5th report

Experiences of interviewing children in a research context

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Introduction

During evaluation and follow-up research associated with a major development project for early anti-bullying intervention among children in preschool and early school years, as a team of researchers we attempted to bring in the children's approaches to and understandings of teasing and bullying. This took place by testing a variety of methods to obtain the children's statements on such issues, resulting in another report (Knudsen, Lindberg & Kampmann, 2009), in which we address children's ways of comprehending, experiencing and dealing with teasing. This report will primarily focus on the *methodological* lessons learned from the various types of interviews with 4-9-year olds. Accordingly, the present paper sets out to contribute to the continued development of methods to conduct research into children's everyday lives. Furthermore, it should serve to inspire professionals who work with children in this age group on a daily basis, and who wish to build knowledge based on children's testimonies.

The development project entitled "Free from Bullying" (in Danish: *Fri for Mobberi*) was originally launched on the initiative of Save the Children Denmark. Right from the planning phase, three municipalities were involved (Aarhus, Kolding and Gentofte), and within each of these, one school was selected along with two preschools located within the catchment area of that school. The participant schools and preschools agreed to work over a prolonged period, focusing on uncovering and preventing bullying. To this effect, a suitcase was provided, containing various types of teaching aids, including concrete descriptions and proposals for didactic activities with the children, ideas for how to draw attention to and foster understanding of bullying within the staff group, as well as materials targeting the parents in order to enhance their awareness and efforts as regards (the prevention of) bullying. All selected educational institutions were involved for approximately two years with access to the same ideas and materials, but with the freedom to adapt the development project to their own setting, traditions and views of

how 'Free from Bullying' would make optimal sense in their particular school or preschool.[1]

The follow-up research project has been tasked with describing, assessing and evaluating the entire process as regards the development, implementation and effects of Free from Bullying in the municipalities and educational institutions concerned.[2] One part of this research – addressing children's approach to and understanding of teasing and bullying – featured only to a limited extent in the early reporting. Consequently, the present 5th report as well as the 4th report "I bit his hand. Then he broke my Lego" (Knudsen, Lindberg & Kampmann 2009) contribute towards this aspect of the follow-up research project.

Childhood research and children's perspective

We are clearly not the first researchers who have taken it upon themselves to obtain statements from children about subjects and phenomena that are significant from the children's perspective. In particular over the past 10-15 years, childhood research has focused on involving children and attributing meaning to their testimonies. One outcome has been the testing of various types of interviews with children aimed at homing in on their understandings and views of conditions regarding their own daily lives. Generically, this field of study can be placed under the heading of 'children's perspective'. For various reasons and in myriad ways, the children's perspective has taken centre stage in extensive circles of childhood research both in Denmark and internationally since the beginning of the 1990s.

Scholars from the Norwegian Centre for Child Research, NOSEB, located in Trondheim, were among the first to explicitly use the term 'children's perspective' (in Norwegian: *barneperspektiv*). Professor Per Olav Tiller was a pioneer in using concrete observations

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[1] An in-depth account of the development project 'Free from Bullying' is available at: http://www.redbarnet.dk/Danmark_og_Gr%C3%B8nland/Mobning/Fri_for_Mobberi/English_Summary.aspx
[2] The follow-up research project thus far can also be found in Danish at Save the Children Denmark's website, see footnote 1.

to highlight the ways in which children establish perceptions of minor and major events and phenomena that differ from how adults experience the same situations, yet are entirely meaningful from the children's viewpoint (Tiller 1990). There is no doubt that Tiller's work in Norway served as an inspiration, contributing to himself and several of his colleagues launching the concept of 'children's perspective' (*barneperspektiv*, Åm 1989 and Barn 1991).

In Denmark, one of the first attempts to explicitly present and discuss the substance and potential uses of a children's perspective was commissioned by the National Council for Children (Kampmann 1998). However, it was not only the term 'children's perspective' ' (in Danish: *børneperspektiv*) which signalled greater interest in involving children's viewpoints and formulation of meaning in a research setting. Since the mid-to-late 1990s, children's participation in and contributions towards scientific inquiry have featured more prominently. At present, the methods of using children as fellow researchers and attributing importance to listening to children have characterised a substantial part of childhood research for slightly more than a decade (Greig & Taylor 1999; Christensen & James 2000; Lewis & Lindsay 2000; Brooker 2001; Warming 2007). There is a variety of reasons for this enhanced focus on children's statements and opinions, and for the scholars' declared intention to approach or establish a children's perspective. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child has undoubtedly been a considerable factor in fostering a wish to listen to children as persons with a right to express themselves and be heard. This connection has been particularly evident in England, since several of the papers conveying knowledge and ideas as to how children can be meaningfully listened to have not been published by standard research periodicals or academic publishing houses, but by organisations dedicated in various ways to the cause of children's rights (Milner & Carolin 1999). Likewise, in Denmark, a similar interest has been cultivated under the aegis of the National Council for Children (Jørgensen & Kampmann 2000).

However, the scholars have also been at odds with each other over perspectives within childhood research. These disputes do not only concern inspiration from the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, but spring just as much from departures and

variances from those paradigms and scientific traditions that have exerted hegemony and dominated the field. Childhood research is not in any way an isolated sphere or environment with its own exceptional historical development detached from the rest of the academic community. On the contrary, parts of the critical childhood research were developed as an extension of – and in some ways as the offspring of – the critical women's and feminist research. Feminist academia was (particularly back in the 1970s and 80s) concerned with breaking the mould of women's invisibility and otherness (Lykke 2008). Several feminist researchers began to draw on this critique to raise similar objections to their own approaches, asking where the children were to be found in the research endeavour, that is: what kind of invisibility and otherness was being established in relation to *children* within this critical research tradition?[3] However, partly as an offshoot and refinement of Critical Theory generally, research circles began to emerge which would raise the issue of children's social position and rights as a group, e.g. as formulated by two German socialisation critics, Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge (1974) in terms of the concept of 'children's public sphere' (in German: *Kinderöffentlichkeit*)[4]. Although Negt and Kluge cannot be said to have contributed their own in-the-field experiences of research methodology, they nevertheless helped enrich nascent ethnographically-inspired childhood research, which focused on the power configuration in the everyday life of educational institutions, as well as on establishing a perspective that attempted to capture children's resistance to institutionally-based power structures and control logics[5].

Towards the end of the 1980s, a more international context gave rise to what would later be known by the denomination of 'a new sociology of childhood'. In addition to building upon a particular Anglo-Saxon version of critical childhood research (James & Prout 1990), significant contributions also originated from continental Europe (Qvortrup 1991;

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[3] See Barry Thorne (1987) for an example of this emerging attention to and criticism of children's role in society being portrayed as invisible, also in the field of gender research.

[4] It should be borne in mind that the critical childhood research is concerned with viewing children as a collective subject manifesting its social categorisation as an interest group, which ought to have political rights related to the group interests (according to Negt & Kluge 1974; Negt, 1984).

[5] Among the relatively early examples of this in a Danish context are some of Sigsgaard's books from the beginning of the 1980s (Sigsgaard 1983a, 1983b, 1984 and 1985), as well as Felding, Møller & Smidt 1980 and Andersen & Kampmann 1988.

Qvortrup et al 1994). Initially, the major contributions of the new sociology of childhood were not ethnographically-inspired studies, but rather some key theoretical and conceptual developments and divergences, which basically established the child as an actor that creates meaning through social interactions, and as a research entity of intrinsic relevance (i.e. not just as an 'appendix' to the family, society, etc.). Upon this basis, the 1990s were characterised by a vast series of ethnographically-inspired studies of children's everyday lives, both internationally and in a Danish context, in which children were analysed as actors who interact, create meaning and negotiate their social position[6].

As mentioned, throughout the 1990s, as an offshoot of this research focus, a discussion arose around the establishment of a children's perspective. Initially, this theme was somewhat confined to Nordic research circles, but has since sparked international interest. Both here in Denmark and globally, recent research initiatives in this area are enabling methodological testing and innovation, which it must be said remain high on the agenda of childhood research. In some ways, it appears that the markedly increased interest in childhood research has set the stage for a fertile and constructive methodological development and testing of various methodological tools and approaches to draw forth children's statements about their own lives in a meaningful manner. This trend aims both to enhance insights into children's lives and to improve the use of children's contributions in the production of knowledge.

In a Danish context, it is possible to discern three main types of research experiences of testing a variety of specific methodologies aimed at obtaining statements from children about their perception of themselves and their own reality:

- What children say spontaneously in connection with day-to-day actions and interactions, which are recorded on 'the soundtrack' of the researcher's observation, thus testing what kind of statements can be obtained from the children by observing their everyday life.

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[6] Among the examples of Danish contributions are Andersen & Kampmann 1996, Mouritsen 1996, Gulløv 1999, Højlund 2002, Andersson 2000, Palludan 2005, Rasmussen 2004b, Gulløv & Højlund 2003, Staunæs 2004.

- What children say brought forth through informal conversations and verbal exchanges with a more or less participant observer in the course of an observation process.
- What children say in a more formalised setting, in which the researcher sets out deliberately –with a certain degree of preparation and planning – to initiate a conversation, dialogue and/or interview with the child and/or group of children, often revolving around a more or less defined issue.

These three types cover a spectrum moving from observation of children and their communication, via the observer entering into communication with children, to the researcher taking on an interviewing role, and no longer being an observer.

Our follow-up research project has not allowed for long-term observation periods, effectively preventing us from gathering statements to any significant extent by means of observation processes. Consequently, this report will chiefly concentrate on the third major category of children's statements.

Interviews with children

Among the first publications discussing experiences of interviewing children was a compilation of articles, in which several childhood researchers accounted for the various methodological approaches to this exercise (Jensen 1988). Issues such as the degree of structuring, number of interviewees and duration are highlighted as crucial challenges, particularly in the case of interviews with younger children. Furthermore, some of the authors address ways of enhancing the interview quality by applying various types of 'supportive arrangements' in the organisation and implementation of the interview. For instance, examples are presented of how children's drawings may be used as a starting point, either by asking in the course of the drawing process what the child is depicting etc., or by subsequently holding a conversation with the child on the basis of the finished drawing (e.g. Westman in Jensen 1988).

Since then, other types of supportive arrangements have been developed for use in numerous research projects. For instance, pictures and photographs illustrating the child's own everyday life have been used as starting point for the conversation, or the interviewer has told a story to invite the child's comment, often with relevance to some ethical or moral issue on which the child's views are sought. Another method is for the interviewer to formulate a half-finished sentence, which the child is then asked to complete or rephrase (Kampmann 1998: 24f).

Another interview practice that has developed in a Danish/Nordic setting is so-called 'life-form interviews', which were applied in the context of a major Nordic research undertaking called the BASUN project (acronym of "Child, Society and Development in the Nordic Countries" in Scandinavian languages) headed by Lars Dencil with the participation of researchers from Iceland, Finland, Norway, Sweden and Denmark (Andenæs 1991; Langsted, year not indicated). In the life-form interview, the child's own story serves as the starting point for homing in on how the child's everyday life unfolds specifically. The narrative is established by the interviewer and the child being together 'at the scene' of the actual events described by the child. In the BASUN project, these interviews were conducted both in the child's home and in the educational institution. In the course of the interview, the researcher would ask the child to show and recount the incidents where they occurred. As regards common day-to-day actions in the child's home, the interview might thus start from specific questions, such as "show me where you wake up", "do you dress yourself?", "show me where your clothes are", "does anybody choose them for you?", "who does that?" etc.

In some recent studies, the life-form interview has inspired the development of what has been called 'walk-and-talk' or 'the walking interview', in which the interest is not necessarily focused on uncovering everyday occurrences in their entirety, but rather on raising particular issues on which a conversation with the child is established, at the same time as the child shows the interviewer where the events took place (e.g. Nielsen 2007, Rasmussen 2004).

The above gives an overview of the methodological development and the experiences achieved thus far within this field, upon which the present report is built, and to which it seeks to add.

The follow-up research associated with Free from Bullying

The approach of the follow-up research associated with the development project 'Free from Bullying' has been inspired by the tradition of action research, setting out to bring about insights and ideas for the anti-bullying programme while this was still being implemented and developed. Accordingly, the knowledge production has advanced in close cooperation with the parties involved, i.e. Save the Children Denmark, the three participant municipal administrations and governments, school and preschool staff, parents and children. Continuous feedback to and dialogue with these parties has played an important role, enabling wider comprehension of the collected data and ongoing adjustment of the research design.

On the ground, the empirical foundation has been built on three data-collection rounds in the participant educational institutions spread at intervals across a period of two years. Both quantitative and qualitative information has been recorded. In all three rounds, selected groups have filled in a questionnaire about their understanding of the phenomenon of bullying, their knowledge and experiences of Free from Bullying, etc. This quantitative data collection has taken place in all participant institutions. In addition, three of the seven participant preschools and all three schools have contributed to gathering qualitative data by means of interviews with pupils in preschool and early school years, their parents, as well as management and staff. We have also interviewed representatives of Save the Children and of the municipalities involved.

In the first round, only preschool children were interviewed, concentrating on eliciting common understandings of togetherness and interactive processes within the group of children, as well as their perception of inclusive and exclusive episodes. In the second round, the schools selected were also involved, thus interviewing pupils in reception class

('class zero' in Danish parlance. i.e. prior to class 1) and class 2, in addition to the preschool children. The focus remained on the interviewees' concrete encounters with teasing, and possibly bullying. Moreover, we made inquiries into the experiences of taking part in the development project Free from Bullying, whether the children perceived any gender-related differences in teasing patterns, and how the children viewed the role of adults. In the third round, only schoolchildren were interviewed, this time from class 3. These children had met us before, and many interviewees were the same as in the previous round. The conversation continued to revolve around the children's experiences on the ground, as well as their perceptions of girls' and boys' stereotypical teasing conduct. Furthermore, the interviews addressed the children's understanding of intentionality in connection with teasing, as well as their experiences of the adult's role in relation to teasing.

Experiences of the interview modalities used

As mentioned, an important aim of the follow-up research project was to test various methods to gain insight into children's understandings and experiences of teasing and bullying, and how they deal with it. The intention of trying out different approaches was not to identify which one is 'the best', but rather to investigate how children communicate their understandings and experiences through the various interviewing methods, i.e. to discover the types of knowledge to which each approach provides access, and hence also the contexts in which each is most suitable on the assumption that this is determined by ease of use in relation to, for example, age and gender of interviewees, as well as by the type of knowledge that is desired.

In the follow-up research project, we tried out a total of six types of interview, namely story interviews, drawing interviews, walking interviews, photo-based interviews, as well as case-based individual and group interviews. All these adhered to a semi-structured interview guide. Four age groups took part, namely preschool children (primarily 4-to-5-year-olds), schoolchildren in reception class ('class 0'), class 2 and class 3. Some interview types were used in several age groups, while others were only tried out with

children of one particular age group. The following table illustrates which types were tested with each age group.

Interview type/age group	Preschool	Class 0	Class 2	Class 3
Story interview	11			
Drawing interview	18	17		
Walking interview	30	16	16	
Photo-based interview			17	
Case-based individual interview				14
Case-based group interview				12

As a starting point for the interviews, we told the children that we were interested in learning something about how children tease each other. We largely left it to the children if they wanted to tell us about their own experiences – in which they had either been the teaser or the teased – or about episodes that they had merely witnessed.

Below we examine each interview type, after which we draw our conclusions, reflecting on the methodological testing and generated data.

Story interview

In the preschools, we spent the first of the three rounds conducting a series of interviews, whose starting point was a short story on the issues of teasing and friendship, written by the group of researchers. The story was read out to 2-3 children at a time. The purpose was to create a secure, comfortable and recognisable situation, in which the interview took the shape of a talk about the story and its issues, in continuation of which the conversation would also turn to the children's own experiences. The story is about a group of young animals at a farm, where a goose teases the other animals until, one day, they teach it a lesson. During the reading, the interviewer would pause five times to ask the children questions related to the plot and issue of the narrative. These included:

"What do you think the young animals should do to get the goose to stop teasing?" and "Have you ever been sad about not being allowed to take part in the play of others?"

The children were captivated by the story, and generally good at commenting. However, several of them became impatient to hear more about what else happened on the farm, whenever the interviewer stopped to ask questions, particularly when trying to turn the conversation to the children's own experiences. For the children, it was clearly the story that caught their interest, while the questions about their own experiences were perceived more as a distraction. On the face of it, the method proved most suitable to gain insights into the children's *general* understandings of teasing and bullying, whereas it complicated the effort to have the children elaborate on their *own* experiences. In those interviews where the children were sufficiently calm and motivated to continue the discussion after the story-telling, we went through some fine conversations about their experiences at the preschool. However, many children plainly found the interview to have ended along with the story.

In almost all the story interviews, two interviewers took part, which was a clear advantage. One would read out the story and ask the initial questions, while the second, apart from assisting by asking supplementary questions, would concentrate on creating an undisturbed interview situation. This primarily involved keeping other children away from the room, since we found the preschool children's attention to be easily diverted.

During the interviews, the children's positions in relation to each other became evident in terms of how much they managed to speak. Even though the interviewers sought to get all children present to express themselves, there were vast differences in how much talking time each child would get, just as several children patently copied the views of their peers. On the other hand, the opportunity to be interviewed with one or two mates gave courage and motivation to take part to some children who would otherwise have been unlikely to accept being interviewed. When this type of interview worked best, the children would inspire each other to speak more, while also commenting or elaborating on each other's accounts.

The strength of the story interview was its capacity to stir the children's interest and engage them in the conversation on the basis of the reading and the story plot. Conversely, the major limitation of the method was that it primarily provided insights into the children's *general and overall* understandings of teasing and bullying, and only to a limited extent into the children's *specific experiences* of their own daily lives.

Drawing interview

Drawing interviews in various guises have been frequently used in recent childhood research (e.g. see Cele 2006: 62; Backett-Milburn & McKie 1999: 387). The term covers a wide array of methodological approaches in which children's drawings play a part, either as the primary data source or as a starting point for interviews of different kinds. The method is popular, because it is interactive and participatory, at the same time as it offers children an opportunity to express themselves about issues that may be hard for them to verbalise (Backett-Milburn & McKie 1999).

In our study, we conducted the drawing interviews with children both in preschool and reception class. As a prelude, we asked the children to prepare a drawing of an experience of teasing that they had had, whether it be as the person teasing or being teased, or merely as the witness of a teasing episode. We interviewed the preschool children *while* they were drawing, and the reception-class pupils *after* they had completed their drawing.[7] In both cases, the drawing served as a kind of supportive arrangement or 'ice-breaker', which we used to get the interview going, as we asked the child to tell us what he or she was drawing or had drawn, enabling us to return to this picture during the conversation. Accordingly, in our use of the method, the chief output was not the drawings, but the children's verbalised accounts based on these. In addition to the

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[7] In practice, however, we found that the two variations of the drawing interview overlapped, in the sense that the reception-class pupils would often continue to draw when the interview began, for instance because a new experience or detail occurred to them, which they had forgotten to include in their drawing, while some of the preschool children were only able to really turn their mind to the interview after they had finished the drawing.

episodes that the children had illustrated, we also – in line with the interview guide – talked about other incidents that might occur to the children.

We learned that the drawing interview appealed to most of the children taking part in it. For children, drawing is a known activity, which a majority of them seemed to enjoy[8], just as they were generally preoccupied with illustrating the experienced situation as accurately as possible. However, in several cases, it was precisely the children's great devotion to the drawing task that turned out to be a hindrance to conducting the actual interview. When the children were interviewed at the same time as they were drawing, the artistic endeavour tended to engross them, making it hard for them to talk simultaneously. As a result, their answers to the interviewer would be taciturn or outright brusque. These children appeared to see the *drawing* as the primary output, finding the interviewer's questions to be disruptive. Conversely, the interviewer was evidently concerned with getting the child to speak. Consequently, this method worked best when the child had finished the drawing completely prior to the interview, having put aside the drawing tools.

As mentioned, most of the children were keen to perform the task. However, a few of them found having to draw their experiences to be limiting This was the case of Johan from reception class, who did not think that it was possible to convey the complexity of occurrences during breaktime on a piece of paper, hence exclaiming, slightly frustrated: "*I don't know how to draw the whole breaktime, or some of it.*" Despite the interviewer's attempts to tone down the expectations and divert Johan's self-criticism, he insisted that he could not draw something like that. Johan's objections are important to keep in mind, since adults may tend to see drawing as an activity in which all children can join in on an equal footing. However, drawing requires skills, or a certain degree of enterprise, and not all children master the task equally well (Backett-Milburn & McKie 1999: 390-394). This can evidently have a major influence on their willingness to engage in a drawing interview.

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[8] However, it is important to mention that the children volunteered to be interviewed. Consequently, children who were not fond of drawing could opt out of this type of interview.

Another important point about the method is that drawing is indeed a creative process rather than an authentic depiction of 'reality'. In the words of researcher Sofia Cele:

"It is important to recognize that a drawing is a mental representation of a place or an object and not a visual observation. The drawing is a representation rather than a reproduction, and this representation has emotional and imaginative meanings. A drawing reveals more about the child than about the object or place that has been drawn" (Cele 2006: 174).

When children draw, they partly rely on their artistic repertoire, i.e. depicting what they feel confident drawing, and partly choose their motif according to what they like or are inspired to draw. In our survey, we found that some children were deeply concerned with the *likeness* of the drawing, i.e. with reproducing the scene as accurately as possible, whereas others took greater artistic license. The latter was the case of 5-year-old Vera:

Interviewer: *What is it that you're drawing right now?*
Vera: *It's water coming down from the sky, because it's raining.*
Interviewer: *Okay… Was it raining on the day when you were teased?*
Vera: *No, I just felt like drawing it.*

In addition to rain, there were three other popular drawing objects, namely elegant dresses, a shining sun, and red apples in the trees, all of which feature prominently in countless children's drawing. In her study of how children experience places, Cele makes a similar observation. She has noticed how Swedish children involved in drawing interviews often 'embellish' reality, e.g. by drawing high-rise blocks as idyllic cottages with flowerbeds all around (Cele, 2006: 187). This highlights that drawings can hardly stand alone as data material, but must be analysed in relation to the social context in which they have been created. Drawings require a thorough explanation and interpretation by those who have made them, if you want to understand their social meanings (Backett-Milburn & McKie 1999: 390-392).

All in all, our experiences of the drawing interviews were somewhat mixed. While the method restricted the self-expression of a few children, others were almost *too* absorbed in the actual drawing process, while yet others seemed to respond as intended. An important limitation, however, is that each child draws only one episode. After this has been narrated, the point of reference shared between child and interviewer comes to an end. Consequently, in the end, the drawings served mainly to 'break the ice' at the beginning of the interview.

Photo-based interview[9]

Until very recently, there was no appreciable interest in using photos in childhood research. Today, however, the method seems to attract growing attention, which – according to Rasmussen – springs from it being in harmony with the premises of new childhood research, in which children are viewed as actors who ought to be seen, heard, and ideally involved actively in the research process as fellow researchers (Rasmussen 2003: 3-13). As in the case of drawing interviews, photo-based interviews are typically perceived as dialogical, inclusive and democratising, since the child is invited to express him-/herself in new ways, and to take part in defining the research (Staunæs 2000: 104-106). The way photos can be used in studies of children varies. A typical approach is to invite children to take photos, but the subject or focus of each study may vary widely in terms of broadness and openness, which has implications for the degree of influence that children exert on the research process. Moreover, the children's photos – just like their drawings – may either constitute data material in its own right or merely serve as a supportive arrangement for a subsequent interview.

In this follow-up research project, we wanted to test whether the use of children's own photos as a supportive arrangement might help engage the children in recounting specific experiences within the space of the school. To this effect, we equipped a selected number of children with disposable cameras, asking them to photograph places at the school where they had been teased, had teased others, or had witnessed teasing. Accordingly,

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[9] Other researchers use the term 'photo-elicited interview', e.g. Rasmussen 2004a.

what we assigned the children was relatively narrowly defined, including the fact that we would follow the children around while they photographed. This enabled the sessions to be completed relatively fast, and helped keep the children focused on the task. However, it can also be presumed to have constrained the children's creativity and freedom to explore less obvious angles. The photos were developed and used in an interview the day after. Although the interviewer would start from the photos, he/she also asked more general as well as follow-up questions based on an interview guide.

We found that virtually all the children expressed interest in participating both in taking pictures and in being interviewed afterwards, when most would willingly tell about their experiences in the places photographed. At the same time, we found that the children – on the strength of the conversation revolving around their own photos – to some degree took it upon themselves to steer the interview. This is also a finding made by Rasmussen:

"(…) *the unequal relationship and power imbalance that is customarily present between questioner and questioned, between adult and child in the conventional interview situation, is altered in the photo-based interview. The child is empowered, and the childhood researcher needs to become more listening, observing, seeking and humble. When using children's photos as a starting point, it is the children who, by means of their photos, set the agenda of the conversation*" (Rasmussen 2003:12, our translation).

During our interviews, several children used the pictures to direct the exchange, for instance by closing a topic of conversation with the remark "*that's all there is to that picture*", after which they would present the next.

Using photography as an interview method entails potential technical problems. We had purchased disposable cameras of standard quality. Although these were equipped with flashlights, these nevertheless proved inadequate indoors, and in several cases also outdoors, since the interviews were conducted on dark November days. As a result, many photos became so dark that it was hard to see what they represented, or they had to be discarded.

Existing literature on photo-based interviews points out that this method appeals particularly to children, who find it exciting and engaging to be allowed to take photos (Rasmussen 2004a). However, in the follow-up research project we did not find that this method would provoke a higher degree of enthusiasm among the children compared to the others. This may spring from the assignment being narrowly defined, but it is also highly conceivable that a part is played by technological progress, as well as children's increasing role as consumers and growing expectations of electronics and the like. Today, many children own a camera, or may have one built into their mobile phone. This must be presumed to lessen their fascination with this method. To many children, there is no longer anything special about being allowed to use a disposable camera in connection with a research programme. This point is significant, since it highlights how the suitability and popularity of a method is always conditioned by the context, and may change over time. Consequently, in particular when technology is used, it is important to regularly consider if technological progress has overtaken the method, or if its use calls for a reassessment. Since ever-younger children are becoming familiar with advanced technology, it might be an option to use photo-based interviews with even younger children than has thus far been the norm. Likewise, the methodological development ahead should evidently consider incorporating new technologies known and accessed by children, such as mobile phones and computers.

Despite the aforementioned technical problems, our experiences with photo-based interviews were positive, since the children's photos gave rise to narratives that were concrete and interesting in a research context.

Walking interview

Interview types in which the researcher moves around with the child interviewee in familiar territory while conversing are widely used in childhood and youth research.[10] The method has several advantages. First and foremost, it may come across as a more relaxed way of interviewing than the conventional approach, in which researcher and

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[10] We here use the term 'walking interview'. Others have preferred to call it 'walk and talk'.

child sit face to face with a sound recorder between them, which in the child – according to Jensen – may conceivably evoke associations with compulsory elements of the school setting (Jensen 2008: 69). By contrast, walking around in the child's 'own' area makes the child feel on home ground, especially if it is up to the child to decide the route. By letting the child lead, the researchers renounce part of their symbolic power, offering the child a chance to partly define the interview agenda.

In the follow-up research project, the aim of trying out walking interviews was to get the children to talk about their specific experiences of teasing. As in the case of the photo-based interviews, we were hoping that interaction with the space of the educational institutions would stimulate the children's narrative impulse and memory, thus eliciting more detailed and descriptive accounts than what might have been achieved by means of a conventional interview. We tested walking interviews with children from preschool, reception class and class 2. With all three age groups, the starting point was the same: We asked the child to show us places at the (pre)school where he or she had been teased, had teased others, or had seen someone being teased. The child would guide us, show us around, and tell us about what had been experienced in the places concerned. As we walked from one scene to another, the interviewer took the opportunity to ask more general questions about teasing and bullying. This method appealed to most of the children in all three age groups.

The walking interview turned out to be highly suitable for gaining insights into children's specific experiences of teasing, and it provided a wealth of data material. In addition to being a relatively relaxed way of interviewing, the method had the great advantage that wandering around the (pre)school premises would spawn new stories. Clearly, once the children were tuned into thinking about teasing experiences, the sensory stimulation of being present in the various places would evoke memories of specific incidents. Children who had expressed at the start of the interview that they could not really recall any episodes, or who had even denied having been teased, suddenly remembered their experiences. This highlights the important point that our memory is linked to visual and other sensory impressions, and may thus be stimulated by the physical surroundings.

Another lesson learned from the walking interviews was that this exercise places great demands on the recording equipment. When a recorder is carried around, the sound of steps in the gravel, flapping, swishing snowsuits, and wind gusts hitting the microphone blend into the conversation, causing a significantly inferior sound quality. One some walking interview days, the wind was so strong that parts of the conversation were impossible to transcribe. The method also requires the interviewer to follow the child closely to keep the microphone near. This peculiar form of hounding could – particularly with the youngest children – present somewhat of a challenge.

On some occasions in the preschool centres, it was a trial to even carry out the interview, because the recorder and we, as adult strangers, attracted massive attention. Other children would often follow us around the premises, interfering with the interview.

This was never a problem in the schools. Firstly, we strove to conduct the interviews while the rest of the class was being taught, so that outdoor areas, corridors etc. would be empty. Secondly, the schoolchildren were better at following requests to keep their distance.

To sum up, the walking interview generally produced good data, which can be attributed to the shared experience of roaming around the (pre)school premises creating a relaxed atmosphere, in which the children were encouraged both to recall and recount their experiences through visual and physical interaction with the surroundings.

Case-based interview – individually and in groups

In the third round, we interviewed only children from class 3, applying a method that resembles the common semi-structured interview. The conversations adhered to an interview guide divided into themes, although a few issues were addressed through a series of cases, to which the children were asked to relate after they themselves had read them or the interviewer had read them aloud.

We conducted the interviews in two different ways, namely with one and with two interviewees at a time. The children were generally keen to take part in both the individual and the group format, even though some children preferred one to the other, perhaps because it gave them a greater sense of security to be either alone or with a classmate.

Unsurprisingly, the two forms gave rise to two widely differing interview situations. The group interviews were generally dynamic, since the children used each other's statements as springboards, hence not only responding to the interviewer's questions, but also to each other's answers. The flipside of this was that they sometimes ended up interrupting each other's stories, as what was related would provoke associations with new trains of thought, or merely because they were eager to have their say. Consequently, individual narratives brought up in the group interviews tended to be much shorter than those created during the individual interviews, where it was possible to inquire deeper into each story without having to take another child into consideration. In a few cases, the group interview also had the disadvantage that the children became unfocused and silly, copying each other's statements, just as the pair of interviewees would sometimes seek to reach a consensus on a variety of questions.

Individual interviews had a calmer pace, and would often give rise to more personal stories. Nevertheless, we generally found that both individual and group interviewees would talk very openly. They became absorbed in portraying power relations in class, analysing who had which roles, characteristics and patterns of conduct. In group interviews, it also happened that the two participant children entered into an internal discussion about their own positions, ways of reacting etc.

Both in individual and in group interviews, a positive flow was brought about by using cases rather than just asking questions from a list. The children showed a clear interest in our 'toolkit', and generally committed themselves strongly to the task of relating to the various cases. An important lesson learned in this regard is that the formulation of the

cases determines the subsequent discussion. It is crucial that they be written as 'openly' as possible, so that the children's answers and reflections are coloured as little as possible by the choice of words in each case. Initially, many children approached these short stories as an assignment for which there was a correct answer. However, either with or without support from the interviewer, almost all children ended up debating or stating reasons for their answers in a reflective manner. In the individual interviews, we chose to start off with the three cases, which thus acquired the function of 'breaking the ice'.

Of the four group interviews conducted at each school, the intention was to have one with two girls, one with two boys, and two with a boy and a girl.[11] The background to this was a wish to capture the children's views and experiences of teasing respectively within and across the genders. However, we did not identify any striking difference in the quantity or quality of our data depending on whether the two children in the group interview were of the same or of different gender. In both cases, the children would supplement each other, while boys as well as girls would talk about the teasing habits of both genders. At all three schools, the girls' conflicts loomed particularly large for both genders, albeit evidently in distinct manners, as the boys would describe what went on among the girls from a spectator's position, whereas the girls tended to be more directly involved. The effect of interviewing a girl and a boy together was, in some cases, that the children would answer the questions about gender complementing each other precisely on their own gender's behalf. However, this must first and foremost be construed as an outcome of individual children's experiences, personalities and relations to each other, rather than as a particular dynamic between the two genders.

Nevertheless, in interviews with two children of the same gender, we often experienced a greater propensity to see eye to eye and agree on how the world works from their perspective. For instance, two boys agreed wholeheartedly that boys were always told off the most, while two girls interviewed together were able to describe issues among the girls in the class from the perspective of 'insiders'. But such an analysis must obviously

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[11] The failure to meet this goal completely stemmed from an uneven gender distribution in the classes concerned, as well as the fact that participation was obviously voluntary.

involve reflections on the interviewees' positions in the school-class hierarchy, whether they have chosen each other as interview partners, or have been brought together by the teacher, and what their relationship is like in general. In a few interviews, it could be sensed how one child tended to echo the other, which may stem from power relations within the group of children, and from differing degrees of confidence in upholding their own views. This was not, however, a predominant feature of the group interviews.

In synthesis, the group interviews yielded – with a few exceptions – more copious results, in which the children complemented each other, talking about individual as well as shared school-time experiences of teasing, as one child's statements would help stir the other child's memory. The advantage of the individual format was the chance to establish greater intimacy with the interviewee, whose accounts would therefore, in certain cases, go into greater depth and detail. Conversely, it can be perceived as a drawback of the individual format that it required more effort from the interviewer to create the necessary relationship of trust in order to get the child to elaborate on his or her answers and come up with his or her own examples.

Reflections on the data material

As mentioned, the interviews started off by letting the children choose whether to narrate teasing episodes which they had taken part in or which they had merely observed. Most chose to recount experiences of their own direct involvement, and these stories clearly provided better data than the eyewitness accounts, as they were more extensive, while the children were better at relating them to certain emotions and moods.

The spectator's perspective was often reduced to 'half stories', as the child might not have seen how the teasing began or ended. In many of these cases, the interviewee had also been out of earshot of the reported incident, thus having limited knowledge of what actually happened. Nevertheless, although eyewitness accounts *per se* do not generally make for particularly good *data*, giving the children an opportunity to recount episodes in which they had no stake worked well *methodologically*. For some of the children, this option clearly functioned as an 'ice-breaker', which set them talking. Later in the

interview, they would then recall – or feel like narrating – experiences that involved themselves as well.

Teasing or bullying others is a potentially sensitive interview topic, since it concerns an unacceptable conduct, while even being *subjected* to teasing and bullying may be perceived as shameful and unpleasant to talk about. Nevertheless, we found the children to be generally well disposed to share their experiences with us. We did, however, also interview a few children who felt insecure about revealing their personal experiences, and worried about who would listen to what they said to the interviewer (and the recorder). These children chose instead to report episodes in which they had not been directly involved, or they stuck to the subject of teasing and bullying at a highly general level.

Looking at our combined data material, the vast majority of stories are about oneself being teased, as opposed to teasing others or witnessing teasing. This may spring from incidents of being teased leaving a deeper imprint on the memory than experiences that have been less emotional and offensive to oneself. It is also conceivable that the children did not wish to expose themselves in the interviews as 'the villain', since they are aware that teasing is seen as illegitimate conduct.

A hardly surprising age-related variation in the material is that interviews with older children are significantly longer than those with younger children. One reason is that class 2 and class 3 pupils could remember *more* episodes (possibly because they had attended school for a longer time, and because older children's memories stretch back further). Another is that their narratives about each episode were more nuanced than those of the younger children. Almost all the preschool children recalled having been teased, but often failed to remember who did it, just as they found it difficult to retain and describe the details. Nevertheless, their body language and tone of voice during the interview showed that the *feeling* of being teased was easily brought to the surface. In addition, there is a gender difference, as interviews with girls were, on average, longer than those with boys. Most boys expressed themselves relatively concisely and matter-of-factly, whereas girls tended to phrase their experiences much more extensively, while

also entering into descriptions of their relationships with the other children, as well as their own feelings associated with the recounted episodes.

Another general feature of the interview material is that the reception-class pupils often chose to narrate episodes from their preschool time instead of, or as supplement to, what they had experienced at school. This is ostensibly because, at the time of the interview (Danish autumn), they had only been at school for a short while, having made relatively few experiences. Nevertheless, we also had the impression that the children found it easier to *remember* preschool experiences, perhaps because places and persons at the school were still perceived as new and unknown, whereas the preschool was safe and familiar, which may have enhanced their memory. Below is an excerpt of the interview with Ali from a reception class:

Ali: *I don't remember everything!*
Interviewer: *No, no. It can be a little difficult to remember everything. But perhaps you might recall some things?*
Ali: *Yes, I remember everything from my school before.*
Interviewer: *Yes, it's easier to remember stuff from preschool, do you think so?*
Ali: *Yes. That's where I know what their names are. I don't remember… I don't know what the whole school is called* (Ali, reception class).

It is also noteworthy that the reception-class pupils at one school provided far more copious and detailed accounts than those at the two other. The school in question is surrounded by a very tight-knit local community, where two particular preschool centres feed the bulk of pupils to the only local school. Consequently, these children usually know most of their classmates at school start (and often also the children in the classes above them), whereas most children at the two other schools talk about their own classmates as strangers. Perhaps it boosts both the memory and the enthusiasm to talk about experiences to an adult stranger when feeling safe among familiar people.

Conclusion

In the follow-up research project, we have attempted to home in on children's own understandings of and approaches to teasing and bullying, that is, we have sought to take the children's perspective. We have experimented with methodological aspects of how to deal with this challenge, since our goal has been to gain insights into how children express themselves using various interviewing techniques, i.e. into which type of knowledge can be acquired through each of the various methods.

Our research interest concerned both children's conceptual understandings and specific experiences of teasing and bullying. We found that – in the case of all interview types – it requires a determined effort by the interviewer to get children to talk in detail about their own experiences, rather than to just keep the conversation topic at a more general level. However, there was vast variety in how much each type of interview prompted such concrete stories.

We found the story interviews to provide good data about the young children's understandings and views at the general level, but only to a limited extent about their specific experiences. For the latter purpose, drawing interviews, photo-based interviews and walking interviews proved more suitable, since the *point of departure* for the conversation in those latter types is a visual product or place related to the interviewee's own specific experiences of teasing. In the story interviews, it was harder to bridge the gap between fictional plot and real-life occurrences.

One strength of both drawing and photo-based interviews is that the child and researcher relate to a shared, visible product. This enables greater focusing, as it is clear to the child what the interview is about. At the same time, it is easy for interviewer as well as child to return to the shared starting point, i.e. the pictures, if there is a pause in the conversation. The situation suggests that it feels fine to just sit and contemplate the pictures together for a while without saying anything in particular, which in some cases helps give the interview a pleasant calmness. However, in our use of the methods, an important difference between the drawing and the photo-based interview was that the former

produced only one picture, whereas the photo interview would count on a whole series. This gave the photo-based interview some advantages. Browsing the pictures one by one served to steer the conversation. The shared starting point continued to be novel and exciting. And the children had several concrete episodes to refer to on the basis of the pictures.

In walking interviews, child and researcher also relate to something shared, though in this case not just a visual output, but an experience of roaming the surroundings together. In contrast to the drawing and photo-based interview, however, the shared starting point is in constant movement. Walking interviews result in openness to new thoughts and impulses that occur to the child in the course of the conversation. The route is not predetermined, but takes shape as the child recalls incidents that he or she wants to recount. Conversely, photo-based and drawing interviews are more closed, since the talk focuses on static pictures. Nevertheless, we found that both photo-based and drawing interviews gave rise to conversations about episodes which the child had not photographed or drawn. It is only that the method *per se* does not amount to a supportive arrangement helping the child to remember these experiences and recreate them in a narrative.

Despite all this, the use of any particular method does not guarantee good and meaningful data. The follow-up research project's methodological approach was highly structured, as we were subject to a timetable and a budget, which made it necessary to content ourselves with short, targeted exchanges with the children. Notwithstanding our attempts to make the interactions relaxed, this limitation inevitably entailed that the interviews constituted, to a great extent, something artificial or 'event-like' for the children, as opposed to day-to-day situations and chats. For us as researchers, it also meant that each singular meeting with a child focused mainly on generating the best possible data. Consequently, an open question becomes the degree to which formal situations are able to capture everyday aspects and what matters to children in the here and now, thus creating a children's perspective. The alternative to a highly structured approach centred on specific methods would be a more ethnographic style revolving around informal

conversations and interactions over a prolonged period, thus enabling the researchers to talk with children in the actual context, i.e. at the same time as, or immediately after, the incidents take place.

In the role of an interviewer, one largely sets the agenda, since the subject is usually more or less determined beforehand. Consequently, the decisive factor for the interview quality becomes the degree to which the children experience the subject as interesting and meaningful. We found that the children generally had a good understanding of the subject matter, but that there was vast variation in how relevant it seemed to them, and hence also in how much they would tell us. Speaking on topics raised by others requires an ability to shift perspective, i.e. to put aside whatever has one's attention in the here and now. As a general tendency, we found that the younger the children were, they less they cared about our research agenda. For the youngest children, the nearness of the experience was an important parameter for how much attention they would dedicate and how much detail they would provide in their accounts. Accordingly, the most complete stories from this age group would be about incidents that had occurred on the same day. The oldest children proved much more capable of – and interested in – recalling events further back in time. Altogether, our experiments indicate that interviews with children call for issues that are both relevant to them and close in time and experience. Finally, we draw the conclusion that good childhood studies are time-consuming, since the interview quality depends heavily on the children having built a feeling of trust towards the researchers, which takes longer for some children than for others.

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