

Abstract

Title The Preschool as a Learning Context for Children's Pictorial Representation
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This study constitutes the second part of my research on preschool pictorial activities. My previous study focused on how such activities are applied by children and adults in daily preschool life (Löfstedt, 1999a). The main aim of this study is to investigate the opportunities offered by the preschool setting, as a learning context, for the children's appropriation of pictorial representational tools. For this purpose, I have chosen a sociocultural perspective as the theoretical basis. From a sociocultural perspective, learning is an integral part of social practice. Learning by participation in social practices in different contexts is described as a process of appropriation; i.e. a gradual appropriation of both intellectual and physical tools connected to different activities. Based on the sociocultural perspective on learning, my definition of 'learning' in this study is: *changing participation in social practice*.

The preschool setting of this study comprises two classes, each with a team of three teachers and twenty children between the ages of three and five/six. In my data collection I have used participant observation as well as microstudies using a video camera, together with stills, and informal conversations. The data also include formal interviews with the teachers, documents covering school activities, and an interview with the head teacher about the school's history and policy. The field work covered a period of nine months, the total number of visits being fifty-eight. The videotaped observations total approx. twelve hours of film. Children's art activities were analysed with focus on changes in ways of representing pictorially.

As a result of my study three contexts for visual art activities have been discerned: *Playtime activities*, *Teacher planned activities* and *Themework activities*. The empirical findings show that, between themselves, the three contexts reported here offer different forms for children's pictorial learning. Significant for their playtime visual art activities is that the children copy each others pictures and address each other through their pictorial representation in their attempts to access a common repertoire of motifs. Their aspiration to participate in the community of practice, is a driving force in their learning. In teacher planned activities, teachers instruct the children about materials and techniques. In this context, the representational subject, is of subordinate importance. In themework activities pictorial representation is used as a tool for communicating a given theme, creating a context in which the children learn new strategies for discovering clues to their representations. Guided by their teachers, they learn to use new models such as photographs and works of art and also their immediate perceptions of reality as a basis for their representations. This leads to their awareness of and acquisition of new pictorial genres, implying the use of new repertoires, as well as changes in both composition and design.