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Researching Children’s Experiences in Early Childhood Education

Introduction

Findings in research on early childhood educational environments are usually based on adult perspectives. The voices of young children, with and without special educational needs, are seldom heard (Clark & Moss, 2011; Tangen, 2008; 2009). This could be considered negative as children’s experiences are unaccounted for (Sheridan, 2001) and their right to be heard is denied (UN CRC, 1989). For example, educational settings can be established or reflected as positive through measurements and the perspectives of researchers and/or teachers, when in actual fact children experience them less favourably. Aspects that children consider important or problematic can be overlooked.

Listening to children, especially those with special educational needs, and understanding their experiences can be methodologically challenging (Roberts, 2008), e.g., trying to grasp the viewpoints and experiences of children with limited or no verbal skills.

Greater attention should be given to developing ways of listening so that every child can be heard!

Methods used in the study

- Photos taken by children
- Children’s drawings
- Pictogram-based interviews & interviews with no questions
- Face-questionnaires
- Proxies

A work in progress in special education

Ethics: Approved by the Central Ethical Review Board of Sweden. Aims: To describe children's experiences of preschool/school life; to gain a rich picture of educational settings and their quality by including children’s perspectives, adult perspectives and results from structured observation rating scales; and to develop methods for conducting research with young children, with a particular focus on children who have special educational needs. Framework: Bronfenbrenner’s Biocological Model (1979; 2005), which states that children’s development is influenced by a number of systems surrounding them, such as distal conventions and proximal preschools, and that in order to evaluate the quality and meaning of these, listening to children should be a priority. Design: A mixed-method longitudinal multiple case-study starting in eight preschools in four regions of Sweden. A result involving values and challenges: The children’s perspectives complement those of the adults. For instance, certain factors deemed significant by children do not feature in the adult observations of the educational environments or in interviews with adults. Unfortunately, not all of the children’s voices could be heard via the methods adopted in the study. In those cases, proxies were used. Round table: Methods for conducting research with young children will be discussed at the Jure pre-conference EARLI 2013.
Round table discussion points

What are your experiences of researching with young children who have special educational needs?

What kinds of methodological challenges, if any, did you encounter?

Were you able to overcome them? If so, how?

What are your thoughts on the methods used in this study?

Thanks for participating!

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References


