

# Expected futures

The use of expectations in the  
transition to school

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# The Swedish Context

- 3 types of schooling for the youngest children: Preschool, Preschool class and Compulsory school
- Children attend compulsory school from the age of 7
- Preschool class is a voluntary type of schooling that children attend the year they turn 6
  - A specific assignment to work with children's transitions and prepare children for compulsory school



# Aim

The aim is to explore how expectations of the future are used when children understand and give meaning to future contexts. The focus is on what ideas children have about their future schooling in connection with the start of school, and how these ideas are used when children understand, give meaning to and adapt to these future contexts.



# Methods

- Ethnographic methods
  - Participant observations and interviews
- One group of children and their teachers
- February to October; during transition
- Focus on children and children's interaction (with each other and with adults)



# Theoretic frames

- Socialization can be described as processes in which people understand and give meaning to their life and gain knowledge of how they are expected to act in different situations (Berger & Luckmann 1966)
- An interpretive approach to socialization (Corsaro 2005; Gaskins, Miller & Corsaro, 1992; Wentworth 1980)
- Anticipatory socialisation (Merton 1968; Corsaro & Molinari 2005; Wærdahl 2005)



# Theoretic frames

"Functions of positive orientation to non-membership groups"  
(Merton 1968: 319)



# Theoretic frames

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- An interpretive approach to socialization (Corsaro 2005; Gaskins, Miller & Corsaro, 1992; Wentworth 1980)
- anticipatory socialization (Merton 1968; Corsaro & Molinari 2005; Wærdahl 2005)
- Children as “being” and “becoming”



# Results

- **Expectations**
- **To generalize from past experiences**
- **Practice for the future**
- **Borrowed experience**
- **“What we usually do” – Initial encounters**





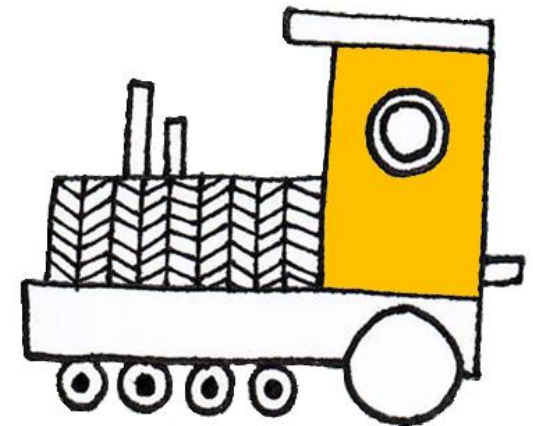
# Expectations



- Excitement
  - Fun to learn
  - Excitement over new challenges (or just the new anything)
  - The status and freedom of growing older
- Concerns
  - Higher demands and more difficult (and boring) assignments
  - Less freedom, more control
  - No play

# To generalize from past experiences

”It's like kindergarten but you have math books and then you don't get to play as much anymore.”



# Practice for the future

We talk about what they do with Anita (the first grade teacher), Pia explains to Kajsa, the other preschool teacher. Pia asks if anyone in the group can read. Emma says she can. It is interesting how you learn to read, says Pia. That's why we work with language groups here in preschool class, so that it will be easier to learn to read in the first grade.



# Borrowed experience

“We know because, because my dad has been in first grade and he has told about it.”



# “What we usually do”: Initial encounters

I: Okay. What do you do in second grade then?

A: You have to learn to be quiet and raise your hand. Don't talk out loud because then teacher gets angry and then you get to go back to preschool class. Again.

I: Mmm

A: And you learn.

(pause)

I: Who told you this?

A: No one.

I: No one? You know it anyway.

A: Yes, I know.

I: Mm.

(pause)

I: Do you know anything else about second grade?

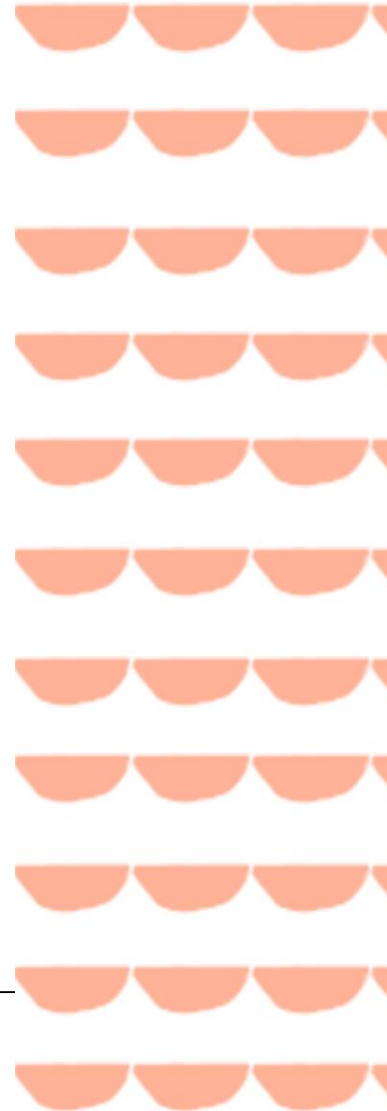
A: Nah. Just that. But I can know much more about third grade.

I: What do you know [about third grade]?

A: We usually make books and draw but not the same colours or the same things or anything. And you make a book out of that.

I: How do you know what you do in third grade?

A: Because I have been (inaudible [there?]).



# Conclusions

- Children have expectations, sometimes diverse and conflicting, for the future
- The work to understand new contexts begin before the transition take place. This makes transition a process over time rather than a distinct event
- In interaction with adults children acquire and process their expectation using different strategies such as:
  - Generalize from past experiences
  - Practice for the future
  - Borrow experience
  - Initial encounters



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