

Abstract

Børn og barndom på fridshjem. Et folkloristisk studie af fortolkning og forhandling om barnlig identitet

(Children and childhood in youth centres. A folkloristic study of negotiation and interpretation of children's identity. Written in Danish with an English summary)

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The aim with the present project has been to examine how children relate to childhood in day-care institutions. The empirical part of the project comprised field studies in an after-school play scheme with some one hundred children aged five to ten. The project is a cultural study with a folkloristic approach.

I describe the recreational institution as a ritual arena, which refers to my intent to observe the children, childhood, and childishness as a cultural phenomenon in a situational, relational and process-oriented perspective. A dominant question is whether life in the institutions can be described as de-ritualised or not, and my conclusion is that ritualization has now adopted new shapes in this, the 'second institutionalisation' (cf. Kampmann, 2005).

I describe children's view of the professionals in the institution. I demonstrate how children respond to the pedagogic attitude and how they relate to the pedagogical. The pedagogues are, in this respect, viewed as the raw material the children use to generate 'institutionalised childhood'. I touch on how this strategy draws upon the cardinal virtues of Danish pedagogy, which are mimicked and satirized by the children.

I elaborate how children's identities are negotiated on the basis of gender, age and ethnicity. I demonstrate how the children are required by their surroundings to provide and establish an identity, and how they meet this requirement. Through this process, specific roles come into existence through categorical intertextuality, i.e. intertextual strategies that create strong bonds or demonstrate the difference between the individual and various meaning markers that categorise people.

I describe how the institutionalised child creates a cultural identity through establishment of a specific aesthetics. I examine the concept of 'childish' and the ways these qualities are managed and aestheticised. One key issue is the aesthetical judgments that underlie construction of the childish, as seen from the children's perspective. Based on a series of childish expressions, I examine how these genres are applied in a sort of tension field between ideal notions of the childish and the actual opportunities and hindrances offered by the institution. It is in this tension field that meaning is generated or occurs.

Keywords: Childhood, child culture, childishness, childish identity, age, gender, ethnicity, institution, every day life, aesthetics, field work, textuality, performance, categorical intertextuality, reflexivity, folkloristics, institutional life as a ritual arena, ethics, teacher hood, genres, inclusion, marginalization, self and the other, variation, group identity, individual identity, synecdochic self.

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