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Chapter 2

Children's Exploration as a Key in Children's Play and Learning Activity in Social and Cultural Formation



Mariane Hedegaard

2.1 Introduction

It has been a dilemma in preschool education for some time about how to prepare children for school without drawing school subjects into the preschool curriculum. Participants at the 'Reconceptualising Early Childhood & Education' (RECE) conferences reflected at their 20-year anniversary about how little they have succeeded to concretize new conceptions into curriculum (Bloch, 2014; Grieshaber & McArdle, 2014; Kessler, 2014; O'Loughlin, 2014). Since the early 1990s childhood researchers have formulated new conceptions (e.g., Burman, 1994; Corsaro, 1997; Grieshaber, 2004; James, Jenks, & Prout, 1998; Walkerdine, 2004) promoting the child's perspective and seeing children as active participants in society. These new theoretical approaches, the RECE researchers argue, have not changed early childhood curriculum. Neither has new conceptions in developmental research (as can be found in Bronfenbrenner 1979, Bruner, 1968, Rogoff, 2003)¹ where children are seen as active and explorative. Early childhood curriculum in most countries is still oriented toward preparing school competences. New tendencies can be found in the Nordic countries (Grindheim, 2011, Hedegaard & Munk, 2019, Johansson et al. (2018). In Denmark and Norway, the governments have recently formulated frameworks for early childhood activities that conceptualize person formation from a wholeness perspective, and promote children's explorative activities. The Norwegian government formulated a framework in 2017 (Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2017) for how to realize their daycare law from 2005 oriented toward children's play,

¹I have participated in this chorus (Hedegaard, 1990, 2009) and continued this together with Marilyn Flear (Hedegaard & Flear, 2009, 2013).

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exploration and culture formation. In Denmark the government in 2018 (Socialministeriet, 2018) also formulated a framework oriented to play and exploration, realizing the six learning goals that were formulated in 2004 as focus points in the Danish daycare law.² The aim in both these Nordic countries seems to be oriented to a wholeness approach where children's exploration and play are the foundation for their social and cultural formation. These frameworks may succeed in formulating a new form of childhood curriculum that the RECE researchers might find satisfying. In this article, I will argue, in line with these two frameworks, that a preschool curriculum should be oriented to children's play and exploration in everyday settings in their community. Such a curriculum will lay the foundation for children's exploration and reflection in kindergarten as well as in school. However, there have to be qualitative differences between the pedagogy and curriculum in kindergarten and the early school curriculum even though they both should be oriented to children's exploration. Therefore, the Danish and Norwegian frameworks for daycare have to be realized in a curriculum for early childhood (kindergarten) that is qualitatively different from the early school curriculum.

The aim in this chapter is to discuss how to formulate a curriculum that supports children's exploration and social and cultural formation in early childhood education. This curriculum shall also open up for a practice that may prepare children for school learning without drawing school activities into kindergarten practice. Here play activity is seen as central.

2.2 Children's Exploration in Different Life Periods

From a cultural-historical wholeness perspective (Hedegaard, 2009, 2012, 2014) the question of supporting children's explorative activity may be seen from the following four perspectives: (a) a societal perspective about how to give children the best developmental conditions, (b) an institutional perspective focusing on practice that promote children's development in early childhood, (c) a situated perspective focusing on the children's social situation, and (d) a personal perspective reflecting children's motive orientations and intentions (see Fig. 2.1). Together these perspectives characterize a child's developmental period, where each life period involves specific ways of exploration in his or her different life settings.

A wholeness perspective implies that one takes the societal demands, the institutional practice and its different activity settings, and children's motive orientation into consideration when planning or evaluating their learning activity and possibility for development (see Fig. 2.1; Table 2.1).

²The six learning goals are: (1) person formation, (2) social development, (3) communication and language, (4) sensation and movement, (5) nature and science and (6) culture, aesthetic and community. In 2012, the Danish government sent out another framework oriented to prepare children for school. This framework was met with some opposition. The 2018 framework is still oriented to the six learning goals, which indicates the dilemma between forces that want the kindergarten to prepare children to school start and forces that see early childhood as important for children's social and cultural formation (Hedegaard, 2017; Hedegaard & Munk, 2019; Kampmann, 2014).

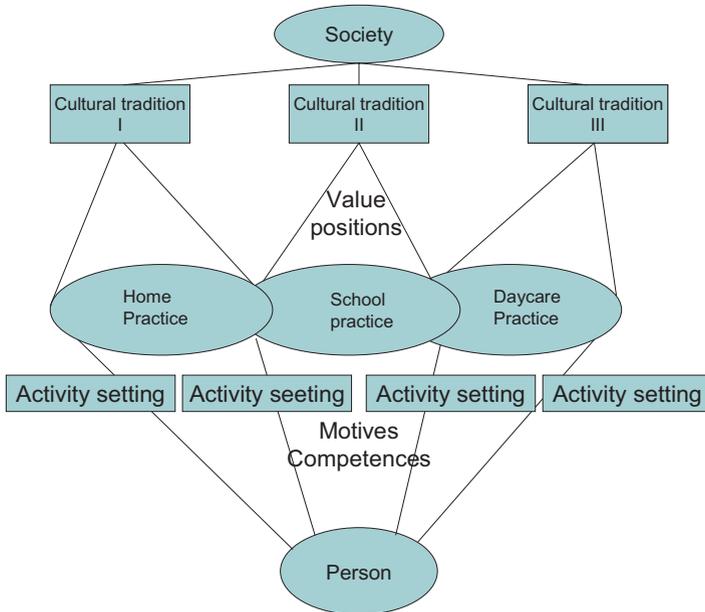


Fig. 2.1 Illustrations of the relations between society- practice and persons with cultural traditions and activity settings as mediating links

Table 2.1 A wholeness perspective on children’s learning and development

Structure	Process	Dynamic
Society	Tradition	Societal conditions and demands
Institution (home, kindergarten, school)	Practice	Value motive/objectives demands
Activity setting	Social Situation	Motivation/engagement/demands
Person	Activity	Motives/intentions and demands
Human biology	Neurophysiologic	Primary need/drives

The societal conditions for kindergarten and school are formulated in laws and regulations for children’s learning and development (as in the framework for respectively the Danish and Norwegian kindergarten, and school laws). In Denmark and Norway, laws and regulation for kindergarten practice are rather new in relation to the government’s formulating demands for school practice that started in the Nordic countries nearly 200 years ago (Ramirez & Boli, 1987).

Children’s exploration has to relate to the different institutional practices in which they participate, and their exploration takes different forms depending on how routines and demands influence their activity in respectively home, nursery, kindergarten and school. Societal values vary between different societies for how children’s cultural formation and learning should take place in kindergarten and

school, and also between different historical periods in the same society (Fleer, Hedegaard, & Tudge, 2009; Hedegaard, 2009; Rogoff, 2003).

Institutional practice in kindergarten as well as in school, takes departure in the goals and standards for evaluating children's learning and development that teachers orient towards. In kindergarten, the goals and standards may be that children have to be able to take care of practical chores, but it can also relate to getting knowledge about their community through stories, reading and visits.

Vygotsky (1987) distinguishes between standards for everyday knowledge and for scientific knowledge. Everyday knowledge is connected to learning in everyday settings; scientific knowledge is connected to subject matter learning in school. Children need experiences from everyday activities to be able to relate to the academic knowledge that school seeks for children to acquire. From this distinction, the goals and standards for children's activity and competence acquisition in day-care should relate to the traditions for different activity settings and different practices in a society or local community. The standards and goals for school activity and knowledge should relate to the systematicity in the different subject matters inspired by science knowledge. Both the Danish and Norwegian frameworks for early childhood education fit well with Vygotsky's theoretical approach and is orientated to children's learning of values and care and their everyday experience and play.

Following the cultural-historical approach from Vygotsky (Elkonin, 1999; Hedegaard, 2009, 2014; Vygotsky, 1987, 1998) a child's developmental age periods reflect the different institutional practices in a modern Western society: home, nursery, kindergarten, primary school and secondary school. Therefore, ideal learning forms are different in different development periods.

2.2.1 Children's Activities in the Different Institutional Settings

Explorative activities are central in children's activity for acquiring competences in infancy and early childhood (Bruner, 1968, Stern, 1985, Vygotsky, 1998). The infant will explore their surroundings (including persons) through intentional orientation and imitation, if home and nursery give the possibility to support this orientation. Children's imitation has, according to Vygotsky (1998) and Bronfenbrenner (1979), to be understood from the child's perspective as meaningful imitation. For the toddler, meaningful imitation (i.e., modelling of persons' activities) can be seen as a foundation in the young child's exploration. This exploration is the leading activity for promoting acquisition of competences and values. In kindergarten, children's exploration may start to take place through fantasy and role-play (if the institutional practices support this). Therefore, the daily settings for preschool children should give children the possibility to explore different family and community settings and the demands of different social roles in these settings. Through this

exploration, both directly and through play, children will acquire competences and motive for learning (Elkonin, 1999). Exploration through imitation, modelling and play continue as learning forms into early school age, where explorative investigations may be seen as the ideal in connection with teachers' guidance and support in formulating conceptual relations between core concepts (Aidarova, 1982; Davydov, 1982; Hedegaard, 1990, 2002).

2.3 Early Childhood Education

There are many ways that children acquire experiences and concepts in kindergarten, such as visits to other places, shared round table discussions where children are asked to tell or describe events, looking in picture books and pedagogues reading. Children may rework these experiences in fantasy play (Hedegaard, 2016; Vygotsky, 1966) and creative activities of drawing and constructing. Fantasy is central in play, which means that exploration may take place not only through material exploration but also through exploration in the child's imagination. In fantasy, it becomes possible to create images of what does not exist in reality. Through play children may create collective imagination (Fleer, 2013) that they can explore together, and thereby develop both their agentic relation to each other as well as their courage to be explorative. These developments may be seen as a life competence. In their play, children can orient to activities in which they do not yet participate and realize wishes that are otherwise impossible for them to realize.

Children's motivation for transition to school is, according to Elkonin (1999), grounded in play oriented toward acquiring competences related to the adult world. Having imagined their participation in activities, children at some point no longer want to pretend, but want to get competence and be able to act. Care takers and teachers are central in supporting children's exploration and building images of what to orient to in the different practices (i.e., kindergarten and school). The way these professionals do this has to be different in the two settings, because the ideals for learning should, as Vygotsky pointed out, be different in kindergarten and school.

2.4 Three Approaches to Explorative Learning in Kindergarten

In the following, I will present three approaches to early childhood education that have promoted children's explorative activities and play as a central pedagogical aim for children's learning and development in early childhood age as well as preparation for learning in school. The earliest is Maria Montessori's *auto-education* (formulated in 1912) the other two build on the cultural-historical tradition from Vygotsky: Bert van Oers' *developmental education* approach and the approach

of *effective pedagogy* initiated by Ronald Tharp through the Center for Research in Education, Diversity and Excellence (CREDE). Tharp's CREDE pedagogy was developed further in Greenland into an early childhood educational approach.

Montessori's approach builds on the ideal of children being explorative in their activity. She writes that a child's attention is caught by material objects during his or her exploration. This process creates the way for a child to understand the world and to become conscious. Montessori (1918) expresses it this way:

It made me think of *life of man* which may remain diffused among a multiplicity of things, in an inferior state of chaos, until some special thing attracts it intensely and fixes it; and then man is revealed unto himself, he feels that he has begun to live. (p. 69)

Montessori's conception is that a child develops as an active person and not as a receptive person. In her 'auto-education' approach, children should be allowed to be spontaneous and free to explore, but at the same time guided by educational objects.

However, to ensure psychical phenomena of growth, we must prepare the "environment" in a definite manner, and from the environment offer, the child the external means directly necessary for him. (p. 71)

Her principles of 'auto-education' build on presentation of material where exploration is connected with possibilities for errors, where:

the control of errors is not mechanical, but psychological, the child himself, whose eye has been educated to recognize differences of dimensions, will see the error, provided the objects be of a certain size and attractive colored. It is for this reason that the next object, so to say, is the control of error in their own size and in their bright colors. (p. 76).

It is the educator's task to create material that will catch young children's attention and guide their exploration. The construction of material has been done experimentally by Montessori by using different materials with qualitatively different sensory aspects (i.e., various geometric forms, material with different weights, sound materials, different colors), where she through experimentation found the differences that will attract a young child's attention. Montessori's material is constructed to enable children to explore sensory dimensions that prepare them to act in a functional and technical world. When creating her educational material, Montessori builds on the conception that the material possesses the power to educate and engage children in both the technical and the moral sense. These properties of the material serve as an introduction to subject matter learning in math and mother tongue in school.

Educators today can still learn from Montessori that possibilities for children's exploration can be created by constructing materials that catch children's attention from early age. Educators thereby guide children's conscious relation to the world. Montessori's approach has influenced the industry of material production for preparing children for math, reading and writing in school. Her ideas of children's exploration are important, but I have earlier criticized the functional approach her material inspires (Hedegaard, 1984) as too technical, and does not orient children to general concepts in their everyday settings. In line with Vygotsky, I find it more important to support children's concept formation of everyday concepts of events

and relations to other persons than of concepts related primarily to the sensory aspect of the world (Hedegaard, 2007).

Bert van Oers also conceptualizes children's exploration as central in their transition to learning in school (van Oers, 1999, 2012). Bert van Oers named his approach *developmental education*. This approach relies on finding cultural products that have high educational power and get children engaged in playful activities that may include the teacher. 'Developmental education' finds its power through engaging and educating children's co-operative participation in play, where the teacher brings material that can be used to engage children in acquiring competence for reading, writing and math. In van Oers' approach the teachers' role is seen as a more experienced participant, where the teacher provides material for play, such as shoeboxes for playing 'shoe shop'. Bert van Oers uses the ideas of Elkonin (2005) that children become motivated to play by attending to the adult's practices in the local community. Therefore, the teacher's task is to orient children to the surrounding community practices in order to motivate explorations that involve school competences of reading, writing and math. The shop theme is central in van Oers' projects.

Roland Tharp and colleagues initiated the third program I will discuss, 'effective pedagogy' (Tharp, Estrada, Dalton, & Yamauchi, 2000). Tharp builds on the Vygotskian position that social interactions within activity settings form the basis for all higher psychological phenomena, including beliefs, ideas and thinking. Tharp pointed out the importance of creating engagement through instructional conversation and relating children's learning toward community traditions. The teacher's task is to establish inter-subjectivity and assisted performance (Tharp et al., 2000; Tharp & Gallimore, 1988). Tharp formulated five standards for how content from everyday activities in the local community should be implemented in pedagogical activities in school.

The CREDE theory was adapted to the Greenlandic context for school in the form of the five standards (Olsen & Tharp, 2013). These standards were extended for kindergarten and daycare pedagogy (Wyat & Lyberth, 2011) with two categories promoting the child's perspective (S6 and S7) into seven standards.

The Seven Standards of Effective Pedagogies

- S1) joint productive activity.
- S2) language development and beginning writing and reading skills.
- S3) using the funds of knowledge and values in home and community to create knowledge in kindergarten.
- S4) promoting complex thinking through questions.
- S5) instructional conversation (the leading standard, to which the other standards relate).
- S6) modelling, visualizing, playing.
- S7) children's interest as initiating shared activity.

2.5 Instructional Conversation (S5) About the Polar Bear's Life

To instruct kindergarten personnel, Lyberth developed a coaching approach using video and an instructional sequence that encouraged preschool teachers to construct their own goal-directed activities. An example from one of her instruction sessions was about the polar bear, its life and it is dangerous to humans. The instructional sequence had six small scenarios that followed the standards presented above, with instructional conversation (S5) as the center for the other six standards. In the education video, five children participated. In the first scenario Lyberth showed a picture of a polar bear and made children tell what they know about the polar bear. The children and teacher talked about how dangerous it is to meet a polar bear (S1). This made the children suggest that they change the song Lybert introduced 'The bear is sleeping, it is not dangerous' ('Bjørnen sover, den er ikke farlig') to 'The bear is sleeping it *is* dangerous' (S2). Lyberth showed children some pictures of where the polar bear lives (S3). Then she asked about where the children were sleeping. They answered in their beds. She asked how their bed looks. Then she asked where the bear sleeps, how its bed looks, and what the difference is (S4). Then Lyberth suggested that children build the bear's cave and played the dangerous polar bear. The children suggested one could use chairs and a table and blankets to make a cave for the bear and they made the cave together with Lyberth (S6). The children entered into the cave and played they were bears, and a child suggested that a bear hunts for food. Lyberth suggested they could play how the bear hunts (S7), which they did.

2.6 Evaluation of the Different Educational Approaches

The three approaches to early childhood education discussed here have contributed to shifting the focus away from receptive learning toward exploration as the central activity for education in early childhood.

Montessori's contribution was to set the child free, by letting the child become an agent in his own learning, where the teachers' task was to provide opportunities and material for the child's exploration. In Montessori's approach the learning objects guide the children's competence development toward sensory discrimination of form, size, color, weight, etc. The knowledge children hereby attain becomes the foundation for knowledge connected to science learning in school. The more general concepts connected to everyday objects and events in the community are ignored when making children focus on discrimination of functional aspects in their environment.

Bert van Oers' 'developmental education' approach orients educators towards seeking opportunities for children's cooperation through playful activities. This approach makes community activities important for children's play activity, where the teacher provides materials and support for playful learning that models

community activities. In this approach, as in Montessori's approach, the educator's aim is to orient children to use math and language skills with the material available for their play. In van Oers' approach, competence of math, reading and writing are the objectives of the play from the teacher's perspective, even though he draws on community activities. The van Oers approach surpasses Montessori's approach with its focus on cooperative play activity, where goals for the activities are formulated through children's cooperation.

Tharp's approach also draws on children's relation to their community, and their cooperation in activities to promote knowledge. Here the main aims are children's learning of critical thinking, communication and reading. In the version developed for the Greenlandic school (Olsen & Tharp, 2013) the five standards for promoting knowledge still focus mostly on the form of knowledge and not the children's experience from the local community. However, in the early childhood education that Tharp developed together with Lyberth, modelling, play and child-initiated activities were added and got a central role. This is in line with Vygotsky's idea that the foundation for children's acquisition of everyday knowledge (i.e., concept learning in early childhood) is their interest.

I have worked with teaching projects in school that were oriented to children's exploration (the *double move* in teaching, (Hedegaard, 1990, 2002) and together with Seth Chaiklin to *radical local* teaching and learning. Radical local education subsumes and surpasses the double move by relating collective local knowledge about nature and culture to general concepts modelled in core models of conceptual relationships. Radical comes from the Latin word root, referring to central concepts. Local refers both to the actual and the historical community. In the concrete project with Puerto Rican children, local referred specifically to the actual community in New York City and to the Puerto Rican community their families had left (Hedegaard & Chaiklin, 2005).

The ideas that I will put forward for early childhood education from the 'double move' and the 'radical local teaching and learning' are:

- take departure in what the child is oriented to
- orient to children's feeling of belonging to a place and community,
- choose topics and concepts from everyday life that relate to children's community and what they think is important,
- guide children in their activity to model conceptual relations that reflect their experience (in play, or children's drawings or storytelling), and reflect together with the children about these relations.

Learning in preschool should never copy school learning, because children need experiences that they are not likely to receive through learning activities that characterize school learning, even though both may favor children's exploration. In school the adults should guide children's exploration in taking the curriculum for the specific subject and grade into consideration.

By guiding children in specific sessions to reflect about the relations they model in play, the staff in kindergarten may support young children's acquisition of concepts that may function as the foundation for the systematic structures that

characterize school subjects. In school, children meet a system of knowledge that may structure their everyday concepts and qualify them theoretically. Children who have rich experiences, which they have reflected about under adult guidance will have a foundation for meeting the system of language (in reading and writing) and science (in math) that is formulated into subject matter areas in school. However, one also needs to be aware that the subject matter areas in school such as grammar or mathematics are not goals in themselves, but are a way to prepare the child's possibility to act outside of school and think in relation to what is important in everyday life and work. In the end these systems should enrich children's everyday concepts (Hedegaard, 2002; Vygotsky, 1998).

2.7 Conditions for Early Childhood Education that Orient Children Towards Play and Exploration

The first step in an approach to learning in early childhood education is to orient children to the content of their everyday life, which implies a move away from a functional approach of training children's discrimination and motoric development. Care-persons and pedagogues should see children's sensing and movement as activities related to a content that the child pays attention to and communicates about. Through this awareness, care-persons and pedagogues should try to introduce new themes. New themes can be about daily activities in the community that they do not meet in kindergarten, and about imaginative events with inspiration from children's books, TV or play material.

Problems created by children not learning about their everyday context and culture can be found in the extreme cases where children of indigenous/original peoples were forced away from their living traditions, parents and native language to become part of the dominant culture tradition. An example from school teaching is the experiment that the Danish government initiated in the 1950s by removing children in Greenland from both parents, nature and culture, and bringing them to Denmark to educate them. On returning home, the children did not know how to relate to their family and community. This resulted in many cases that these children growing up into adulthood with problems of belonging. Similar types of problems were created when Canadian Indian children were moved from their homes to Canadian boarding schools, or the Aboriginal children to Australian boarding schools. In Norway Sami children until recently in school have been taught in Norwegian and had to learn the Norwegian tradition.

The Norwegian and Danish governments formulated clearly in their new framework for early childhood education a need for children to learn about their cultural belonging. Learning content in everyday settings, and learning ways to express emotions and act in their communities are important for children's development and later learning in school.

The principles for how curriculum and tasks should be formulated in early childhood education are quite different from school, because kindergarten tasks and demands should follow the children's spontaneous activities, as illustrated in the approaches developed by Montessori, van Oers and Tharp. In school, tasks and demands should follow scientific principles from the specific subject matter areas, but in both kindergarten and school, it is important that children want to explore either through play or through research activity.

In kindergarten play, the tradition is that children direct how the play themes unfold, while adults may follow and support children in their exploration (Johansson, Emilson, & Puroila, 2018). Conditions for children's play is created by the pedagogues structuring of the practice of the kindergarten, but pedagogues may only indirectly influence what children play, as in the example with Lyberth. The children's initiatives create the content of the play activities.

In early childhood, play should have a central role. Through play, children become oriented to planning activities and to imagining what they cannot see, which are foundational capacities for working with the written language in school.

The way that children's school readiness is evaluated in kindergarten has consequences for their activities in early childhood, because pedagogues introduce demands that correspond to the evaluation criteria. I will present the ideas behind evaluation material formulated together with Naussunguaq Lyberth (Hedegaard & Lybert, 2019) for the Government in Greenland to evaluate 3 and 5 years' social situations of development and their readiness for school that build on the wholeness theory for children's development formulated earlier in this chapter (Hedegaard, 2012). In this evaluation, the pedagogues are evaluated as much as the children, in relation to how they promote play and exploration. This evaluative focus reflects the conception that play, exploration and life competences must be reflected in the pedagogy.

2.8 Evaluation and Pedagogy Have to Be Seen as a Unit: A Greenlandic Early Childhood –Kindergarten Project with Focus on Exploration

Evaluation systems will influence how the professionals create conditions for play and care in early childhood because the system is also an evaluation of the professionals' capability to teach children and prepare them for school.

To give an idea of how evaluation can take a form that promotes play and exploration, I will describe a project (with Lyberth) to secure that young children get supportive conditions for their social situations of development in kindergarten, which should also promote transition to school. In the project, we formulated six areas of evaluation of children's social situation of development, which was assessed with a screening material named *Undersøgelse af Børns Udviklings Situation* UBUS

3 and UBUS5 (Investigation of children's developmental situation)³ (Lyberth, Lund, Hedegaard, & Pedersen, 2017a, 2017b). The first area: (1) was connected to a child's *health and wellbeing*. The following five areas were connected to how a child relates to other people participating in shared activities. These were: (2) *social interaction and competences* (focus area: how a child relates to other people and creates contacts), (3) *communication and language competences* (focus area: how a child relates to other people through language and for what a child uses language), (4) *sensation and movement* (focus area: the content that a child is oriented to when moving around and paying attention), (5) *cooperation and initiation of activities* (focus area: how and what a child contributes to shared frameworks and child-led activities), (6) *knowledge of nature and culture* (focus area: the content of nature and cultural activities with which a child engages).

The focus is on (a) the child as an active agent who takes initiative to participate in shared activities and explore his environment of daily settings and nature through sensation and movement, cooperation and communication with other people, and (b) the child's orientation and participation in cultural activities and explorations through play activities and fantasies.

The main concern in the evaluation of the child's social situation of development is how the child may participate in shared activities. It is not directed at evaluating a child or a child's functional abilities in isolation.

In the evaluation material, the categories for 5-year olds look similar to those for the 3 year olds (see Tables 2.2 and 2.3). The main differences are in the interpretation of the results in that 5-year-olds are expected to take initiative in a shared activity of exploration (i.e., older children should be more conscious about their social relation of being explorative).⁴

- Three year-olds: The focus is on exploration of actions through imitation and modelling
- Five years olds: The focus is on exploration of social relations through play and communication

The question in early education is how the educators may create tasks so children get possibilities to use their capabilities to cooperate in exploration. For both 3- and 5-year-olds, tasks should lead them to explore the activity settings of daily life, while 5-year olds should also reflect about these shared activities in fantasy and play.

The differences in nature and cultural traditions and events in different societies should be reflected in the play material and the themes that characterize a curriculum. Values that should dominate in preschool has not been an explicit topic in

³Investigation of children's developmental situation (UBUS 3 and UBUS 5) in Greenland are inspired by the themes in the Danish Government's framework for early childhood education.

⁴The task of evaluation is the responsibility of the daycare personal, or the family if the child is not in daycare. The next step is to formulate guidelines (Hedegaard, presented at CHACDOC 2019) for how to support children if there are areas of concern, and how this can be done. The task is to find ways to support children so they get possibility to become explores of daily life in their community and environment of both nature and culture.

Table 2.2 Standards for evaluating 3 year's social interaction and development (area 2 in UBUS 3)

Focus areas	Competences	Yes	Partial	No
The child enter into shared activities as a way of contacting other children or/and making friendships	The child plays with other children			
	The child contacts other children to play			
	The child accepts to be close to adults			
Ideas for pedagogical activities:				

Table 2.3 Standards for evaluating 5 year's social interaction and development (area 2 in UBUS 5)

Focus areas	Competences	Yes	Partial	No
The child enter into shared activities as a way of contacting other children or /and making friendships	The child initiates play with other children			
	The child accepts decisions in play and to control its activities by the play group			
	The child accepts bodily contact and distance, may express wishes for being close to an adult, but also made borders for itself			
Ideas for pedagogical activities:				

Western preschool curricular traditions. Recently a project by Johansson et al. (2018, pp. 33–35) argued that Nordic countries have some kind of hidden agenda for value education in early childhood. These values are: (a) self-enhancement: to enfold and be listened to, (b) democracy: rights and responsibilities, (c) discipline: rules and order, (d) efficiency: institutional resources, and (e) ethical values: care and safety. The five value areas Johansson argues have to be seen as a field of competences both for the pedagogues and for the children. All these areas can be found in early childhood education in the Nordic countries, but they are dependent on the specific pedagogues. Researchers and politicians need to dare to make guidelines for curricula that give foundations for children's play and explorative activities in early childhood education that explicate values. The new frameworks formulated by the government in Norway (Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2017) and in Denmark (Socialministeriet, 2018) can be seen as a first step to such guidelines. Curricula based on these frameworks could incorporate some of the value fields that Johansson et al. (2018) describes as characteristic for the Nordic countries by including themes from the specific community of ways of being a family and community member.

2.9 Conclusion

The chapter shows a way to transcend the pessimism that several authors have raised about how to include the child's perspective as an agent in early childhood education. Montessori promoted the child's agency already in the early 1900's. Her

approach to early childhood education can be criticised for focusing too much on the functional aspects of children's agency that are oriented to math and science education. Within the cultural-historical tradition van Oers, Tharp, Hedegaard & Chaiklin have formulated educational approaches that promote exploration of local culture. This chapter takes departure in these approaches, arguing that exploration of local culture is central for children's cultural formation. Furthermore, a curriculum that promotes children's play and exploration should have explicit standards, which are also reflected in the system for evaluating children's competences. These standards should not be school standards used to evaluate children's school readiness. Instead, these standards should be connected to the values one wants to promote in kindergarten, and relevant for cultural formation of children's life competences, promoting their transition to the next age period, school age. These life competences are children's cooperation, communication, imagination, planning and being able to express and control feelings. These competences are also all relevant for school. An early childhood curriculum should encompass both emotional experience and knowledge of the community, which is elaborated and related to general concepts (root concepts).

The task for preschool educators is to take departure in children's interests and the local community, but to enhance these interests so that the education does not remain with what is close to children, such as children's play material at home, or their own body or the obvious in the community (i.e., the grocery where the parents bring them when they shop). In a Danish context, one might start where the children live (e.g., city or countryside), but then explore new areas (i.e., the countryside, when they live in a city or vice versa). The initial area for children's exploration in a society will therefore not be the same for all children, but the task of the educator is always to orient children to new areas so that they may become curious and want to explore and know about them. Toys and objects that can catch children's interest, story-telling and reading and picture books are important as starting points for motivating exploration.

The Nordic frameworks for early childhood education fit with a Vygotskian approach. The task is to orient children to their local community, nature and culture, so that they get concepts about these areas. This means that it will be relevant to plan activities related to children's knowledge of their community, local nature and cultural traditions. In the Danish framework for early education (2018), it is suggested that one should make a year plan for activities oriented to content. Units in such an approach could relate to the way that a specific community is organized in families, educational institutions, work places, the local nature (with its specific geography and animal life), and the local culture (with its history, child literature, music and song traditions, traditions for celebration, and ethics).

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