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Author(s): Vuorisalo, Mari

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Sammendrag av doktorgradsavhandlinger

Mari Vuorisalo

Children's fields and capitals.

Participation and the construction of inequality in preschool

Avhandling for graden Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in Education ved Faculty of Education, University of Jyväskylä, Finland. Disputas 24. mai 2013.

This study explores children's everyday actions in a preschool with particular focus on children's participation. The theoretical bases for the study combined Childhood Studies and Pierre Bourdieu's relational sociology – especially his concepts of field and capital. The primary aim of the study was to gain a profound understanding of children's participation and how it produced children's positions in a group. The study aimed also to determine day-care practices which constructed inequalities in preschool.

The ethnographic data for the study were collected in one preschool. Participants consisted of one preschool group and its staff. The group included 21 children aged 6 years and three practitioners: two preschool teachers and one nursery nurse. The main data consist of observations carried out during an entire preschool year. The fieldwork involved also interviews with children and staff members. The interpretation of the data relies on Bourdieusian field analysis. The relational concepts of field and capital have been defined through a dialectical process between the observation data and the theoretical notion.

Firstly, the study considers what structures constrain social action in pres-

chool. It shows that in daily activities, conversation and equality were emphasized. Secondly, and in particular, the study examines the social arenas of preschool as fields. Two fields – the field of children and adults and the field of children – were identified. Participation in these fields required different forms of capital. In the field of children and adults, conversation was a crucial practice which produced conversation capital. The field of children relied on social recognition, which is a particular form of social capital in this field and also a sign of power. Children's positions in the fields are defined by the value of their capital.

The results reveal that participation is not equal in preschool. Through field analysis, the study indicated that the preschool has structures which produce distinctions and inequalities in everyday interactions. From a relational point of view, the study provides an opportunity to take a critical look at the structures of preschool.

Kontakt: Mari Vuorisalo

E-mail: mari.vuorisalo@jyu.fi