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Title: Children's resources in action : the conversation of capital in the preschool field

Year: 2011

Version: Published version

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Please cite the original version:

Vuorisalo, M. (2011). Children's resources in action : the conversation of capital in the preschool field. In L. Alanen, & M. Siisiäinen (Eds.), *Fields and capitals : constructing local life* (pp. 29-61). University of Jyväskylä, Finnish Institute for Educational Research. <http://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-951-39-6097-1>



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Children's resources in action – The conversion of capital in the preschool field

Introduction

Most children in Lievestuore attend day-care while they are under school age, and at the latest the year they turn six which is when they start preschool¹. Day-care as well as preschool are approached here as a social field in Bourdieu's sense, and children's interaction in their preschool group is looked upon as a social space in which children are involved on a daily basis in carving out for themselves positions in relation to other

¹ Preschool in its present form was established in Finland in 1998. Since then, municipalities have been obliged to provide every 6-year-old with free half-day preschool. In most cases, preschool is organized and run by public authorities. Enrollment is voluntary but yearly almost all children participate in preschool (94 % in 2005; Sauli & Säkkinen 2007, 172). In Lievestuore, according to our survey data, all 6-year-old children attended preschool in 2006 (Lehtinen & Vuorisalo 2009, 103). For those children who need full-time day-care, preschool is usually organized in a day-care centre in a group where they have preschool activities in the morning and day-care in the afternoon.

children and as well as to adults. The focus in this chapter is on young children and their local lives especially in preschool.

A reasonable starting point is that in addition to 'field', Bourdieu's other concepts, especially capital and habitus, are also useful in exploring the preschool group as an ensemble of relations, in which each child can be individually perceived as being positioned in the network of relationships. Bourdieu's theory is helpful in revealing how distinctions and inequalities are produced in everyday interaction, and explaining why the social order thus generated tends to remain intact. In this context, Bourdieu's concepts need to be seen as internally linked to each other. Another valid reason to use Bourdieu's notion of studying young children's action in preschool is because it offers a contextualized and empirically grounded account of children's resources and participation in their everyday life.

In this study, the field in focus is one preschool group in the local day-care centre. However, the local community surrounding the day-care centre also needs to be conceptualized as a field, although the investigation of the locality is concise compared to the description of the preschool field. Children's daily living and construction of resources engage with these fields (preschool and local community) and both of them have an influence on the kinds of resources children have access to. Furthermore, these fields have been located as sub-fields in the field of contemporary childhood. With this kind of contextualized approach, it is possible to describe the use of resources as capital as a part of social interaction within wider structures. In these processes, inequalities are also produced by those very same agents, big or small, adults or children that are drawing on their capitals. (Alanen 2009b.)

Thus, the aim of this chapter is to find out how children utilize the various resources at their disposal within their relational networks, and how some of these resources may occasionally function as capitals in the preschool. An adaptation of Bourdieu's theoretical framework is presented with a focus on how children's capitals may become converted from one form into another.

The officially stated purpose of day-care as an institution is to educate children, support their individual development, socialise them to live in

society and give them skills to participate and act as citizens. Hence, any understanding of children's future as adults function as guidelines for organizing everyday actions in the institution, implying a perspective on children as 'becomings' (see Qvortrup 1994; 2009). In *Childhood Studies*, this is often contrasted with the perspective of children as active 'beings'; studies on children's daily life and activities show they are in fact social actors and participants in the daily practices of the institution. Children as 'beings' – as active agents here and now – is emphasized particularly in social studies of childhood (Corsaro 1997, 2005; Lee 2001; Mayall 2002; Prout & James 1997; Uprichard 2008). Research shows that everyday life in the day-care is socially demanding and requires many different kinds of skills and resources, such as self-control and the ability to verbalise intentions. These, moreover, are essential premises for social recognition, influence and status in the context of day-care. (Gulløv 2008, 142.) These demands that daily life in a preschool puts on each child are the daily 'negotiations' (Ahn 2010; Cobb-Moore, Danby & Farrell 2010; Evaldsson 2009; Lehtinen 2000; Löfdahl & Hägglund 2007; Markström & Hallden 2009; Sheldon 1996) or, in Bourdieusian terms, the daily 'struggles' in preschool where children's resources are utilized and positions defined. In this study, a Bourdieusian frame is adopted for researching children in preschool in order to shed light on these 'negotiations/struggles' while they happen in preschool between children and also with adults.

Children's action and mutual relationships in day-care are widely researched subjects. However, only a few researchers have examined children's peer group action and capitals in early childhood's institutions from a Bourdieusian frame (see Connolly 1998, 2000, 2004; Palludan 2007). Connolly has adapted Bourdieu's theory for the research of racism among young children and has extensively used Bourdieu's concepts of capital, habitus and field. In her study, a Danish researcher Palludan (2007) has explored ethnic majority and minority children in day-care, focusing on how social distinctions are produced in this environment on the basis of ethnic features, especially language use. In the primary school context, Devine (2009) has made interesting findings of how migrant children have mobilised their capitals. I shall return to these studies later in this chapter while discussing field and capital in preschool.

In this chapter, the path to preschool goes through the children's families and their resources. To frame the analysis and the description of local childhood, the methodological settings are presented next. Then young children and their families' resources in the context of Lievestuore are introduced. After that follows a theoretical discussion of notions adapted in this chapter and how they are interpreted in the context of preschool. Then the chapter moves on to the findings in terms of children's resources utilised in preschool, and how particular resources function as capital and convert from one form to another. The chapter ends with some concluding remarks.

Research methods and data

This study draws on two sets of data. The main focus in the empirical part will be on the ethnographic observation data of a preschool group in the day-care centre. However, in the third section of this chapter, the reported findings were based on the survey data collected in the research project. Survey data on 5–7-year-old children's resources were collected with questionnaires filled by the parents². The data described children's local-living in Lievestuore and the resources that children had access to in their families. (Lehtinen & Vuorisalo 2007.)

Composite variables of families' resources were constructed in the analysis (see Appendix 1), one for each form of resources: economic, cultural and social. These composite variables for resources were developed from different variables which were logically compatible. To describe economic resources, the responses from five questions were used: the mother's and father's occupational position in the labour market, the most important sources of income for the family, the amount of parents' combined monthly income, and the ownership of the house where the family live. The composite variable of cultural resources was based on the responses of the child's mother's, father's and grandparents' basic

² The total sample consisted of all families with 5–7-year-old children in Lievestuore, the answer rate 65 % (N=74).

and vocational education. The sum of social resources was constructed of seven questions: how often the family is in contact with the child's friends, grandparents, or family's relatives and friends; how many good friends the child has, did the child have friends s/he visits, and was s/he a member of a voluntary association. The values of composite variables are presented as such and also divided into three different groups according to the families' local background. These various interpretations require that the available survey data is small and is therefore not representative in any statistical sense. However, there is a total sample of the local families in three age-cohorts and almost two-thirds of the sample is represented in the data.

An ethnographic fieldwork was carried out in one preschool group³ during the whole preschool year involving participant observation as well as interviews with children and staff. The preschool consisted of one group in its own premises. The group was a full-time day-care group, where they had preschool activities in the morning (4 hours). Some children participated only in the preschool part of the daily activities. Moreover, they were in the same age group; during the observation period they were in the age range of 5–7 years. The fieldwork is presented in more detail in Appendix 2.

The aim in making the observation was to explore beneath the surface of the statistical evidence and find out not only what the resources are, but how they are used. In the analysis, capital was recognized through the theoretical frame and seen as occurring in a dialectical process between the observation data and theoretical notion (Nilsen 2005, 117). First, children's resources were coded, and after that they were named capital when they were actively used to accomplish an effect in social interaction. Through capitals, it has been possible to map the field in the group (Emirbayer & Johnson 2008, 37). During the analysis process, sifting through the data has helped to cause a broader view of the resources and 'field-like' actions in preschool and this is the base from which to handle this research theme.

³ There were 20 children in this preschool group; all of them except one participated in study. Two preschool teachers and one nursery nurse worked in the group. Henceforth, all adults are referred to as a teacher or by name.

The relational concepts 'capital' and 'field' have been defined through the whole data, even though here the reader will only be presented with a couple of glimpses into daily life in a preschool. However, before that, the next section will present children's local resources in families.

Young children in Lievestuore

While the main focus in the empirical study will be on children in their preschool group, day-care is of course not the only field that children daily live through. Children's earliest field in most cases is the family into which they are born⁴. By the time they attend preschool, most children have also visited other domains of activity, such as their extended family, the neighbourhood, and organized free time activities. According to the survey conducted within this project, every third child participated in guided free time activities regularly, and every fourth family experienced daily contact with the child's grandparents or friends. Nevertheless, the importance of the day-care for children's everyday life was incontestable. After family, the day-care was a local arena that reached the most children; three out of four children participated in day-care. Usually, one or two of these local domains were active for a child in his or her daily life. (Lehtinen & Vuorisalo 2009.)

The residents in Lievestuore were found to be a fairly homogeneous population in terms of their economic, cultural and social resources (Kivelä & Salminen 2009), and therefore, no great differences were expected to be discovered among the families of young children. The following table shows the distribution of economic, cultural and social resources among children's families according to the composite variables. The mean values are not comparable with each other because the construction of composite variables was diverse. Thus, the range of variation is a suggestive indicator of these variables.

⁴ For family as a social field, see chapter 4 authored by Leena Alanen.

Table 2.1 *Economic, cultural and social resources in children's families*

	Mean of the volume of the resource	Range of variation
Economic resources (N=71)	10.1	4–13
Cultural resources (N=63)	6.4	3–10.5
Social resources (N=69)	11.1	5–17
All resources (N=62)	27.9	19.5–35.5

In economic resources, as the mean establishes, families' were mostly settled in the upper end of the range. Only a few families had an economic resource value under eight. The range in cultural capital was the smallest, while in social resources it was the widest. Cultural resources were emphasized at the bottom of the range; two-third of the families received a value under the average.

The implication of a family's local background on children's and their families' resources has been previously defined in this research project (Lehtinen & Vuorisalo 2009). The starting point for the investigation was physical and temporal locality. However, the purpose in using this 'local roots'-variable was not to explain how engaged or attached families are to Lievestuore. In former studies of local living and belonging, researchers have considered it to be problematic if the most important indicators of local engagement or place attachment are the local roots (Savage, Longhurst & Bagnall 2005, 29; also Gustafson 2002, 24). However, one aspect in local living is the time spent in a place and this is admitted also among those who examine attachment to places (Gustafson 2001, 9; see also Hay 1998). Long-term relations with place and people as well as familiarity with local traditions, organizations and associations construct local networks where it is also easy to navigate as a parent and offer various resources for one's offspring.

Families were divided into local and incomer families by the birth place of the child's mother and father. In *local families*, both mother and father were born in Lievestuore. *Incomer families* had moved to Lievestuore without any local family relationships. There in between these two groups, was a group of *semi-local families*, where either mother or father

was local by birth. Families’ economic, cultural and social resources as defined by three local background groups are represented in the following table, which establishes that the distinctions between families were quite exiguous.

Table 2.2 Means and standardized deviations of resource variables in families’ local background groups

Families	Economic resources		Cultural resources		Social resources		The mean of total resource volume	
	Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean	Std. Dev.
Local (N=15)	10.9	2.066	6.2	1.819	12.4	2.230	29.4	3.301
Semi-local (N=23)	10.7	1.824	5.9	1.551	11.6	2.085	28.0	4.184
Incomer (N=24)	9.4	2.620	6.8	1.673	10.5	2.000	27.3	4.693
All (N=71)	10.1	2.238	6.4	1.693	11.1	2.285	27.9	4.022

Local and semi-local families had more *economic resources* than incomer families. In economic resources, the means follow families’ locality, even though there is no evidence that local background explains this. However, it might be discovered that wealthy families in this research data usually had local roots. In spite of the means, the standardized deviation indicates that the substantial economic resources have been addressed to semi-local families.

It was incomer families who brought *cultural resources* into Lievestuore. In these families, the parents are educated, and there are more parents who have an academic degree than in the two local groups. While semi-local families were rich in economic resources, in these families, cultural resources were weaker than in the other two groups. Cultural resources also appeared in children’s free time activities: children in both incomer and local families participated in guided free time activities and they carried out the activity alone or with their families (e.g. drawing, stamp collecting, and outdoor activities like skiing, swimming and fishing). In *social resources*, most families in each group attained values from 10 to

13. In local and semi-local groups, there were some families who had ample social resources, whereas in the incomer's group, there were a few families with meagre resources. This had implications on the means of social resources.

The distinctions between families were broader in social resources and it seems that locality took part especially in the construction of these resources. This is revealed if one examines the construction of the variable of social resources. It is not local as such, because the core of the variable is a question of communication. However, the data establishes most of that was happening locally. Nearly all daily contacts with grandparents took place in families which had at least one local grandparent⁵. Only one family in the whole data was in everyday contact with a grandparent who was not local. The responses of child's friends showed that the most common answer to the question of where the child's friends lived was 'in the same neighbourhood'. Only in one case did the parent report that all of the child's friends lived outside Lievestuore. For these reasons, it is possible to make a interpretation that the vicinity had an influence on communication and social resources were locally constructed in this data; although it has been thought for a long time that social relationships have become dissociated from place, because of the development of information and communication technologies and increasing mobility (see e.g. Albrow 1996, 155–159).

Thus, the local family background (or the lack of it) appeared in children's social resources. Children in local and semi-local families were rich in social resources, which are based on local family relationships and contacts with relatives, especially with the children's grandparents, whereas incomer families were active in relationships with friends. They were more engaged in contact with children's and families' friends than local or semi-local families. However, children in both local-family groups had two sources for social resources: family and friends, which made their social resources substantial compared to incomer families. Social resources in families imply that locality matters as a source of

⁵ Over 87 percentages of families in both local groups and also 19 percentages of incomer families at that moment had at least one grandparent in Lievestuore.

resources. Social connections close to the home are important and active. This is confirmed by the notion that incomer families were also most active in their local connections. Even though they had less social resources than families in both local groups they had more daily contacts with the children's friends. This may be considered to be a strategy used by the incomer family to become acquainted with the locality where they live and construct local social resources.

Incomer families constituted an interesting group in the locality. One reason for incomer families' weak economic resources was that in this group many mothers took care of their children at home. This lowered these families' economic resources, but at the same time it might be seen that they are more resourced by having the possibility to choose to stay at home with their children instead of working. It is quite obvious that these educated parents also had employment opportunities when the situation in the family changed and their children got older. If families had made this kind of choice, it might also indicate that they were more involved in improving their children's resources themselves. There are more opportunities for resources to be transmitted from one generation to another, whenever parents spend time with their children at home. Developing social capital at home also enables the utilization of other capitals that can be shared within the family, i.e. parents' cultural capital. However, any transition of resources requires that parents actively work to bring it about. (Cf. Coleman 1988.)

In this survey data, children's everyday life appeared as local regardless of the families' local background. The mobility of children under school age was usually local with day-care and free time activities taking place in Lievestuore. Children's social networks, people with whom they had active contact were physically close by. It could be that the families who had chosen Lievestuore as their home place were more engaged with a particular place close to nature than, for example, families in a city environment. It seems that families had not chosen an environment for perceived advantages such as diversified free time activities, or cultural and other services. Many respondents emphasised the importance of the place being a safe neighbourhood in which to live and rear children. It has an intrinsic value and at the same time it means that some other

possibilities, which are part of living in a city-neighbourhood, had been consciously forsaken or families were ready to make an effort to reach them. Of course the rather low cost of housing had been important for many families while choosing a place to live. Nevertheless, when examined as a whole, the data do indicate that locality is a resource for families with young children, and it may be assumed that those families who are locally active are also engaged with a sense of place and belonging.

However, the image of childhood in Lievestuore is too limited if it is only seen as 'local' and defined by the local aspect. Children do not only construct their resources locally, but the extended space of everyday life is also part of children's living and it has an influence on what kind of resources children have (Morrow 2004, 71). Children move with their families and 'the world' comes to them via TV and Internet. One example of this is how the media produces resources for children in toys. Later in this chapter, this occurrence will be presented, while enlarging on children's resources in preschool.

The description of young children in Lievestuore is based on the survey data, which does not disclose how the distinctions were made by children or families and which resources were recognized as capital in interaction. Even though it might be assumed that these kinds of distinctions also occur in the local social space of Lievestuore, the local day-care centre provides research with a limited social space in which to observe how resources function in action. Thus the need for a more thorough investigation using ethnographic data from the day-care field is justified. In children's everyday life, the recognition and distinctions are made in interaction at a micro level of society, and still there is possible to discover how influences from different levels of the society intermingle with children's everyday life at day-care.

As has been mentioned, day-care is the place where one meets more easily with children in the research site. In every locality group, the majority of the children were involved in the day-care with, however, slightly fewer incomer children than local or semi-local children⁶. Naturally,

⁶ The percentage of day-care participation: incomer families 60%, semi-local families 80% and local families 80% (Lehtinen & Vuorisalo 2009).

the day-care centre is a node in children's local peer-network and is an important place for children to participate in and meet other children. It possesses a special nature as it is the children's own shared place, teeming with social action, a place where different children from different backgrounds meet and get to know each other. At the same time, the day-care centre might be seen as an important place in which the construction of local childhood occurs. Day-care is also the first local institution that meets these children as a group, and starts to develop and evaluate them by the official standards of "normal" or "good" childhood (see Bundgaard & Gulløv 2008). As has been mentioned earlier, nearly the whole age group participated in preschool at the age of six. For these reasons, preschool constitutes an important year for children before compulsory school begins. An interesting question that does arise is whether the preschool group constitutes a Bourdieusian field. This will be considered in the next section.

Field and capital in day-care

The concept of field is used here as an analytical tool for explaining social interactions and any social space where children utilize their capital. The main focus will be on children's actions, that is, on how they capitalise upon their resources and thereby construct for themselves a position in the preschool. (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992.) Thus, it is assumed that in any actual day-care centre its everyday life unfolds in a social arena that functions as a (Bourdiesian) field. In this study, the term 'preschool' includes those children and adults (staff members) who form one preschool group, and the interaction between all these members.

The preschool group represents a field on a micro level of society. However, day-care as a social arena is seen as a part of the wider processes of childhood, existing within a hierarchical network of inter-related fields (and subfields). In other words, the preschool will need to be understood relationally, in the context of an extensive field of childhood and its history, therefore also the past and present states of the childhood field have an impact on contemporary day-care. (Gulløv 2008, Mayall 2002, James

& James 2004.) Moreover, Connolly (2004, 105) emphasises that by ignoring the broader social contexts and relationships within which children are located, children's actions will not be perceived correctly. While researching racism and gender issues among young children, Connolly developed an interpretation of children's social living within a Bourdieusian frame by focusing particularly not only on a micro level, but also by 'looking beyond the school gate' to the extensive field of childhood while explaining the construction of children's capital (Connolly 1998, 2000) and habitus (Connolly 2004).

The concept of field describes the day-care centre as an organization, where both inter- and intra-organizational processes construct the field of preschool (Emirbayer & Johnson 2008). The day-care organization (including preschool) is a sub-field of the more extensive field of childhood, where contemporary childhood is determined simultaneously at many levels of society, and from where influences and capital move into the day-care field. A social arena already exists in the day-care, formed by children in terms of peer group, and the others corresponding to relations between children and teachers. The functioning of the day-care centre is preconditioned by the development in the local environment as well as in the regional and national government, economy and consumption, media and public sphere. All of these possible fields enter into the extensive field of childhood and present themselves in the preschool field. They also have an impact on the valuation of capitals that are available to children. Clearly then, the autonomy of the preschool field is far from extensive and, consequently, capitals from other fields flow into its social action.

Even if preschool cannot be deemed as an autonomous field, it is a field in the sense that the participants (here especially children) are positioned and position themselves in relation to each other (Devine 2009; Petersson 2004). One of the preschool group's special features as a social space is that it is not a group that children have formed on their own. It is a children's group that has been organized mainly because parents need a place for their children during their working hours. Therefore, children are not in day-care because of their own interest in the games played in that field. As a group which meets every day, they are bound together and

are related to other members. However, the field in itself arouses interest when the social production and reproduction of positions begin. Most of the children participate eagerly in everyday action and have an interest in playing games (Lehtinen 2009, 155). The field as an on-going process invites and sometimes forces children to participate, regardless of the children's interest in the game. Analytically, this means that in determining the field the most interesting actions engage in the struggles over power between relevant actors. Educationally and ethically this emphasizes that there are participants in the preschool group with only meagre or no resources to participate in the position-taking.

The analysis of field helps to explain why particular forms of capital are highly valued in some contexts and completely devalued in others. In Bourdieu's words, capital⁷ is any resource (material or embodied) which is effective in a given field and is recognized there as capital (Bourdieu & Wacquat 1992, 98–99). In the study presented in this chapter, the focus is on cultural capital, in its objectified and embodied states, and how they can be transformed (or converted) into social and symbolic capital. Participants in the preschool field construct the form of capital that is specific to that particular field and these capitals have an exchange value, which will be presented later in this chapter.

Objectified cultural capital, holding cultural goods, is closely linked to economic capital, which as such does not have particular currency in the preschool field. Usually the economic capital that is available to children (in other fields) has been transformed into objectified cultural capital before it enters the field of day-care. Hence, toys, clothes and other equipment represent and mediate the wealth of children's families and participate in the production and reproduction of social order in day-care. On the other hand, in the children's peer group, various items may be valued as cultural capital, although they are not highly priced. Their legitimiza-

⁷ Capital has four different forms: economic, cultural, social and symbolic. *Economic capital* is the same as money and other property. *Cultural capital* refers to cultural goods in objectified state, and embodied dispositions toward various cultural goods and practices as embodied cultural capital. The third form of cultural capital is institutionalized, which means holding legitimate educational qualifications. *Social capital* is linked to social networks and relationships and also resources gained in relationships with others. Each of these capitals may become *symbolic*, on the condition that it is recognized as legitimate and powerful in the field. (Bourdieu 1986.)

tion as capital takes place in action, by the participating children, who make up the sense of the items in question as part of the on-going 'game'. Recognising the game played in the field requires *embodied cultural capital*, embodied dispositions and practices, which guide the child's participation in the group's activities. It unconsciously operates like a radar that gives hints of conceivable and unconceivable possibilities in the field – what a particular child can do and how to act. It is one part of the child's habitus – the durable dispositions to feel, think and act in particular ways. (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992, 121.)

The evaluation of resources seems more arbitrary among children than among adults; moreover, changes may be quick and values often are unstable. This is one of the preschool field's special features. Objectified cultural capital does not always have long-lasting value among children. Therefore, embodied cultural capital is required. Children have to use a lot of energy and attention to be aware of the currency of various resources. In a peer group culture, where a used candy-wrapping may gain value as a resource, active participation is a way to be involved in actions where the values of the resources are defined. This is one reason why rapid changes and a high tempo typify children group interaction (see Corsaro 1985, 150; Strandell 1995, 33). If one has an interest in the game played in the field, he or she is bound to constantly move and observe. That is the way to take care of one's own position in the group, and to know what is the current rate of one's own resources.

Utilizing capital and converting them from one form to another is part of a field's dynamics. The values of various capitals are constantly negotiated or struggled, because the agents' positions in the field are defined by the capitals' values. (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992.) Taking advantage of capital is possible if the participant has in his/her habitus 'a sense for the game', as Bourdieu (1998a, 36) described the capacity to notice possibilities in the field. The struggle of capital does not mean open conflict; it is similar to exploiting the social energy that is moving in relations. The permanent group in a day-care constructs a relational social space, where resources are valued not only as cultural or social capital, but also as symbolic capital. Every form of capital may function as symbolic capital, if the capital in question becomes a credit due to recogni-

tion by others. Recognition is the core for the mobilisation of cultural and social capital. Holding symbolic capital usually means possessing power over that particular field and thereby gaining influence to determine how capitals are valued in the field. (Emirbayer & Johnson 2008, 13.) By using symbolic capital appropriately, in a productive way, the holder is able to improve or move his or her position in the field and gain other capitals. (Bourdieu 2000a, 242.)

Devine (2009, 523) has related these outlines to the educational system and perceived that field positioning according to capital volume and weight is the key process by which the understanding of that social space is possible to begin. Devine's target group in her study was migrant children. She noticed the importance of social capital in children's peer group; integration into the social networks and friendships were meaningful sources of social capital. Friendship as social capital immediately gave the holder a feeling of belonging and 'getting on' with school life. (Devine 2009, 526–529.) It seems that in a children's peer group, especially in preschool where economic capital is not directly used (cf. Bourdieu 1986), the meaning of social capital is emphasised. If the child has social capital, a recognised position in a friendship network, it is easier to get access to other capitals in the field and also to get recognition from others of those resources that children have already gained in other fields, like home. Moreover, along with recognition comes power, and this combines social capital and power in the preschool field.

The struggles of positions and recognition enter into preschool's everyday life frequently. One distinction in positions is clearly between teachers and children. From the children's point of view, adults as staff members are the highest authorities in the preschool. The adults in a group represent power, which has been assigned to them in their organizational position as preschool teachers. However, power dynamics is a complicated issue that extends beyond the power imbalance between children and teachers into a realm of competition and power differentials in the day-care's peer group (Reay 2006, 172). Hence, children as agents compete with each other for recognition and positions. Many of these struggles take place under the teachers' eyes, who actually struggle along with them, because their authority is not sovereign, though in many cases

it bypasses the power possessed by the children. It has to be kept in mind, that most of these struggles take place unconsciously. Some moments of these struggles will be presented next in this chapter – what kind of resources hold value as capital in preschool, and in which situations does the exchange value occur.

From resource to capital

The ethnographic data used and discussed in this section offers an account of some resources that children utilised as capital and transformed into another. Three cases are presented as evidence of the fact that the social space of preschool forms a field where the utilisation and convertibility of capitals take place. In the first case, the data is from a preschool session where cultural capital had also been used for social purposes. The second case describes how the presence of the children's own toys started to develop social relationships. The last episode gives evidence of one girl's embodied cultural capital and its value as symbolic capital in this group.

(1) Skilful pupils in preschool

Officially learning is one of the leading activities for children in preschool. In the episode below, the skills attained by working as a pupil have been taken into use as capital, and the exchange value of cultural capital appear. Children wrote in their preschool books under the teacher's guidance.

Preschool session:

Matti sits behind Laura⁸. He does not know what he should do. Otto, who is sitting next to Matti, shows from his own book the right spot. Despite Otto showing him, Matti starts to fill in the wrong exercise. - - Henri also does not know what to do. PAULA says that everyone should know what they are

⁸ The names of the children and adults have all been changed to ensure anonymity; the teacher's name is marked in upper case letters

doing, because they have done the same kinds of exercises before. They start to spell out children's names. - - While they are spelling these names, Otto still tries to show Matti which exercises he should do. Matti notices that he has done the wrong exercise. He tries to erase it with his finger. He starts to do the right exercise, but he makes a mistake again. - - PAULA gives them new instructions. Then she gives the children coloured pencils for the exercise. At this point Matti says aloud that he has made some mistakes. Laura turns to Matti and asks: "What?" Matti shows her where the mistakes are. - - At the same time while they are doing the colouring exercise, Laura advises Matti on the first exercise. - - Laura works on her task quietly. When she has completed her exercises, she turns to Matti many times and follows how Matti gets on with his tasks.

When Matti noticed that he had missed the instructions, he tried to hide his confusion and looked for help from his neighbour by throwing him glances. Otto noticed this and tried to help. Concealing these actions from the teacher meant that Matti did not understand the instructions correctly. He was making constant errors. Matti's troubles were nearly revealed when the teacher walked around and gave colouring pencils. Matti prepared for the teacher's attention by confessing his mistakes, but the teacher did not pay any attention to Matti after all. Laura instead heard Matti and offered her help.

Both Otto and Laura were involved in helping Matti. They knew what to do and had finished their own exercises. Their achievements function as *cultural capital* in this situation. It demonstrates their skills, but that is not the main reason why they acted thus in this situation. Resources were utilized to benefit Matti. Cultural capital transformed into social capital between these three children, and vice versa on Matti's behalf – his social capital, friendship with Otto and Laura, offer him an opportunity to cope with his preschool exercises – to achieve some cultural resources. Devine (2009, 532–533) has also elicited that social capital is most effective when it functions with other forms of capital.

Friendship, i.e. earlier acquired social resources among these children, contributed so that Otto and Laura were ready to help and took care of Matti in order that the teacher would not know about his problem. The conversion of capital in this situation was conceivable since these children were used to spending time together and were valued as participants

in the peer group. The conversion reproduced these children's mutual relationship and social capital that already existed. This happened by the recognition of sameness, these children – positioned near each other in the field – confirmed their relationship and positions by helping.

The teacher's comment underlined that children should be able to follow the instructions and know what to do. This explains why the children so carefully tried to hide Matti's confusion. The trio worked in secrecy, which strengthened their shared activities and sameness with each other and at the same time implies their resistance against the teacher's control, and distinguishes them from the power that the teacher represents. In the observation data, there are also episodes when the teacher was immediately told if anyone made a mistake or broke the rules. This indicates that from these same elements, children also make distinctions and emphasise differences between children in their positions in the field (see also Löfdahl & Hägglund 2006, 192).

The episode displays that working with the preschool-book is especially meaningful for children for many reasons. They are eager to study and they want to fulfil their positions as preschoolers. The status as a preschool child is an important and new position for children. They are on the first step of their formal education career and they are the oldest children in the day-care centre. The next step is to start primary school. They have achieved a developmental landmark which is bound to age and is important to children and adults alike. For children, developmental achievements, such as the age and status of a preschool child, or the ability to read can be valued resources (Mayall 2002, 138) and might be drawn on as capital. The same abilities and skills that educators evaluate and try to develop, children utilise and convert as capital. The new achievements are mobilized directly, not only as a learnt subject and cultural capital, but as a representation of capability in many kinds of situations, for example, when helping a friend. Children use their resources widely, and social interaction opens differing possibilities for children to utilize their resources as capital.

(2) *Toys in action*

Toys and different kinds of items occupy a significant place in children's interaction. Using toys, children construct games which are perhaps the most important way to participate in the children's group. In the situation described below, they had a bring-your-own-toy day at the preschool and Venla introduced her toys, little animal figures⁹, to the other children. This was an ordinary start for the toy day, which they had in this preschool usually once a month. Every child would begin by telling something about his or her specially selected toy. What is interesting in the next episode is how Irina conveyed her interest in Venla's toys and how this activated the capital-conversion.

The bring-your-own-toy day

Venla is introducing her toys, little animal figures.

Venla: "These are from the same set as Laura's."

Irina (asks Venla): "Where do you live? May I come next weekend to ask for you [to play with me]?"

Irina recalls that she has seen Venla once [in Venla's home-yard] as Irina was returning from a cycling trip with her family. During the day Irina repeats the story several times.

In the preschool-yard:

Venla, Irina and some other children are jumping outside.

Irina asks Venla: "Will you be at home this weekend?"

When the girls run past the sandpit, Irina says: "I don't remember, what colour is your home." Venla: "It's blue."

The toy day was at the beginning of the preschool semester. Irina was a new child in the group and she did not yet know Venla. During a social interaction, Irina noticed Venla's toys and this accented the toys' value as capital. Irina's recognition gets Venla's toys to function as capital and the shared interest opens up interaction between these two girls. Irina's interest was accepted as Venla told what colour her home is and at the same time she enabled Irina to find her. Therefore, two recognitions, one for both girls, are discovered and by them the transformation of capital

⁹ The Littlest Pet Shops -figures

is enabled. Venla's toy-animal figures functioned as *objectified cultural capital*, and this generated social capital (friendship), by widening Venla and Irina's friendship network.

An important feature in this case is that the transformation of capital did not happen directly. Irina returned to the subject during the outdoor activities, which established that Irina's actions and questions had a focus. She recognised the potentials that were covered in this situation, and the continuum between actions in preschool and at home. They transferred friendship, achieved by a common interest in particular toys, and started to share a social connection out of this field where capitals were created. One reason for this might be that the girls did not have so many friends in their neighbourhood. At preschool, they already both had tight friendship connections, Venla with Laura, and Irina with Anna, but only Venla and Irina lived in the same neighbourhood. Venla's friendship with Laura already revealed itself in the toy introduction. It became quite obvious that Venla and Laura had planned to bring the same toys and to share a game. Irina's questions also expressed that she was not immediately interested in playing with Venla. She had made plans for the weekend. This arrangement stayed like this also after Venla's and Irina's friendship had begun. During the semester, Venla and Irina's friendship was apparent in the preschool especially in discussions, when they told and recalled what they had done together at home. In preschool, they spent time with their old friends.

Toys, clothes and other kinds of objects are resources for children which they also may utilize as capital. Children have not had a long period of time to develop the amount of their capitals. Therefore, toys are potentially meaningful mediators of capital. As an object, a toy is immediately possible to use and to present as capital. However, this is not always possible. The value of the toys is defined by their owners. Toys as reified economic and cultural capital convert to other capitals in action, especially in games. Thus, in a children's peer group, children might have access to other capitals through toys as objectified cultural capital, particularly social capital in friendships.

The consumption of media and advertising, especially in combination with TV-series and toys, generates popular brands among children (Cook

2009, 343), and this provides a fairly stable and special value for certain kinds of toys and clothes. However, the basic principle in consumption is change and this has an influence on toys – old brands have to make way for new brands, thus making some resources obsolete. As has been stated, the struggle over capital is constant. The toy mediates the value from one field to another. In the episode presented, Venla had animal-figures that had gained their value in the field of children’s media and consumption. The value obtained there also bestowed a certain value upon them in negotiations in the field of day-care. In Venla and Irina’s case, social capital from the preschool was transferred to home. These two fields overlap and the same capital is valued in both fields. This establishes how capital passes through the fields and also how different fields are represented in the preschool field.

When such valued ‘capital objects’ are used, this experience shared by children causes the social capital to remain even when the object is taken away. Social sharing continues and one capital is transformed into another. This is what happened between Irina and Venla. On the other hand, experiences also become attached to objects, so that they alone may represent power to their holders. Objects have importance as capital and the holder therefore is significant. The value of objectified cultural capital is measured by two aspects: what is the resource presented as capital and who is the holder of the capital. Children’s hierarchic positions in the social field have an influence on how the resources are perceived - whether they have a capacity to also function as capital. This establishes how objectified cultural capital demand embodied cultural capital to be used appropriately (Bourdieu 1986, 244). This will be discussed in more detail in the next episode in this chapter.

(3) Like a fish in water

In this particular group, guided discussions, like morning circle times, are remarkable places to participate and present one’s own resources. There the structure of the assembly holds the attention of all participants; sitting in a circle ensures that everyone sees each other. In preschool, children are able to show all their resources, but they have a place to tell

little stories about them. Those children who consider participating in these conversations have the opportunity to construct their resources and position in the group, and their resources have a place to be recognised (Thornberg 2009, 401). For them, the joint action yields greater advantages than for those whose participation is more irregular or silent. This, especially the advantages of speaking, will be established in the next episode. The morning circle-time was an ordinary start for the preschool-day: children were sitting on their benches, where they had assigned places, and the teacher led the situation. This time, the teacher had taken an unusual place; she was sitting on the floor instead of on the chair.

Morning circle time:

EEVA is sitting on the floor. Irina says that EEVA sits just like she did when they were visiting a place with puppies - the puppies were climbing up into her lap. [She shows how the puppies were climbing.] Aaron makes the wish that they would play Crane and frogs; Anna asks for the Rocket-aeroplane game. Otto puts up his thumb. EEVA: "Nice – you have a thumb!" Otto proposes that they have some morning exercise while Irina continues her talk of puppies, describing how the puppies used their teeth to help in their climbing. EEVA says that Irina should keep an eye on her toys when a puppy is brought home. She tells how a dog had once destroyed a teddy bear at her friend's home. Otto now takes a turn to tell how their dog Rex once chewed his sister's Moomin house. – – Irina announces her wish that they play a particular [colour] game before breakfast. EEVA carries out her wish.

The atmosphere in the morning was easy-going. Two children had run to hug EEVA when she entered the room. The children and EEVA were in dialogue, even though in these situations there was a rule whereby children were not allowed to speak without the teacher's permission. However, this was not the first time when the rule was forgotten. Irina opened up the dialogue with her puppy talks. The way the teacher was sitting made Irina recall an event, when she had met their forthcoming puppy. The relaxed atmosphere also encouraged Aaron and Anna to bend the rules and to make proposals for games. At this moment, Otto asked for permission to speak by lifting his thumb up. EEVA noticed this and gave positive feedback – this was the way the proposals should be made. Still, under Irina's guidance, the group continued its discussion of dogs. In the middle of this conversation, Irina asked for a particular game, which EEVA chose to execute.

Irina's way of participating in the group's joint activity displays how she has acquired the discussion culture which is shared in action. Her fluency in participating and the use of discussion indicate her cultural capital which she embodies. She moves in the discussion "like a fish in water" choosing the topics, and had "a feel for the game" so that her game-idea is fulfilled (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992, 127–128). Irina's *embodied cultural capital* had an influence on the whole group's action. In this situation, her participation in the discussion stretched out the formal limits of the group's social action. It offered other children possibilities to express their resources and use the shared discussions as a place to get recognition. Aaron and Anna directly noticed this possibility and tried to propose games. Otto tried to offer his proposal in accordance with the rules, but neither did he manage to accomplish his proposed game. On that occasion, Irina was the one whose game-idea was carried out, although the teacher returned to these other proposals after the breakfast. The teacher followed Irina's initiation. It is noted that the rules or the reproduction of them were not the structure that guided the teacher's action, though she noticed the right form in Otto's action. However valued those rules were in the group, children's agency and capital produced new ways to act in interaction situations.

The episode represents how embodied cultural capital functions as symbolic capital. It is recognized as legitimate competence. Irina's power in the group was manifested in her role as the informal leader of the discussion. It was she, and not the teacher, who produced the content for the assembly. This establishes that achieving the readiness of speech as a part of embodied cultural capital bring certain children status, and thus power, within their peer group and also in a preschool group including adults. By embodied cultural capital, children may also occasionally abolish adults' organizational position in the group and take the leadership over from the adults. Children are otherwise struggling with adults' dominance of the field.

Telling about your own resources and a readiness of speech are highly respected values while children are acting in the preschool field. Other researchers have also discovered the significance of vocalizing. Emirbayer and Williams (2005, 708) have noticed that the manner in interaction was

the important determinant for clients' positions in an institutional field. In the day-care research context, Palludan (2007, 79, 88) has stated that vocalising was a very distinct and crucial practice in adults' and children's interaction. The language use has a considerable meaning in participating. By exchanging with adults, child may acquire a respectable position and their actions may also be seen as being more legitimate than others. The position gives them more freedom and also valued their actions. These research findings follow Bourdieu's definitions of linguistic markets, where the price of the speech-act may be different depending on the speaker. The competence to speak does not only mean that one has a capacity to speak. The linguistic competence is connected to the power structure of the field, which distribute speakers and the importance of their message, and at the same time it is one feature of social distinction. (Bourdieu 1999, 54–55.) Silent children, those who do not present themselves through speech, may be ignored and thus invisible in the group (Holkeri-Rinkinen 2009, 217, cf. also Devine 2009, 530). In contrast, powerful children may be seen as 'the voice' of the child group towards the power field of adults above them. Another question is, how representative is this 'voice', does it represent only those children who have this 'voice'?

Another point to be made about this morning circle time episode is that it also displays how different states of cultural capital are drawn upon at the same time and how vocalising embodied cultural capital enables the presentation of these other resources. Irina's puppy functioned as an objectified cultural resource in a conversation – Otto also started to talk about dogs and by doing this expressed his interest in the topic that Irina had chosen. Otto's support is significant because he is in a powerful position in this group. The attention he paid to Irina's topic also confirmed Irina's symbolic capital as recognition in the field. Hence, at the same time when children spend time nicely together, they also make distinctions. The situation described above was comfortable for all, but it was also an example of the common discussion in the power of one girl.

Concluding remarks

This chapter has investigated the construction and conversion of children's resources, both in the context of a local community and in the social interaction of a preschool. It was argued that it is meaningless to attempt to understand children's resources without reference to the specific context within which they occur (Connolly 1998, 2004). For this reason, this study, although limited, has also considered the local lives of children and the resources that they had access to in their families. The results suggest that young children's resources in Lievestuore have been constructed locally. Even those incoming families in Lievestuore are active locally and create networks in their own neighbourhood, so that their children might have access to cultural and social resources there where they live. Another context issue, which has been present throughout this investigation, is an attempt to connect children's preschool childhood to the wider context or 'fields' of contemporary childhood, and how these fields might be perceived at different levels of society in the daily life of a children's preschool group.

The approach adopted in this study permitted a close examination of children's resources in preschool. The results presented here, which used a set of qualitative observations and interpretation through a Bourdieusian theoretical frame, suggest that a preschool group is a 'field-like' social space, where children utilise and transform their resources as capitals to organize the field. Data examples express that the preschool setting allows children possibilities to take into use various forms of capital and, thereby, to have an effect on the structure of action in day-care. Furthermore, a comparison between these findings and children's resources in families reveals that differences in local family backgrounds do not extend to children's interaction. It seems that there is no direct reproduction of families' resources in preschool, because the resources used and converted in preschool were universal, not local. This establishes that the preschool field is autonomous compared to local fields, and there, children also have opportunities to use their resources regardless of their families' resources. This implies that even though children in many ways are dependent on their families,

they might also have their own fields where they are independent actors who utilise their own resources.

The episodes in this chapter are not intended to offer a comprehensive description of capitals in preschool group. Rather it focuses on some forms of capital to present how conversion may happen and in what kind of interaction processes and relationships. In the teacher-guided activities introduced in this chapter, children were presenting and utilizing their resources mainly through speech. Thus, participating in the field of preschool requires an abundance of cultural capital, especially in its embodied form. Resources do not function as capital if the owner is not able to use and to capitalize them. In the preschool field, as the episodes proved, the embodied cultural capital is considerably important. Emirbayer & Johnson (2008, 4) describe the meaning of embodied cultural capital by emphasizing that it *“allows the well-endowed to profit from formal and informal education in ways that those lacking in cultural capital cannot, thereby helping to reproduce the social world that originally produced it.”*

The states of cultural capital, objectified and embodied, are important fuel for interactions. In many cases they produce the content for the interaction. They may provide the child with the possibility to be recognized and to gain symbolic capital. Bourdieu & Wacquant (1992, 98) have expressed the meaning of possessing capital by stating that it *“allows its possessors to wield a power, an influence, and thus to exist, in the field under consideration, instead of being considered a negligible quantity.”* Therefore, holding appropriate capitals in the field might be seen as fundamental if the agent wants to succeed there. Properly used, one capital contains access to other capital, and at any one moment, children can draw on many capitals. This displays how complicated the utilisations of capital are and how the different forms of capital are connected to each other. Capitals are constantly moving. They are undergoing value-struggles, while acquiring and maintaining a particular form of capital takes its place in the field.

This chapter has focused on children who are relevant actors in the preschool field. In the preschool group, there were also children who did not participate in the action like Venla, Irina, Laura, Otto and Matti. These five children were in positions where they had enough symbolic capital to convert their capitals and wield power in the field, thus taking advantage

of their resources. They are recognized participants in this group and they had habituated the game played in the field. In Childhood Studies, all children are easily covered under a robe of agency. However, at the individual level not all children have equally opportunities or a capacity for agency. James (2009, 44) emphasizes that even though children are agents in their everyday life, agency is an attribute of individual children and it depends on the person. In a Bourdieusian frame, it also depends on the field and agent's position there, how he or she is able to use the capital available. This has the effect that children are unequal in using and transforming their resources. Some children's voices are 'louder' than others in the preschool group (Reay 2006; Warming 2011). The group obeys its structure as a field where one's voice is connected to position, thus those with more capital are more likely to get their voice heard (see also Löfdahl & Hägglund 2007, 332). A more extensive application of Bourdieu's field theory may decipher the structure of the preschool group showing how distinctions are made in a preschool and how children's positions are constructed.

In other words, Bourdieu's notion of field helps to develop an understanding of when and where particular forms of capital either become eminent and valued or diminish in importance and eventually devalued. The field consists of particular forms of capital and struggles to acquire or secure these capitals. (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992.) Examples that are specific to the preschool field confirm that resources that are valued as capital in the day-care field may have their sources in other parts of the social space, e.g. outside the preschool field. Therefore in order to identify preschool as a field, its connections to other fields also need to be studied. It already emerged in this chapter's short episodes how children drew on capital from other fields and, on the other hand, how capital acquired in preschool moved with the child to another field. An interesting question for further research is how children's resources from home come into use in the preschool.

Analysing the field may show how children participate in the construction of their own position in the day-care centre, and how they thereby contribute to its structuring (and possibly inequalities between children). The aim or motive of analysing fields is to discover the structure of day-care life and if there are special forms of day-care capital.

Appendix 1. The composite variables

ECONOMIC RESOURCES: variables and values

Mother and father's working life position:

Unemployed, full-time student, or home taking care of child(ren) = 1

A salary earner working part-time or pensioner = 2

A salary earner working full-time or similar = 3

Family's most important sources of income:

Benefits = 1

Earned income and benefits = 2

Earned income = 3

Parents' combined monthly income (before taxes):

Less than 2 000 euros = 1

2 000–4 000 euros = 2

Over 4 000 euros = 3

Family's housing: owner-occupied house or flat

No = 0, Yes = 1

CULTURAL RESOURCES: variables and values

Mother and father's education and mean of all grandparents' education.

Mother's/ father's/ grandparent's basic education:

Less than elementary school = 0

Elementary, middle- or comprehensive school = 1

Secondary school graduate = 2

Mother's/ father's/ grandparent's vocational education:

No degrees = 0

A degree in a vocational school or a college level degree = 1

A vocational high school degree or a university degree = 2

SOCIAL RESOURCES: variables and values

Contact with child's grandparent(s)/ child's friend/ family's relatives/ family's friends and neighbours

Monthly = 1

Weekly = 2

Daily = 3

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Amount of child's good friends:

From 1 to 3 = 1

More than 3 =2

Child's membership in association:

No = 0, Yes = 1

Child visits her/his friend at least once a week/ child's friend visits her/him:

No = 0, Yes = 1

Appendix 2. Ethnography in preschool

Ethnography as a methodological approach is widely used in Childhood Studies (Lange & Mierendorff 2009, 80–81). It offers children an active position in the research as social actors and emphasises children's contributions to the shaping of social life (James 2001, 250–251). In addition, in the Bourdieusian frame, ethnography is an applicable method to describe how actions are organized in a field, and to follow the field's objective regularities (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992, 8). In ethnographic fieldwork, it is possible to grasp children's everyday life in a day-care, to examine the occurrence of social production and reproduction of resources and relations.

The process of ethnographic field work for this study was conducted in one day-care centre in 2006 and 2007. I carried out observations, and then one-to-one interviews with only those ten children who had volunteered. A group interview was also conducted with the staff. The results reported in this chapter are based on the observation data.

Children's participation in the study was voluntary, but in institutions, participation is not always optional as the group is working together and the researcher is also involved in the action. I did not acquire the children's written consent to participate, but the permission was continuously negotiated in action. Children might feel forced to participate because of the conformity of the group or adults' expectations, therefore I tried to be sensitive to the children's expressions of discomfort, and did not continue observation if a child somehow expressed rejection. Usually this happened nonverbally, but only in situations where the children were free to choose their activities. In the beginning of the observation, I told the children who I was and what my main interests were, I also informed them that participation was optional. Parents allowed their child's participation in the research passively. I gave them a form which I asked them to return to the day-care centre if they did not wish to give their permission. All twenty children participated in the study, except one, whose parents had refused permission.

As a researcher, I was a participant in the knowledge production, even though children in their action did not particularly produce the data for

me, but participated in actions at preschool. Ethnography is a subjective method, where the knowledge, observations and interpretation are produced through the researcher, and the presence of the researcher interacts with the situation (James 2001, 254). I paid special attention to how I interacted with the adults and children, and how I posited myself in comparison to those 'educator-adults'. On the other hand, I also trusted the children's ability to distinguish between the various roles between adults. I intentionally attempted to act differently than the educators, but at the same time I chose to act like an adult, who is friendly, trustworthy and easy to interact with. I constructed my role as a participant observer so that I usually awaited children's invitation to interact, and tried to always answer their questions and help them if my assistance was asked for. Only in a few rare situations did I have to use my responsible adult-role. In those situations, the children's actions threatened other children's physical or mental safety.

I observed the children during the formal parts of the preschool day, as well as at playtimes and mealtimes. Most observations took place between early morning and noon. I devoted one day to each child in order to observe her or his actions. I wrote down my observation. After the day at the preschool, I usually transcribed the notes immediately, so that I could add all the details that I remembered. The transcription was also the first part of the analysis and led to how I continued my work at the preschool.



Taimirinne day-care centre



Laurinkylä primary school