

Original Research Paper

Who is The Troll? Children as Active Learners Presented as a Learning Story about the Troll from a Norwegian Barnehave

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Abstract

We present a case study about a child initiated project. In this project learning takes place among peers, outdoors, in a wood in Norway, searching for the Troll. We reveal the process of learning by combining the Learning Stories approach (Carr, 2001) and constructing of co-narratives. Learning is considered contextual and social and more than individual skills. From their common experiences the children narrated their learning through dialogues. Inspired by a mosaic approach (Clark & Moss, 2005) we reveal children's different ways of communicating by discussion and making stories, drawings and photos. The case is built upon the teacher's stories about her experiences in the project. Children are presented as active and competent learners, and we exemplify how teachers may work and scaffold children's learning processes.

Introduction

The aim of this article is to reveal children's learning through the presentation of a child initiated project in Bergen, Norway. The learning processes are situated in a kindergarten (barnehave) among peers and for the main part in outdoor play. The five five-year-old children in the project used multiple methods for constructing knowledge. They were searching for a Troll they thought lived in the wood nearby. They spotted tracks, made drawings and photos, told stories, and in between these actions, they had lively discussions between themselves and with their teacher. Their teacher Modgunn, engaged in complex processes of communication and meaning making with the children through their unstructured and play-based activities. The main role of Modgunn in the project was to participate in the development of the children's fantasy, curiosity and learning. The children were looked upon as competent constructors in their own learning processes. This way of relating and scaffolding children's learning is a traditional way of teaching in Scandinavia.

We present the project as a learning story taking further the work of Margaret Carr (2001) in New Zealand. In particular we analyse the role of the learning stories as a mediated tool for learning. We reveal and link this way of teaching and learning to the construction of co-narratives (Odegaard, 2007a) and the centrality of language as an artefact for learning (Vygotsky, 1978). Co-narratives are constructed in dialogues that include broader communication than merely the spoken language. Therefore it is one of the most important

responsibilities of early childhood education teachers to provide opportunities for the development of co-narratives. This article is an attempt to illustrate how children and their teachers may create meaningful learning situations through the shared narrative of the Troll.

Project Background

The Troll project is linked to a European COMENIUS project called CARIPSIE (Children As Researchers In Primary Schools In Europe) with partner institutions in seven countries in Europe. Aims of the CARIPSIE project are to explore, compare and identify appropriate ways to teach young children of all abilities in primary schools the skills they need to become active researchers. A further aim is to contribute to existing knowledge, providing adults working professionally with children with new insights into children's own perspectives.

The Bergen partner's main responsibility in the CARIPSIE project was: *to explore how the roots of research skills can be embedded in the pre-school and how children can subsequently develop these skills throughout their primary years.* The CARIPSIE project was inspired by Mary Kellet's ideas and research among children in the UK (Kellet, 2005). The five-year-old children we write about are in barnehage in Scandinavia, whereas in the other CARIPSIE project countries this age group is in primary schools. In a Norwegian context, working with pre-literate children we wanted to combine Kellet's methods with a narrative and mosaic approach. We define the roots of research skills as ways of exploring and learning about matters in which pre-school and pre literate children take an interest. The question of whether children are doing actual research or not, is not taken into consideration in this article. We focus on children as *active learners*.

The Learning Context

Barnehage is a Norwegian word for a daycare institution for children's care and education from birth to six years of age. Barnehage includes English terms like kindergarten, day-care centre and pre-school. The Norwegian Framework Plan for the Content and Tasks of Kindergarten (Ministry of Education and Research, 2006) applies to all barnehage and this phase of a child's education and care is seen as separate from mainstream schooling which starts in the year a child turns six. The Framework plan underlines that children shall be *given the opportunity to take part in planning and assessing the activities of the kindergarten* (Ministry of Education and Research, 2006, p.8). This paragraph states the importance of children's participation.

Norwegians have a close cultural attachment to nature. Children's learning in the barnehage is often associated with outdoor play and activities and is part of their everyday experiences. A prototypical image of a happy childhood in the Scandinavian countries, Norway, Sweden and Denmark, is that of children playing outdoors irrespective of season and weather (Aasen, Grindheim & Waters, 2009; Borge, Nordhagen & Lie, 2003). Children in Norwegian barnehage often play outdoors for three to five hours a day, and outdoor play and activities in nature are part of the curricular content (Ministry of Education and Research, 2006).

Trolls are part of Nordic folk traditions and fairy tales. They are a sort of fantasy creature. They resemble human beings but they may be much larger, and some of them may have more than one head. They are thought to be ugly, dangerous and simple minded. The Troll that the children were looking for, lived in the wood nearby the project barnehage, and according to the children it was a male Troll. In this project learning elements stated in *The*

Norwegian Framework Plan for the Content and Tasks of Kindergarten (Ministry of Education and Research, 2006) are to be found: communication, art, culture and creativity, body, movement and health, nature and environment. Children in Norway are told stories, sing songs and watch plays about trolls from when they are very young. This knowledge is part of the cultural context of the barnehage and therefore part of the knowledge that the children construct. Learning about Trolls is seen as a way of learning about good and evil, right and wrong and to stimulate the children's fantasy and creativity.

Methodology

The CARIPSIE project developed learning projects from different countries, which were influenced by each partner's curricula and cultural traditions. As we view research as contextual and social, our contribution was closely connected to a traditional Norwegian way of learning in barnehage. That is why this barnehage was chosen to represent Norway in the CARIPSIE project. It is a small barnehage situated in a homogenous, middle class area of the town and it represents the traditions of outdoor learning and child initiated activities.

We present the learning story from the barnehage as a case to explore, describe and explain how a learning process might appear. According to Stake (2008) the epistemological question for a case is: What can be learned from each case? Following Stake (2008) our case might be seen in part as an instrumental case study, because we want to provide insight into the processes of revealing informal, contextual and social learning. However in this research we stress the importance of the cultural and theoretical contexts of learning and, in this sense, the case can then be read with an interest in the case itself. Hence the paper views the case of the Troll in terms of both the contextual interest of the constructed co-narrative, and in terms of the more general interest in the development of co-narratives between children and teachers in early childhood care and education.

The narrative dimension in our case refers to what is being told (narrate, lat. "to tell"), in various languages. Narrative resource (Bruner, 1986; Goodson & Sikes, 2001) refers to individuals as co-constructors of their lives through the stories in which they present themselves. It is based in a belief that narratives are among the most important cultural meaning-making tools. Through narrative resource, resources describe their informants' lives and collect, tell and write narratives built on their experiences (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006).

The children narrated their learning story in dialogue with each other and with Modgunn. In addition Modgunn made her narrative from her experiences of being in dialogue with the children. It was a challenge for the teacher to balance her respect for the play-based child initiated project and her challenging their learning processes. Play contains both adjustments to an existing culture and to its challenges.

The children's playground is a field of an intense, ongoing interaction among many unmerged voices (Duncan & Tarulli, 2003; Sawyer, 1997). The parents' and the teachers' voices are represented in play. But play as an imaginary world and the multiple possibilities of the use of artefacts make play a site of both preserving and challenging forces. Bakhtin's notion of heteroglossia would suggest that play is a site of differences, conflicts and dissension (Duncan & Tarulli, 2003). How to interfere in the children's play was a balance between adding another voice to their self motivated project and the danger of transforming it to a reproduction of the social system and limiting the learning to what the teacher had in mind. As researchers we structure these experiences as a case of learning and teaching in this project. Combining co-narratives and learning stories gave us a wider tool for understanding and presenting our case.

The project was approved by the Data Protection Official for Research, Norwegian Social Science Data Services. We collected written consent from the parents to use the materials and photos made by and of the children. The names are anonymous and we obtained consent from the parents whose children appear in the images in this paper.

Theoretical Perspectives

We find Carr's (2001) way of presenting learning stories an interesting tool to reveal learning as social and contextual. According to Carr, a social view of learning and teaching is difficult to combine with assessment limited to individual skills irrespective of the context, as learning is more than personal knowledge. She presents her learning stories as an alternative way of assessment for kindergartens in New Zealand, including the context and the social aspect of learning. This view is connected to Bruner (1997), Lave and Wenger (1991), Rogoff (1990), Vygotsky (1978) and Wertsch (1991), who combine individual development to participation in social practices in cultural and situated contexts. Children are looked upon as active constructors of knowledge, and teachers, social communities and contexts as co-constructors of knowledge.

In the present case these children's learning stories are viewed as a construction of knowledge, a cultural tool for learning or learning mediated by the tools of languages and making of co-narratives. We focus more on the construction of co-narratives as a process of learning, than learning stories as a tool for assessment. Co-narratives refer to the resultant narrative when several participants are involved in the discourse (Odegaard, 2007a). Odegaard's understanding of co-narrative is built mainly on Bakhtin, who explains dialogues as a basic 'way' for human existence, referring to lived lives as continual dialogues including history, culture and context (Bakhtin, 1981, 1986; Holquist, 2002).

To be a participant in co-narratives means that your voice is heard. Researchers like Bae (2004, 2006), Clark (2005), and Dahlberg and Moss (2005) stress the importance of giving children a voice, and listening to what they have to say. The way children's voices are revealed in our project connects to a mosaic approach which gives a range of strategies for listening to young children's perspectives on their lives and represents a way of revealing children's learning process (Clark, 2005; Clark & Moss, 2005). A mosaic approach regards young children as competent, active meaning makers and explorers of their environment. The approach is influenced by *The Hundred Languages of Children* introduced by Loris Malaguzzi in the Reggio Approach to Early Childhood Education in Reggio Emilia in Italy (Barsotti, 1998). The spoken language is only one of many ways in which young children may express themselves and therefore it is important to give children various opportunities of having a say.

Bakhtin's conceptualising of languages as a dialogic process can contribute to the understanding of how young children acquire and use languages (Cohen & Uhry, 2007; Wertsch, 1991). Our contribution is an attempt to connect the learning stories, which we find useful for presentation and visualisation of social and contextual learning, to the Bakhtinian dialogue. Thereby we will underline the importance of each child's utterances and the abilities of teachers to give children a voice. By having a say and being heard children's utterances can contribute to the construction of co-narratives.

The Troll Project as a Learning Story

Learning dispositions are of great importance when outcomes of learning are of interest. These dispositions include skills, knowledge, intent, social partners and practices, tools and

motivation as an accumulated continuum of complexity of learning (Carr 2001, p.5). Carr (2001) introduced domains of learning dispositions in five sequences of a learning story: “taking an interest, being involved, persisting with difficulty or uncertainty, communication with others and taking responsibility” (p.23). These five intentions of a learning story are to be connected to tools, activity and social community. Since all learning is figured as social (Aasen et. al, 2009; Vygotsky, 1978) the learner cannot be seen as isolated from other persons or the contexts in which learning takes place. Following this view we present the project about the Troll as a learning story by connecting the processes of the project to each of the five above mentioned sequences. The aim of Modgunn was to expand the children’s learning activities based on their own interests and curiosity in a context that was available to them. She was open minded and listened to what they discussed. She wanted to involve the group in a project, but the theme of the project was to be initiated by the children.

Taking an Interest

Modgunn told this story to illustrate the start of the project:

One day a group of 17 children were visiting the wood. On their way into the forest Jon told Tom: “Today I will look for the treasures of the Troll. I am sure they are hidden in a cave”. The children and I brought warm porridge for outdoors lunch. After finishing the meal, Jon, Tom, Mia, Marie, and Sonja asked for permission to go and look for the Troll and his treasures. They asked me to join them. When we came back to the kindergarten, the five children were very eager to tell the others about what they had done in the wood, and that they were certain the Troll had hidden himself. A few days later we visited the wood again, and the same proposal came up: “Let’s go and look for the treasures of the Troll”.

The children’s curiosity about the Troll was awakened. Modgunn also took an interest and listened to the children. She observed where they played, with whom and which cultural tools for learning were involved (Carr, 2001). She listened to the children’s various voices (Bakhtin, 1986; Wertsch, 1991). The five oldest children took a special interest in finding out more about the Troll and together with Modgunn they wanted to investigate the following questions: *Does the Troll exist? Who is the Troll? How does he live, look like and behave? What kind of treasures does he keep?* These questions were of genuine interest to the children in the project group. The context of the project was located; the project took place in the wood close to the barnehage where the children thought they had noticed the Troll.

Being Involved

Taking an interest is closely connected to various dimensions of social identities (Carr, 2001). The identities of children in the group reflected aspects of the wider community that had captured their interest. First of all: They all were *Troll experts*. They already knew quite a lot about the Troll, and they wanted to find out more. They were close friends and it is of great importance to friends to be together (Corsaro, 1985). Frønes (1995) underlines that learning (socialisation) in peer groups is of major importance for modern people. In addition it was a privilege for the children to join the project because they were the oldest of the group. The oldest ones often have a higher position in a group (Löfdahl, 2006). When they became a team, this confirmed to them that they belonged to a higher status group. We also found the *frightened one*, who would not go too close to where the Troll might be, and the *brave one* who invited the Troll for her birthday-party. Both the frightened one and the brave

one took part and participated in the community among peers, but in different ways. The Troll experts, the friends, the oldest, the frightened and the brave were absolutely involved. Whenever the group walked into the woods the children found evidence and tracks from the Troll. As we understand from the following example told by Modgunn, the children willingly told people who visited the barnehave about the Troll and what they had found out about his daily life.

One day the kindergarten had a visitor from England. He also participated in the CARIPSIE project. He came to Norway to learn more about the Troll project. He participated on a tour in the woods, talked with the children and asked questions through an interpreter about what they had found out about the Troll and his everyday life. Mia made a drawing of the Troll with a sweater and trousers. She also told him that she did not believe there existed or have ever existed any Trolls. Jon drew a Troll with one eye, two noses, three heads and four legs, and with colourful teeth, inspired by a well-known Norwegian song about the troll. Jon also told the Englishman that Trolls existed during World War II, and that the Troll near the barnehave ate mushrooms, had big, colourful, sharp teeth, big eyes like dinner-plates, long nose and an enormous mouth. Sonja drew a Troll that also had colourful teeth, and wore a sweater and trousers with a zigzag pattern. She told she believed that the troll existed in the very old days, and they made tracks for us to find and that they could become very angry. Tom made a drawing of baby Troll together with his Troll mother that entered the streets to scare people. He thought that Trolls captured and ate humans in the very old days and that the Troll makes big footprints. Marie drew a baby Troll with very long feet and sharp teeth and told that Trolls do not really exist, but we think they do in our nightmares.

We interpret the children's eagerness to tell the visitor about the Troll, as signs of involvement. The children showed great interest in telling what they had learned from their visits in the wood. Their consciousness of being active learners was obvious and visible.

Bakhtin (1986) introduced speech genre as a way of describing the categorical way of various utterances in relating situations. In the current study, the Troll project might be characterised as a speech genre. The children had different ways of communicating, using different voices, each associated with a distinct identity to their social community, but all connected to the Troll project.

Persisting with Difficulty and Uncertainty

The questions for the children's Troll project was: *Does the Troll exist? Who is the Troll? How does he live, look like and behave? What kind of treasures does he keep?* These questions were the first difficulties and uncertainties the children and Modgunn met. To try to find out whether the Troll existed or not, Modgunn brought them to the wood where they searched for tracks from the Troll. Jon found marks from his big teeth on the mushrooms, big soft footprints where he had walked. Sonja and Mia also found a big piece of wood that looked like the Troll's wooden telephone and some sticks which indicated that the Troll had made a bonfire for his barbeque. When the children found something they thought to be a Troll track, they asked Modgunn to take a photo. These photos are an attempt to capture more of the knowledge constructed from the children's points of view. They illustrate a frozen framed moment of their construction of meaning. The photos present the photographer and the children's interpretation of what might be tracks from the Troll.

The children agreed in their interpretation of the tracks as more or less convincing indications of an existing Troll. They discussed their ideas about his everyday life; how he lived, looked like and behaved. As they were more or less convinced that the Troll existed, they had to deal with their fear of the Troll, which the following dialogues written by Modgunn illustrate:

Tom said: "I was frightened. It was like someone touched me and suddenly it became much colder. I wanted to go back to the barnehage at once". Maria: "If you want the Troll to exist, it does. If you don't want it to exist, it doesn't". All the sounds in the wood created uncertainty, but excitement. It sounded as if there was a big creature, tramping behind them. The earth was shaking, and the children startled each other by asking more questions: Tom: "Who is behind us? Is he coming closer?"
The brave Sonja: "Oh no, come on".

It was important for Tom to talk about his fright. By discussing his experiences with the other children he calmed down. The uncertainty about the existence of the Troll was met by the conclusion made by Sonja. Her conclusion is chained to her understanding of Tom's fear of the Troll. Her utterance was comforting for Tom. She encouraged all of them to continue further into the wood, and she succeeded.

To encourage the children's search for the treasures of the Troll, Modgunn had made a secret trick:

One day Maria found a box under some branches in the wood. Modgunn had put it there earlier that day to encourage the children's further investigations. The box contained chocolate money wrapped in golden paper, beautiful stones in various colours and a paper with drawings of children and a Troll. The note was written like a greeting from the Troll. Sonja shouted out in the air to the Troll: "Come to my birthday party today". All the others were extraordinarily quiet, and Tom hid himself behind one of the adults. On the way back to the barnehage Mia asked Modgunn: "How do you think the Troll got his gold?" Modgunn asked the group: "How do you think he got his gold and these precious stones?" Jon: "Either he found it in the wood, or he made it himself". Tom: "Perhaps the Troll went to the jeweller's shop, and nobody noticed him?" Maria: "No, I don't think he went to the jeweller's shop. If he did, someone would have noticed, and he does not want to be seen by human beings". Sonja "I and my dad did not put the box in the wood, but someone did it, someone human".

We conclude that the children did not come to a common agreement to solve this uncertainty. Following Bakhtin (1981), we believe the value of the dialogue is located in the very presence of a variety of voices and not in an attempt to idealise agreement. We can track the cultural knowledge of the Troll in the children's applications. Each new expression of playfulness and fantasy changes the contextual interaction. The children drew their conclusions, but had to rethink and discuss over and over again. It turned out that the mystery and the authenticity made the project an ongoing process, despite what they thought was possible or not. The project lasted for more than a year. The children as learners in action went in and out of fiction as a tool for learning together with Modgunn. All about the Troll is fiction, and to find out about the Troll, you have to 'be in fiction'.

Communicating with Others in any of the Hundred Languages of Children

The next sequence of a learning story is connected to communication with others. In our project the live dialogue is of general interest and is a common theme in all the parts of the learning story. This section is to illustrate various ways in which the children expressed their utterances and how they were given a voice, inspired by a mosaic approach (Clark, 2005). The children used a wide range of communication skills or languages (Barsotti 1998) by means of their voices, drawings and photos.

First of all the children had oral discussions. Modgunn asked the children to make a fairytale for a Troll book. This is a part of their discussion written by Modgunn:

Jon: Once upon a time there was a big billy-goat, the Billikin Whiskers who butted the Troll into the waterfall. He was on his way to eat the mountain grass to get fat.

Tom: This fairytale already exists; we are supposed to make a new one.

Marie: Yes, that is what we are going to do

Jon: The Troll climbed on the rocks, and then he went to a cave and lived there.

Marie: And whenever someone passed by his cave, he tried to get hold of them, but he didn't manage to catch anyone.

Sonja: The Troll tried to catch the smallest girl, but he could not make it.

Modgunn's voice and what the children thought she expected from them were an underlying force to what they did and how they did it. In spite of this their individual voices contributed and made various fairy tales possible.

The photo below is taken one day the children and Modgunn were looking for tracks from the Troll in the wood. Marie, Sonja and Mia found and discussed a special stone:



Modgunn wrote this story:

Marie, Sonja and Mia ran towards the stone and were eager to examine it. Marie: "Modgunn, Modgunn come and see; the Troll is transformed into a stone." Modgunn came nearer, bent down and had a closer look: "How do you find out that this is a transformed Troll?" Maria answered enthusiastically "Look, the Troll has two heads, three eyes and one mouth". Modgunn: "OK so you think this is a Troll?" Maria: "Yes, sure. Can't you see the sun breaking through the branches over there; the sun transforms trolls into stones." Modgunn: "What do you think happens to the Troll during the night?" Sonja: "I am sure he will wake up, and become alive again when the sun disappears."

The girls concluded that this was proof of the saying that trolls *transform into stones when the sun shines on them*, but they also added to the saying by suggesting that they retransform into a troll as soon as the sun disappears.

Secondly the children made drawings and expressed their thoughts about what the troll might look like, as illustrated. Modgunn wrote down their oral utterances, and how she interpreted their communication through the drawings:



Girl, 5 years: "This is a Troll who enjoys scaring other trolls and human beings".

His big teeth are in the center of the drawing. The big teeth follow the interpretation that the marks on the mushrooms they found in the wood stemmed from the troll's. The Troll uses his teeth for scaring other trolls and human being. The playfulness and joy about this activity are expressed through the colourfulness and the big smile.



Boy, 5 years: "This Troll has big teeth with many different colours".

The boy and the girl had a common agreement of how the Troll's teeth look like. They were sitting next to each other. And as both of them were drawing the Troll, they communicated through their drawings. These narratives were closer connections to what the Troll might look like than the objects of the drawings. We interpret the drawing as serving as a prompt for the verbal narratives about the Troll (Coates, 2004).

The third way of communication was developed through their findings of traces from the Troll. Modgunn told this story:



On the ground I noticed a dirty, brownish, disgusting paper and bent down and suggested with a laugh that this might be his “Snotta Kluit” (handkerchief). We all started laughing and Mia suggested that the Troll caught colds, like human beings. Maria asked me to take a photo of the Snotta Kluit.

These voices of the children and Modgunn include cultural experience of the Norwegian autumn when most of the children catch colds. The voices of the children and their teacher are being beyond their individual voices, as heteroglossical, culturally ingrained voices (Bakhtin, 1986) narrating at the same time their lived experiences and their understanding of a shared cultural context.

Taking Responsibility

According to Carr (2001) *taking responsibility*, includes contributing to shared activities or episodes of joint attention. Modgunn told this story to illustrate various ways of contributing and taking responsibility:

One day the children and two adults were in the wood looking for traces from the Troll, they found some sticks placed in a way that seemed to be the start of making a bonfire. Sonja: “Oops, I think we interrupted the Troll when he was making a bonfire” Jon: “He must be quite nearby – I think he left only a few minutes ago”. Modgunn: “Why do you think the Troll would make a fire?” Mia: “I think he will make a barbeque”. It was cold, foggy and rainy, and we had to walk in line – there were so many trees in the wood. It was very exciting and scary. To start with none of the children wanted to be first in line, then Mia said: “I am not afraid, I will go first”. Deeper into the wood even Mia hesitated, so therefore Modgunn took her hand as they continued walking in line further into the wood.

Mia took responsibility and supported her frightened friends. After a while the support from Modgunn was comforting, but Modgunn did not take over, she walked close to Mia and helped her and the other children to keep on track with their task. This way of collaboration among the children and their teacher might be seen as ‘bridging’: Both the children and Modgunn shared their understanding and structured the others’ participation in the problem-solving tasks (Carr, 2001). Shared responsibility enabled successful collaborative problem solving. Carr refers to two patterns of responsibilities regarding who takes initiative: adult support or peer support. In our example it was peer collaboration on a joint task. The children supported each other and insisted on continuing further into the wood. Modgunn provided the opportunity and added some physical assistance: a hand to hold and helping the children keeping a focus on the key activity of their project. There was no praise from the adult. The children wanted to hunt for the treasures of the Troll, and they were very excited about their findings and their new knowledge.

An ethical issue is the frightening and thrilling aspect of this kind of experience that might seem like scary adventures for children. Children seem to be attracted to this kind of excitement. Playful interactions where fear is combined with excitement are frequently observed in the barnehage (Odegaard, 2007b). Usually children who do not choose to be a part of such play show signs of uncertainty and fear (Odegaard, 2007b). The children in the Troll project were in command of the frightening situation – taking responsibility for themselves and others. Modgunn regarded the situation as thrilling, scaring and exciting for the children. It is of great importance for teachers to know that play can appear to be

amusing and self chosen, at the same time as having the potential to be scary and forced on the child (Sutton-Smith, 1997).

Discussion

What did the Children Learn?

In line with our view of learning, it is important that the children's voices are heard in all phases of the project, including their learning outcomes. When Modgunn asked them what they had learned, Modgunn told us that Sonja expressed her new insight like this: "I have learned that there is no Troll, and that he has never existed. Whereas Maria thought that "there was a Troll in the very old days." Mia had learned that the "Troll cannot exist for real; only in our fantasy". Jon concluded that "the Troll kept some gold." Tom said: "I have learned to spot tracks from the Troll." Most of the children agreed that they have learned much about the Troll: what he eats and how he eats, that he is large, catches colds and turns into a stone if the sun shines on him. The children analysed the tracks from the Troll, and made a special book that showed their view on the Troll. They had some questions, and in search of new answers they made co-narratives, about their learning outcomes, creating knowledge as active learners, in their own context and community.

Asking the children what they had learned introduced questions concerning each child's awareness of one's self as a learner. Such questions reflected an attempt to find out about their meta cognitive ability, and their ability to 'do' meta cognitive dialogue (Brown, 1978). Flavell describes meta cognition as something that can help people to understand better, to learn better, to achieve better academic results and make wise and thoughtful life decisions (Larkin, 2010). According to Larkin (2010) metacognition is the thought about the thought; why did I think the way I do or *what* made me think this way? The children in our project created a dialogue about what they had learned; none of them said anything about *how* they had come to this insight. Several mentioned that they had learned to look for tracks from the Troll, but did not conclude this to be a way of learning. This might be too difficult for children at this age, but as consciousness of oneself as a learning person is awakened, it might appear in later meta cognitional dialogues or co-narratives, built on common experiences.

What can be Learned from this Particular Case?

According to Stake (2008) the epistemological question for a case is: What can be learned about the particular case. As researchers and authors our aim was to illustrate how learning takes place, in a child initiated project, in the children's own environment, among peers and for the main part in outdoor play. Focusing on the case as a learning story made it possible to identify more than personal skills (Carr, 2001). For example: The learning outcomes for the children were closely connected to the status of the project group in this barnehave. The status had a major effect on the eagerness of exploring and on the sustainability of the ongoing process of learning. The case indicates that construction of skills or knowledge can neither be separated from the social community, tools nor activity.

We connect learning stories to constructions of co-narratives. In line with this view, a co-narrative presents various utterances, in various languages or ways of communication. We learned about the importance of creating opportunities for the children to make their voices heard and to express themselves among peers and adults. The statements of learning depended on how they were met by the teacher. Their teacher listened with an open mind (Aaberg & Taguchi, 2006) and the ways of teaching turned more towards listening and

asking widening question, than to talking and giving right answers (Bae, 2006). Modgunn observed and interacted with the different forms of expressions of the children: bodily, non-verbal and verbally (Bae, 2006). Thereby the children's experiences and points of view were acknowledged as worthy of attention. The Bakhtinian dialogue demands tactful educators who develop a caring attentiveness to the unique; to the uniqueness of children and of their individual and social lives. This "tone" of teaching can be sustained by the cultivation of a certain kind of seeing, listening, and responding to children in each particular situation (van Manen, 1991, 2002).

The project was based on playfulness and fantasy, and Modgunn played along. Playful and humoristic modes of communication are parts of the forms of expressions in which children often choose to present their views (Bae, 1996, 2006). We find this tone of teaching to be in line with the studies of Johansson (2003) which develop the argument that teachers' practices should support children's perspectives, while at the same time providing new experiences for children and challenging their reflections. Communication and interaction in everyday life are key factors in children's cultural learning (Rogoff, 1990). Everyday life for the children in our project was very often in play. In all play there are elements of learning. Play is an existential way of being involved and embodies much more than learning. This is underlined by Johansson and Samuelsson's (2008) research which focus on similarities between learning and playing. As we interpret Bakhtin (1981) play is a site for children to both learn to realize about the social norms in their cultural context and to enable them to achieve some critical distance from the language and behaviour of adults (Duncan & Tarulli, 2003). In spite of this more or less common knowledge we claim that peers and teachers as competent listeners and humoristic play mates, might easily be forgotten when we talk about teaching and learning. We also realized that young children developed consciousness of themselves as learners, and saw the importance of teachers contributing to the children's meta cognitive abilities.

A mosaic approach helped the teacher to open up for different languages like using photos and drawings in addition to oral language. These could be further expanded by music, clay or other materials to give the children a voice, or materials for expressing their utterances. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) states that children have the right to influence their daily life (§12-14). To assist children to obtain these rights of influence, teachers have an obligation to give children various opportunities to make their voices heard. The role of the teacher is of great importance according to Malaguzzi, for the organisation for direction, meaning and values (Rinaldi, 2006). The teacher is the key person of relations, and may transform everyday experiences into important cooperation and communication for everybody.

We present only a glimpse of Bakhtin's enormous contribution to literacy critics, social thinking and philosophy. We find his way of presenting the dialogue in line with the way we experienced the children constructing insight into their common reflections and searching for more information about the Troll. Even though it could be of interest, this case does not focus on hidden agendas in the culture represented by Modgunn or by the three of us who have constructed the case and the article. Another important issue is to take into consideration that our learning story is sited in a small, homogeneous part of the town when it comes to the parents' income and social status. We are aware that in other parts of the town with more social and financial variations the teachers may have more difficulties in giving each child in a group of five-year-olds a visible and clear voice. We are also aware that by presenting some of the photos and leaving others unpublished, we reveal our values and views of learning that represent the uniqueness of each of us, but also the dominant voices in our Norwegian culture and in early childhood education. Discussions among the

three of us about what to take in or leave out of the article and the writing process itself, present different forces and voices in the dialogue of this learning story.

Summary

Children as active participants in a community seem to construct new knowledge whether we want it to happen or not!

If teachers are aware of some of the complexities of learning, then learning processes can be influenced in an ethical, playful and educational way. We regard this as a way of teaching and illustration of learning taking place, as lived dialogues or meaning-making through constructions of co-narratives.

The children defined their own learning paths and made sense of both the physical and social world from their own personal and sociocultural perspectives. They created their physical and social worlds as well as their thinking being shaped by the environment (the wood) and respectful adults who were assisting them in their search for answers to questions and curiosity.

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