strong family-culture. She thinks about the high social competence as a protecting factor, together with the strong connection to the culture within games, rhythm and songs. Let me describe the family situation with a case report.

Jonah is one of my informants. He lives with his family of eight children and their parents. The family speaks two local languages beside Amharic, since the mother is from one culture and the father from another. In addition to his five biological siblings, a young aunt and a cousin live at their compound. The main building is surrounded by outhouse, including bedrooms, a kitchen and a barn. In the garden fruits and vegetables are grown and the family is basically self-sufficient. The properties around the compound are owned by the extended family: grandfather, cousins, uncles and aunts. The large family often helps out with cooking, farming and constructions. Jonah is in the same class as two of his cousins. They sit together and help each other with their studies. He shares a room with one of them. His younger sister is musically talented as her mother and several of the family. She learns traditional songs and dances from both cultures. Television broadcasts daily
language shows from different parts of the country. She learns from the TV and the elderly in the family. The family is the financial strong. They are good farmers and active in political and social life. (Case report “Jonah”)

All children are not in similar situations; some are from families who see the country's development as a threat to the ancient society and as threats to the family's support. Some children have to support their families. Ababesh is a girl in grade 4, school number I. According to the SDQ form, Ababesh is scored high on concentration problem and is restless, overactive and cannot sit still for long time. On the other hand she is helpful and has friends. From the questionnaire one can see that the teachers score high on her problems with attention span high. It is hard for her to get good marks, so school gives her extra support. We are after observation in her class discussing her situation:

Mrs. Zehai: Ababesh is a sponsored pupil. Mostly those pupils do not work as hard as pupils with parents who pay the school fee themselves. She does not have toys and recreation time at home, so she is using school time as playing time. She does not even learn enjoying. After school, she goes directly with her mother to the market and work all day. Her family is poor. Her mother supports them as a saleswoman at the market. We give her extra teaching support, because she does not make her homework and we know she receives no help from home. (Interview, school number I, connected with observation 1)

4. Training at the appropriate level

Pupils are in the class they have passed entrance for. Already in kindergarten, the children do the test. They must be able not only to know the Ethiopian alphabet but also the Latin, before they can begin grade one. This means, in class pupils with the same prior knowledge are taught but they are of differing ages. In rural area and in poor families children's workforce is needed. They are placed in school when parents think it's appropriate. Daniel and Yenna are both described as boys with great difficulty to sit still and behave in a school-friendly way. They were both a couple of years older than their classmates, and perhaps this helped them to do as well as they did.

5. Collective learning processes

Structure and predictability are factors affecting one's ability to concentrate. Ethiopian lessons are collective. The pupils only during brief moments with, for example, a mathematical task or when they work independently during an art lesson self-working. Maybe this is due to lack of teaching materials. The teacher has one book, from which data is taken and written on the board. Teacher guides the children through the lesson. Executive functions as shifting (change focus), inhibition (avoid undesirable stimuli) and monitoring (up-dating of information stored in the memory) are controlled by teachers while Swedish pupils are expected to carry out these functions themselves to a greater extent. Even less attentive Ethiopian pupils could stay focuses in the collective learning process. In many Western schools individual training has replaced the group training operations. This favours mature children with good attention and is a disadvantage to those with difficulties. Individual approach requires pupils who have a drive and motivation for good performance. It favours pupils with good attention ability and well-developed executive functions (Ingvar, 2010). In Ethiopian schools, teachers control lessons and guide the pupils almost every minute. These favour children with week attention. Skill training is the obvious priority. The children recite and some teachers manage to combine rhythm and pedagogy in a rap-style teach-style! A science lesson in grade two, started in this way: Teacher: “Today we shall learn about
flowers”. The class repeated: “We shall learn about flowers”. The teacher continues: “Flowers have stamens and pistils”, the class shouted: “Stamens and pistils!” (Grade 2, school II).

The pupils who "are surrounded by many" has from infancy been taught to interact in groups, the social drive seems natural for them. Since the dominating parts of the lessons are controlled by the teacher and since copying verbally and written is a common method of learning, the pupils are kept occupied and active.

Nigoze, school number I, was one of them who flourished. He seemed very motivated and curious.

This class has Mr. Salomon as teacher, the lesson gives information in sexual matters; the female and male sexual organs. There was no embarrassment or giggling in the classroom. English was mixed with Amharic during the lecture. Quite many of the children are distinguisingly concentrated and observant, especially Nigoze, a boy in a shabby school costume. This boy is alert and focused but at the same time seemingly relaxed and joyful. He did not miss anything of the lecture, often answering questions, leading the recitation and now and then helping classmates. (Observation III, in school number I).

Johannes in school number II is another highly motivated pupil, receiving intellectual stimuli from the interesting lecture, while others were occupied with the writing/copying tasks.

The strongly teacher-led and collective education also upholds the concentration of weak children, through long lesson. Much of school days in Awassa consist of reciting. This requires minimal concentration, little enough for the attention- weak children to be able to concentrate. Meanwhile, the teacher gives a lecture on the more complex things that are not recited or written. Those who have capacity to focus on more than the basic task (to copy or recite) can absorb this information. The strong teacher-management system requires a focus on the subject. Some children in the classes observed occasionally lost focus. Leah played with her toy phone and Yenna was distracted by an insect, but the teacher and the class mates drove forward the lesson with recitation and copying and Yenna and Leah could pick up the lesson and follow it.

At schools, physical punishments of children are prohibited since five years, but still occur in homes. Adults have a naturally authoritarian position and the children obey, sometimes submissively. Focus and silence is expected in the classroom. The discipline keeps even the restless children quiet and non-disturbing to others. Below are some examples from a pedagogues’ point of view:

The owner (of this school) is an Afro-American with roots in Ethiopia. His slogan is “Knowledge by freedom”. A main idea for his pedagogic is to use the pupils’ motivation instead of punishment. The older pupils get exercise books and pencils as reward for good behavior, while the younger children get stickers (Interview with headmaster of school number I).

“If we are to compare with school number I, the children seem to be less controlled in School number II. They could, to some extent, get away with chatting and throwing objects in the classroom. When it got too far, however, the teacher could get a bit rough. Some children appeared to be afraid of being slapped. Moderate physical punishment did occur, even though it is by law forbidden. One of the teachers had a whip that never touched the children, but threatened them. A couple of times we saw a teacher grip a kid in the ear.” (A field note from school number II).
There is a late-comers problem. They might miss the first lesson. For example; if someone is late, they will miss the first lesson. They will go to the school gate, register that they are late, and it will be recorded. Parents will be called, and told about that their child is late coming. They will sign a paper and promise their children will not be late. (Interview with Head teacher in school no 3)

Obstructive factors

The wider survey from school number III gave a dark picture of children’s situation in Awassa. Collection of data now included more obstructive factors such as poverty, illness and traditional beliefs. The intention of this part of the data collection was to obtain teachers’ image of a larger amount of pupils with a focus on five main areas, attention ability was one of them. Questions and problem areas were copied from a Swedish study (Kadesjö, 2000). The head teacher was interviewed twice before his colleagues were involved, one of them as a pilot study to prove the usability of a questionnaire.

Result of Study I: Karlstad, grade one and Study II: Awassa, grade five and eight:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Problem area</th>
<th>Study I Major problems</th>
<th>Study I Some problems</th>
<th>Study I No problems</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attention</td>
<td>13 %</td>
<td>18 %</td>
<td>69 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning Ability</td>
<td>13 %</td>
<td>20 %</td>
<td>67 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Interaction</td>
<td>8 %</td>
<td>13 %</td>
<td>79 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language</td>
<td>5 %</td>
<td>15 %</td>
<td>80 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotions</td>
<td>4 %</td>
<td>9 %</td>
<td>87 %</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A little more than one in eight (13%) of the 7 year old children in this study were perceived by their teachers in Karlstad as having major attention deficits. In study II the pupils are older and in another setting. Nearly one in five Ethiopian pupils is rated by their teachers as children with disturbed attention (major problems). Only 37% of the 371 pupils were judged to be without emotional problems, compared with 87% of the Swedish. Mr. Zacharias believes that poverty and disease account for a lot of these figures. Overly harsh discipline can also provide emotional difficulties. Teachers in Sweden scored more of problems in area “Learning ability” and “Language”. Ethiopian school system has a strong knowledge focus and documents the results of tests in ledgers or record books, subject by subject. All courses give points from grade 1, which adds up to grade 10. From an early age children are tested and may move up as they pass the knowledge tests. This may be one of the reasons the teachers assess pupils not having difficulty in language and learning ability as Swedish teachers scored their pupils. However, the Awassa teachers said they are unaccustomed to think about attention, social interaction and emotion problems etc. The high rates of response option “some problems” may show this uncertainty. Large classes make it difficult of course for them reflecting and follow up on these issues. This may affect the answers. During interview the teachers group described the situation for pupils in special need.
Children with special needs

Several of the children seen were children in need of special assistance. It appears that pupils in the observed classes exhibit difficulties and abilities with attention/concentration in same amount as in the Swedish classes. Learning disabilities occur as well. How do schools in Awassa deal this situation?

For disabilities there is no special class. In some cities there are special schools. Here disabled and able kids are in same class. Some have difficulties walking, seeing and hearing. We have a girl in wheelchair, but the school is not built for wheelchairs but because of her, her class will be on the first floor. (Interview school number III).

Mentally retarded children are not pupils in this school, they are in government schools. Less gifted children, those with social problem or learning disabilities get their education in government schools. Teachers can attend courses for special education at the University of Awassa. I have attended this course. In the Capital of Ethiopia there’s a doctor, a specialist for children with learning disability but such knowledge is not to be found in Awassa, 300 km from Addis Abeba. We have the responsibility to communicate with the parents and try to find good solutions for the children. The main idea of this school is to keep the children in school. We have a little boy in one of the first grades, who cannot attend the lessons because of behavioral problems. He gets his education in his home, three times a week. Every afternoon he comes to school for sports and leisure activities (Interview school number I).

Another one of the youngest pupils in the private school have emotional troubles, reflected in defiance and aggression, according to his teachers:

Daniel is a boy sitting at the back of the room with some of his classmates. He appears to be alert and curious. We understand that Daniel is the boy described as: “a boy who is sprightly, who need limits and who maybe is mentally retarded”. When his arms have been waving for a while, one of the teachers approaches him and tells him to cross his arms, which Daniel does. He continued to be listening and alert. His headmaster tells us more about his situation: You see, during his first months in preschool he improved very well. The environment was new for him and he could listen and follow instructions. But the more he got familiar to the school situation the more disobedient he became. It was really hard for us to control him. We contacted his parents and tried to find ways to control him in school as well as at home. He did not want to eat. This was a great problem and they took him to a hospital in Addis Abeba, to a special psychiatrist and now receive medicine from there. I have no idea what kind of medicine it is. But they told the parents not to leave him alone, either at school or at home, that is all I know. This of course gives us some trouble. It is hard for him to play with other kids, because everything has to be in his way. He keeps to himself and has no friends. We are concerned about him of course. (Observation V, Grade1)

The SDQ result for Daniel scored restlessness, over activation, not sitting still for long time, easily distracted, poor attention span and problems with friends. During observation he was not disturbing much. When he did so, his teacher asked him to cross his arms and listen. He then was attending lesson, listening in a curious way. He was the tallest of the children in his class. As children in Ethiopia attend the class they pass the tests for, it could be so that Daniel is a couple of years older than most of his mates and his age and maturation favour him.

One of the informants wanted a more creative approach in Ethiopian schools. Mr. Zacharias is reflecting:

In the 60’s I co-operated with the Swedes who had this mission. I saw how the Swedish teacher taught missionary children. One morning I saw from my classroom how she had lessons in the
sandbox. The children would build a village in the sand. I realized later that what she did was to let the children solve practical problems together. We discussed this. I was surprised. Our children don't have these facilities. Your children can get whatever they want, and going on with their mind, not guided. But here, the kids must learn! They don't play much in school, the rest time is short. They only have time to go to the latrine. I think it is good for children to play. They are experiencing how to work, they get wide minded, know how to make things” (Interview, school number III).

Mr. Zacharias is describing the frustration about pedagogy far too narrow-minded using copying and repeating. “Our children miss independent thinking, they will not be good at solving problems”, he complains.

The Convention [UN] Convention of the rights of the child] also provides a framework by which the quality of that education must be assessed. If children are required to sit in an overcrowded classroom and parroting what the teacher says; their learning and developmental needs are clearly not being fulfilled. The Convention guides us, therefore, in article 29, towards a more child-centered model of teaching and learning, one in which pupils participate actively, thinking and solving problems for themselves, and in this way developing the self-esteem that is essential for learning and decision-making throughout life (Bellamy 1999).

Concentration ability in a gender perspective

In the Swedish school debate, boys mainly tend to gravitate towards an ideal where knowledge is not a high priority (Ingvar 2010). In Ethiopia the inverse relationship was observed. Boys are motivated to study more and dominate in higher education, according to informants; Mr. Zacharias and two teachers at school number I. Society's expectations for boys as supporters of the family, impact on motivation and school behaviour. Girls are expected to acquire a husband during her teens. Already during the first days of class observations, girl's inattention was noted compared with boys. Here's an excerpt from an interview at school with two teachers, showing how the expectations of boys and girls affects their motivation for school work and higher education.

We are sitting in a small hut in the playground. It is normally used by the teachers as a coffee house. We intended to talk about Heruth, a girl in grade five, but the interview ended up also discussing the very interesting subject of gender differences. In the lower grades boys and girls are equally competitive, says Teacher Salomon. The older girls, over ten years old, are losing their interest in studies. Girls tend to marry young, as soon as they are physically mature. Especially girls from the rural areas do. They are giving birth at the age of 14 – 15 and even when they are younger. In the rural as well as in the urban areas, females are not expected to join the social life outside the family. They are supposed to spend their spare time at home. Therefore, they are eager to find a fiancée.

[...]The national exam is after grade 10, and many girls drop out before that. Many women drop out before or during University. Because of that, we have less educated women than men in Ethiopia. (Interview/observation IV, school number I)

Several of our informants spontaneously points out the girls' situation in school and home. This is particularly highlighted by the informant who teaches in a public school with pupils from poor families in the city's outskirts. He worries about the situation of girls in the family. They are expected to take considerable responsibility for their brothers and fathers and carry a heavy workload in the household. Many girls are late to school because they have to prepare breakfast
and lunch box to their families. Instead of studying at the library, they clean up and wash at home. Mr. Zacharias explains:

Let me tell you about myself. I used to come home after work at school. I sat in my chair with my palms up, waiting for my wife to come and wash them with water and soap. She washed my hands and feet. Then I was served food. I did not react in many years. Than my youngest child, our only daughter began to emulate with her mother as model. She washed her five brothers' hands and feet as her mother washed mine. I did not want to see her do so. I tried to get my sons more involved in household work, but realized the futility of this unless I set a good example. From that moment I started to take care of myself. My wife and I make dinner together. On Saturdays, I wash my own clothes and our sons wash their. Today, my daughter is sixteen and on to higher educatio [---]I have been teaching a long working life, worked on school improvement at the regional level and at Teachers College. I had a high salary and a car of my own, which is a rare luxury in rural Ethiopia. I realized that my six children needed a father who was home more often, so I took service in a government school near my home. If males in this country are changed in their minds, the families can change and also the whole country.” (Interview, School number III).

Health situation

Those families who can grow their own food or can afford to shop at the local market are eating healthy and high energy food. The soil around the Awassa Lake is rich in minerals and gives high yields, sometimes up to three a year. In the observed ten classes most of the children seemed to be in a good health condition. They appeared like enjoying the lectures, and none of the so far observed children (about 180 pupils) gave an impression of being depressed or sick in some way. Some informants pointed to healthy diets and strong cohesion in the family. Teachers from the government school give a darker picture of the health situation in Ethiopian Schools, telling about children with diseases and lack of food.

Mr. Zacharias: Some of our pupils do not have enough food. In our school there is one government organization, feeding poor children and organizations such as “Compassion” and “Mary Joy” gives clothes, washing materials, oils and some grains and other things. Helped parents more easily send the kids to school. So there are some problems with nutrition. Children without parents, get help from organizations, churches and “people with good spirits”. Malaria problem is very serious around Awassa. You know children may say “I’m sick” in the middle of class, and I allow them to go. When they go to the clinic, malaria is found. Also typhoid is found. I think the cause is that children are not getting enough food. They are so easily attacked by these kinds of diseases. In the rain season there will be flood, and malaria eggs will be hatched. Traditionally they call the malaria mosquitoes the yellow one (brain malaria) and the small one the general malaria. Brain malaria makes them cry, hard head ache. Some religious people just pour water on them and call on God. But the kids are not attacked by evil spirits, just malaria. They are even chained some times, because they get panicked from the pain. With medicine they are easily cured. It costs about 10 birr (half 1 USD) or 30 birr for a new American medicine, which is difficult for some of the children to pay. Malaria and typhoid are seasonal diseases. Then the pupils are sometimes becoming sick because of fainting. They just fall down. Later when we ask them, they tell us he/she did not eat breakfast. Also epilepsy, which will let go of the child after some hours. Some pupils, who are coming from outside of town, also have different types of diseases. But only few of them are really sick. (Interview school number III)

I asked my informants about the HIV situation in their schools. In the three schools included in the study, none of the pupils were reported to be HIV-positive. Only few pupils in the study come from families affected with HIV. “Of course sick parents are not able to work, so they are helped by others, school and other communities will help children. They are free from every fee; there are clubs in school that feeds these children, for example a cup of tea and a loaf of bread,
not much, but charity organisations as SOS gives money to the school administration for this cause” (Interview school number III). Furthermore, there are self-help groups for HIV-infected mothers of small children. Today there are disease-modifying drug for HIV disease, accessible to poor people. The state has an outreach to the affected families so that children may receive a reasonable treatment.

**Attention ability and Khat**

Khat or Qat (Catha edulis) is a plant cultivated in East Africa and The Middle East and has been consumed as a part of social life, as coffee-drinking in Western Countries. Chewed in moderation, khat reduces fatigue, appetite and increases attention ability. It contains a number of chemicals, among which are two controlled substances, cathinone and cathine. Chewing leaves gives an amphetamine-like effect. There are side effects of both chemical medication and use of herbs, such as sleeping problems, weight loss etc. One of the informants, Jonah, is a pupil in grade eight. He talks about classmates having problems with staying alert during long lessons:

> Today everyone is talking about studying, but about half are talking more than concentrating. They play during the lecture, go out, whisper, and so on. But the teachers have good discipline. Some chew the herb Khat in the evenings and nights since khat has a stimulating effect. Their sleeping habits shift and they get un-concentrated and sleepy during the day instead. Others chew carefully during the school day to stay awake and alert. The teachers know about this but pretend that they do not see. It is accepted in the culture but not legally. I think approximately 10-20% of all pupils in my class are chewing khat regularly, mostly during break. They start when they are nine - ten years. It is growing in most gardens in the village (Interview with Jonah)

This can be seen as a form of self-medication, comparable to the stimulant drugs Western children with attention deficit may have. Jonah says the users know about side effects such as weight loss, sleeping problem, palpitation etc. Unfortunately, khat-chewing was not discusses with us until the two last interviews, shortly before the fieldwork was completed.

**Summary**

This chapter attempted to highlight the positive and supportive factors for children’s ability to concentrate. In Ethiopia, the education has high status. Good performance in school can make the step from poverty possible. The children have expectations from society, their families and sponsors to perform well in school. Children are often raised in large families. During the observations of classes quiet cooperation and friendly support was common. Children having difficulties in keeping focus got help from friends sitting close. Collective learning processes dominated teaching in classes with pupils of different ages but at almost the same knowledge level.
6 DISCUSSION

In this chapter, I will discuss how the ideas and experiences the study resulted in, became visible for me. The salutogenic approach, which was appreciated by many of the informants in the field, highlighted some factors but hid others. During the data collection and in particular after the validating interviews I had to correct the salutogenic approach and also include factors which were seen as prohibitive.

Literature studies, together with talks, interviews and observations clearly enhanced my understanding of the processes interacting with attention ability. Complex brain processes interact with everyday situations. Responses and treatment in the child's environment affect biological structures. The impact of social competence became obvious while observing children helping each other to stay focused during long sessions. Some of the findings were expected, and easier to transfer from one context to another. There are four areas in the study I want to highlight, which can inspire teachers and parents. Some findings were surprising, complex and difficult to apply in a Western context. By locating the study to Ethiopian schools, factors that otherwise are taken for granted, become visible as the importance of structures and routines in collective learning processes. “Self-medication” appeared as surprising news.

There are also difficulties conducting an ethnographic research like this one. It will finally be discussed in this chapter. The results and how they can be implemented in Swedish schools will be discussed. Further I will discuss methods and how results emerged in relation to previous research and literature. Ethical dilemmas, difficulties and opportunities in the researcher role will be illuminated. Finally, I reflect on further educational and medical research initiatives in the field of attention opportunities/difficulties.

I have sought answers to research questions from a special education perspective, looking at various levels of the children’s life. During the analysis process it was apparent how tendency at society level benefit education. Education goals are transformed in every day studies by teachers and headmasters. This levels importance was more obvious than I expected.

High expectations from both society and family

Children in Ethiopia have high expectations to perform well in school, according to informants, from their families on the first hand but also from the society. National/international policy documents were visible during the fieldwork, the teachers related frequently to them. I interpreted this as a kind of expectation from different arenas in the children’s life. Importance of expectations has been difficult to substantiate in literary studies, which also Ingvar (2010) notes. In sports science there are a lot of research on motivation and expectations.

The conscious or unconscious expectations teachers have of a pupil can affect his behavior and performance (the self-fulfilling prophecy) Success is not only based on the teacher having good expectations of pupils or not. But on the basis of what one knows, one can say that without pedagogue positive expectation there is almost never good results [my translation] (Jenner, 2004 s.85).

In many countries, good education is often the only way out of misery and poverty, both for society and for individuals. I think this is perhaps the major reasons for Ethiopian children having high motivation to study.
Motivation as an important factor in learning is well studied (Hedin & Svensson, 1997)

I imagine, however, motivation as a phenomenon with many supporting functions, where expectations play one of the roles. The families, and in some cases also sponsors, makes sacrifices for the education of their children.

Giving education a higher status hardly allows itself to be done on the school floor. This calls for efforts at other levels of society. School issues are high on the political agenda even in Sweden. Learning goals have higher priority even in the early school years and are becoming more visible in the new Swedish Education Act which comes into force in 2011. The situation in our schools is debated extensively both in newspapers and in professional literature on the results of for example the PISA studies. Among other things, status of the educators and education are considered to play a significant role. The concept of "Education Revolution" (Bellamy, 1999) was new to me. It is not mentioned in the Swedish school debate as far as I know, but its importance to the Ethiopian pupils' school motivation was clear. To live in a society where education has a high status gave a visible impact in the classrooms.

**A collective learning process**

Ethiopian pupils are frequently skill-trained. The collective teaching situation, conducted by the teachers, was activating by the teachers and activating for many of the children during the observations. Everyone could recite and copy from the blackboard. Sometimes I myself was a part of the children's recitations! A collective learning situation is obviously more difficult in the Swedish school system since children are in age-grouped classes but can be organized in such ways so the pupils are stimulated regardless of intellectual level. I have seen the same kind of education in Italian schools. The teacher draws and writes on the blackboard and the children copy, while the teacher lectures. There are, of course, both positive and negative effects of this method. The advantage is that all can be active and achieve a reasonable result. Some children may use several senses simultaneously and are stimulated both auditory, visually and in their fine motor skills. Others need a one-sided intellectual training. Ethiopian classroom have perhaps too great emphasis on copying and recitation, as Mr. Zacharias pointed out but the collective teaching situation was activating for especially those with difficulties to focus. Some of the children could easily follow the basic level of the lesson. They had mental space left for the more advanced part of the teacher's lesson.

What is missing in creativity and problem solution perhaps is gained in structure and predictability. This benefits children with less concentration ability. Children who can rely on a safe classroom routine and well known structure have mental space and energy for learning. A well-documented and well known educational phenomenon is the automation’s importance for teach (Ingvar, 2010). Automated knowledge in areas such as math, language, social studies, etc. release mental capacity and does not take place from working memory. Energy is left for further learning. Structure and predictability are affecting pupil's ability to concentrate and is recommended for pupils with attention deficit. This is a support for all and can be combined with methods that promote problem solving and creative expression. As we saw in the literature review many researchers, for example, Green (2001), Ingvar (2010), Barkley (1997) Kadesjö (2010) and Gillberg (2005) recommend a teaching method with predictability and structure. This can easily be done in a collective learning situation so common in Ethiopian school system.
Confirmation and belonging

To be surrounded by many classmates seems to give Ethiopian children a sense of trust and togetherness. This was a factor I expected before the study. During my visits to the country I have found the social competence as a prominent feature in Ethiopian culture. During a walk in the town of Awassa, we met a group of pupils in their teens. They became curious and wondered what brought us to Awassa. We began by mentioning the wildlife, the beautiful scenery ... “and our attitudes, our culture, right?” stopped us a girl. “We are known our social competence, "she laughs while her arms are surrounding her friends. Often one can see men walk hand in hand and women who embrace, on their way to job and schools. The physical closeness seems to provide safety and security. Security and affinity are of great importance for the child's ability to absorb knowledge. Confirmation and having positive “school ties” is a salutogenic factor, Kadesjö (2010) stresses the importance of this factor:

[---] create a positive school-relation; so the children experience school as important and feel that what you do, leads to success, estimated by the child itself and others. At school, children need therefore, meet people who care about them, conveys acceptance, systematically encourage the positive behaviour and gives them security. [My translation] (Socialstyrelsen, 2010-3-6, p 48)

Living in large families has both advantages and disadvantages, especially for girls it may be a conservative force in their development. The positive aspects are obvious and frequently referred to by the informants as important factors of children's wellbeing. The healthy life style with locally produced and homemade food is other factors.

Self-medication

The presence of "self-medication" was nothing I expected to find. In an African village, far from neuropsychiatric diagnosis, children self-medicate themselves by leaves they pick in their garden. According to one of the informants, about ten percent chew khat to be able to concentrate during long and monotonous lessons. The adults use khat when they need to increase their attention and perseverance. “The best drivers are the ones who chew khat” explained one of our friends when I nervously noticed the driver to instantly chew the herb. Young people chewing Khat in the evenings stay awake long and has a hard time to fall asleep. This disturbs their awareness in school. Pupils, chewing while having breaks, believe to attend better during the lessons. Extensive use of Khat gives heart palpitations and insomnia, symptoms similar to the chemical drugs. Unfortunately, the habit is a huge social problem in some areas of East Africa because many are trapped in addiction. In western countries children with ADD/ADHD can get medical help from medicine like Retaline, Concerta and Strattera etc. These drugs can help them with their attention ability.

My results compared with three other studies

Surprisingly many of the pupils in Awassa seemed to be healthy and prosperous. Desta (2009), reached the same result; In interviews parents scored far fewer children with psychiatric troubles than reported from other countries. Desta says it is uncertain whether the incidence is actually as low as it appeared in the study or if it can be seen as the parents are reluctant to report weaknesses in their children. Against these results are “Survey 371 pupils” from School number III. I questioned if the teachers reported the opposite way, namely too problem-oriented. Teachers reported 2/3 of the class having (Major/some) trouble with attention compared with 1/3 of the Swedish children (Kadesjö, 2001). However, it is difficult to compare those studies, since the age differs and perhaps the teachers interpret the questions differently. Major/some
problems with Attention might be translated as “unacceptable behaviour”. Teachers in Awassa scored very rarely pupils with difficulties in language and learning. This can be interpreted in different ways; the pupils have to pass tests before moving to next grade, so they are almost at the same level of knowledge. Another explanation can be that the difficulties will not be visible in a school where the demands for self-produced performance in school are few.

ADHD is as prevalent on the African continent as in Western Countries (Meyer, 2004). The same results are observed in classrooms in Awassa. It was, in the narrow bench rows, children who with similar difficulties as those found in Swedish classrooms, diagnosed in the neuropsychiatry field. But with a pedagogy that provides the ability to fall into the recitation these difficulties are not shown to the same extent. Being "surrounded by many” can provide support and assistance to the children with low attention span. The Ethiopian school culture, where children are sitting closely and perform essentially the same thing, can certainly be a disincentive for some but for Gabriel, it was helpful to have Johannes as “a personal friend assistant”.

**What can we in the West learn from the schools in the study?**

Increasing the status of education might be a help for all children and can be expressed in different levels of the society; from teacher training system, educator's salary to family's expectations of their children’s performance at school.

The collective learning process has a clear positive impact on children's attention in Ethiopian schools. There is a long tradition of skills training and teacher lead lessons in Western schools. In recent decades, individual-centred pedagogy has improved. Pupils are seeking knowledge by themselves. These two branches in pedagogy, the collective-oriented and the individual-oriented, may well be combined. Structure and predictability are important components of pupils' ability to concentrate. It was found in the study and is documented in the pedagogical as well as medical research by scientists such as Iglum (2008), Barkley (1997) and Kadesjö (2010).

Confirmation and belonging were one of the three main areas in this studies search for salutogenic factors for children’s ability to pay attention. It is close to the second area; collective learning processes but underlines the importance of relationships. In Awassa the children spent their time together without competition of computer games, sites on the web and different sport activities far from the neighbourhood. Schoolmates played together on streets and in their compounds. No one drove them to an arena at the other side of town. Mostly they lived very close to each other. Spending more time together with family and close friends makes social ties grow stronger and deeper. As I could see it gives the children security and a good social competence.
Summary

The purpose of this research was to study children’s attention abilities and to investigate supporting factors for pupil’s possibilities to concentrate as well as to determine the usefulness of these experiences in a Swedish school. In the discussion of results, four key salutogenic factors for pupil’s ability to concentrate have been highlighted:

- Expectations, from both society and families encouraged the pupils to do their best.
- A collective learning process supported important parts of the executive functions.
- Learning at appropriate level helped pupils with problems in the area of attention/concentrate to follow the lessons.
- Cooperation and fellowship seemed to provide security and happiness, and thus, in turn increased the children’s possibilities to pay attention and absorb knowledge.

Method Discussion

The framework of the scholarship, two months’ stay in the field, was well suited for an ethnographic study. As Foucault notes, “it is only when we consider our thoughts and ideas through anything other - and especially the strange and unknown - that we can produce conditions that would otherwise not easily be visible to us” [my translation] (Foucault, 1984/1986).

Access to the field was to some account given by my background. Many wished their particular school would be the subject of study and the informants’ helpfulness was found in both the professional and the private arena. This fact was included in the reflections. Goodson (2003) believe that the selection of informants is important. He does not recommend people who are overly sympathising with the researcher. This recommendation is followed in just school number I. The main informants at school number II and III were familiar to me. There was also a risk of “exoticism” and to overly positive interpretations. This I have tried to work away through daily reflections with my assistant and informants. On ethnographic sense, I lived close to my informants. Living a long period in a culture is usually considered to increase reliability in ethnographic studies and helps the researcher to become part of the informants’ everyday lives. The first three weeks we stayed in the middle of town, in the same compound where I once spent my childhood. It felt like having a natural affinity to the area. On the streets of Awassa, we were soon recognized. The children who lived next door to us, we met at school. In the afternoon we met them at the compound, watched their games, heard when they were called inside in the evening etc. Informal interviews, mixed with spontaneous conversation during coffee ceremonies and family celebrations, have influenced the interpretation process.

The value of pure sociability should not be underestimated as a means of building trust. Indeed, the researcher must often try to find ways in which ‘normal’ find social intercourse can be established. This requires finding some neutral ground with participants where mundane small-talk can take place (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2002, p 89).

Previous knowledge of the area's social structures and language facilitated the work and made me fairly quickly go into the field work. Making a study in a completely different cultural context
than one is used to, requires some time to get used to social codes, a new language, new sounds and smells. This time was shorter for me and I quickly came into the field work. Starting with the privileged school, I can see retrospectively as an advantage. Although the teachers there are working in circumstances other than I'm used to, it was the school whose conditions are different at least from the Western. The pupils come from wealthy homes; the size of classes was in some cases, comparable to Swedish conditions. In this school, I was not known in advance. If this increases the reliability of the material from observations and interviews, I cannot say but it could be so. In school number II I stayed in only one class, compared with five classes in the first school. This helped me to observe and get to know Yenna, Leah, Johannes and Gabriel better than the children at school number I.

The results from “Survey 371” were difficult to interpret. I suspected, when analyzing the results, certain insecurity about the issues of attention, emotions and social interaction since the teachers seemed to estimate too much difficulties. Do we mean the same thing when talking about for example attention difficulties? I thought about not including this part of the study but changed my mind since the survey and the interviews gave new information. It appeared in the validating interviews with particular Mr. Zacharias that the results were consistent with his and his colleagues' views. Desta (2008) suspect an overly optimistic estimation, me myself - too pessimistic. I choose to leave the suspicions aside and take the responses as they appeared. I interviewed Mr. Zacharias again. He was not surprised, but told us his and his colleagues responses corresponded to pupils' reality. He pointed out the difficult circumstances in particular girl’s lives and how this affects their learning situation. During my fieldwork time, I was still puzzled over the answers and was considering making observations in some of the classes. I refrained, however, as this model was not introduced from the beginning.

**Difficulties and possibilities during the study**

In Awassa there are internet cafes but the availability of electricity varied and often it was turned off by the middle of a search. This complicated the retrieval of information. Not having access to libraries, Internet access and contact with my supervisor, has been partly impeding the process. At one time I had contact with my supervisor on the phone and a couple of times via email. But it has also contributed using the available channels are used frequently such as daily reflections in field notes and with repeatedly discussions with my daughter and informants in the field. Libraries were found at colleges but there had only the pupils in the college access. To bring a large amount of literature on a journey is not easy. In my luggage however, was the most urgent method books and literature. Processing of field notes and analysis was for those reasons, deferred to my return. I had to handwrite the questionnaire for “Survey 371” (See Appendix 6).

The survey questions from the computer could not be printed. Several local internet cafes were tested without success. Probably the Word versions were not compatible with each other. Eleven surveys where therefore prepared by hand.

Eight weeks in the field resulted in a lot of time for observations at schools, so the data collected, were extensive. The first interview was recorded on a Dictaphone. However, this was abandoned when the informants were distracted by noises and became too stiff in relation to the technology. Instead, field notes from both secretary and researcher were used. Questions arose when the raw material was processed.
Going back to informants was impossible. It is even difficult communicate with email, as electricity is not working as we are used to. Neither I nor my informants are native English speakers. The interviews were conducted in a language that none of us fully mastered. This was a hindrance of digging deeper into the material. A condition of the scholarship was to write the essay written in English. This has given me great challenges. Mostly the text has been written in English but some parts in Swedish and translated afterwards. To my help, I have had my daughter and dictionaries as well as different translation sites on the web. Finally the text has been proofread by an English spoken friend. I have some prior understanding in the national language in Ethiopia so I could somewhat follow the lessons and the interpretations from English to Amharic. This was estimated mainly by the children and made it easier for small talk with people. I could keep up with lessons a bit and even communicate to some extend with the children in their language.

During the data collection a series of ethical dilemmas occurred, Ethiopia has for twenty years been marked by the abuses of a totalitarian government abuses. Several of the older respondents were afraid of being "exposed" and make sure that their identity could not be traced despite the interviews never was political in nature. The younger informants wanted to be quoted with real names but I have chosen fictitious names to all. In the original research plan, my idea was to follow at least on child both at school and leisure time to observe the event in the child's life-world. This was abandoned as I told earlier. A foreigner coming to schools in Awassa is not part of everyday life. I was careful not to disclose my curiosity about individual children and pointed out to respondents in schools not to identify individual children with gestures or name. This was a difficulty at school I and II, where I observed classes repeatedly. In the quantitative portion of the data collection, I did not have this complication. Individual pupils were representing the number they had in the class list. Another problem encountered during the completion of the SDQ for one of the girls in school II. The informants were concerned about the girl. They had different thoughts about her. At one point they asked themselves if she was the subject of "evil spirits" or not. This is a common dilemma in social research. “Participants may be given a false impression, for example that the ethnographer agrees with their views or finds their behavior ethically acceptable when he or she does not.” (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2002, p 265). I felt awkward about the situation and switched from interview to talk about my view of thinking about the problem and I also lifted both the girl and the teachers with “good” examples from the observations.

It was easy to get willing informants because Ethiopians are more used to aid workers from the West, aiming to implement knowledge from West and not transfer experiences in the opposite direction.

**What could I have done differently?**

The data collection was maybe too large. A better approach could probably be to start with a wider screening, as Survey 371, followed by a pilot study, then selecting one of the schools as object for the research to make the material narrower and more profound. To start with a quantitative approach and continue with a qualitative one can be combined and enrich the study. Nowadays both methods are often used in one study (Starrin, 1991). To have all the interviews recorded, is of course preferable. Problems with technical equipment meant I had to rely on my assistant’s speed on the laptop and my own notes to be readable.
Many informal talks brought new information but were not always printed. This is a weakness in the study.

In the analysis phase I became disappointed with the fact that I did not ask more eagerly to see curriculum from the government. I hesitated to take more of the occupied teacher’s time since they had to translate it from Amharic.

**Suggestions for future research**

A study of the importance of expectations for a young person's ability to concentrate may be an idea for further research. It may not necessarily be in the form of an ethnographic study abroad.

The girls' situation has been observed in research more recently. There is a risk that girls with problems in the area are not addressed as much as boys. What does girls with attention deficit disorder need? Conducting a similar study, but with a clear gender perspective would be an interesting idea for further research.

It would also be interesting to investigate the use of the drug khat in East Africa's schools and how the medication of an herb grown in family gardens affect pupils' ability to concentrate in school. This proposal is better suited for medical research.
7 REFERENCES


http://www.cas.uio.no/Publications/Seminar/Convergence_Meyer.pdf


Appendix

Appendix 1

Interview 1, before observation:
- How many children/teachers are there in this school? How many children in each class?
- Do you have any school fee? How much?
- How do you organize the school day (Length of the day, Homework, lunch etc.)
- Which area do the pupils come from? Tell me more about the socio-economic circumstances the children live in. (family size, health status etc.)
- Are there subjects you give priority in your school? Why?
- What kind of learning material do the teachers have access to?
- Are there any special adaptations for children with disabilities?

Interview 2, was constructed from individual observations and SDQ-form.

Validating interviews:
- In this study I saw the importance of four main factors for children’s ability to pay attention during lessons.
- The importance of expectations: As I understand from mainly the observations I understand that children are eager to learn. What’s your opinion about the level of expectations and motivation? If you think of a typical Ethiopian family, what kind of expectations do they have for their children?
- The collective learning process: What do you think about the Ethiopian School system and the way of teaching at schools?
- Children helped each other and cooperated frequently, during observations. What is your opinion about social closeness? How does it affect children?

Appendix 2

Six internationally agreed education goals aim to meet the learning needs of all children, youth and adults by 2015. www.unicef.org/crc

Goal 1
Expanding and improving comprehensive early childhood care and education, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children.

Goal 2
Ensuring that by 2015 all children, particularly girls, children in difficult circumstances and those belonging to ethnic minorities, have access to, and complete, free and compulsory primary education of good quality.

Goal 3
Ensuring that the learning needs of all young people and adults are met through equitable access to appropriate learning and life-skills programs.

Goal 4
Achieving a 50 per cent improvement in levels of adult literacy by 2015, especially for women, and equitable access to basic and continuing education for all adults.

Goal 5
Eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005, and achieving gender equality in education by 2015, with a focus on ensuring girls’ full and equal access to and achievement in basic education of good quality.

Goal 6
Improving all aspects of the quality of education and ensuring excellence of all so that recognized and measurable learning outcomes are achieved by all, especially in literacy, numeracy and essential life skills.
Appendix 3  DSM-IV criteria

Six or more of the following signs of inattention have been present for at least 6 months to a point that is disruptive and inappropriate for developmental level:

- **Inattention:**
  1. Often does not give close attention to details or makes careless mistakes in schoolwork, work, or other activities.
  2. Often has trouble keeping attention on tasks or play activities.
  3. Often does not seem to listen when spoken to directly.
  4. Often does not follow instructions and fails to finish schoolwork, chores, or duties in the workplace (not due to oppositional behavior or failure to understand instructions).
  5. Often have trouble organizing activities.
  6. Often avoids, dislikes, or doesn't want to do things that take a lot of mental effort for a long period of time (such as schoolwork or homework).
  7. Often loses things needed for tasks and activities (such as toys, school assignments, pencils, books, or tools).
  8. Is often easily distracted.
  9. Often forgetful in daily activities.

IB. Six or more of the following signs of hyperactivity-impulsivity have been present for at least 6 months to an extent that is disruptive and inappropriate for developmental level:

- **Hyperactivity:**
  1. Often fidgets with hands or feet or squirms in seat.
  2. Often gets up from seat when remaining in seat is expected.
  3. Often runs about or climbs when and where it is not appropriate (adolescents or adults may feel very restless).
  4. Often has trouble playing or enjoying leisure activities quietly.
  5. Is often "on the go" or often acts as if "driven by a motor".
  6. Often talks excessively.

- **Impulsiveness:**
  1. Often blurts out answers before questions have been finished.
  2. Often has trouble waiting one's turn.
  3. Often interrupts or intrudes on others (example: butts into conversations or games).

II. Some signs that cause impairment were present before age 7 years. III. Some impairment from the signs is present in two or more settings (such as at school/work and at home). IV. There must be clear evidence of significant impairment in social, school, or work functioning.
Appendix 4 and 5 SDQ in English and Ahmaric version

Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire

For each item, please mark the box for Not True, Somewhat True or Certainly True. It would help us if you answered all items as best you can even if you are not absolutely certain or the item seems daft! Please give your answers on the basis of the child's behaviour over the last six months or this school year.

Child's Name ................................................................. Male/Female
Date of Birth..............................................................
Considerate of other people's feelings
□ □ □
Restless, overactive, cannot stay still for long
□ □ □
Often complains of headaches, stomach-aches or sickness
□ □ □
Shares readily with other children (treats, toys, pencils etc.)
□ □ □
Often has temper tantrums or hot tempers
□ □ □
Rather solitary, tends to play alone
□ □ □
Generally obedient, usually does what adults request
□ □ □
Many worries, often seems worried
□ □ □
Helpful if someone is hurt, upset or feeling ill
□ □ □
Constantly fidgeting or squirming
□ □ □
Has at least one good friend
□ □ □
Often fights with other children or bullies them
□ □ □
Often unhappy, down-hearted or tearful
□ □ □
Generally liked by other children
□ □ □
Easily distracted, concentration wanders
□ □ □
Nervous or clingy in new situations, easily loses confidence
□ □ □
Kind to younger children □ □ □

Often lies or cheats □ □ □

Picked on or bullied by other children □ □ □

Often volunteers to help others (parents, teachers, other children) □ □ □

Thinks things out before acting □ □ □

Steals from home, school or elsewhere □ □ □

Gets on better with adults than with other children □ □ □

Many fears, easily scared □ □ □

Sees tasks through to the end, good attention span □ □ □

© Robert Goodman, 2005

Date ...........................................................................

Parent/Teacher/Other (please specify:)

Signature ...........................................................................
Appendix 6 Survey 371 pupil

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