

Go Edvin! Pedagogical structuring of activities to support toddler participation in an early childcare programme

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Abstract

The present paper addresses children's participation through pedagogical structuring in an early childcare programme in Australia. Research shows inequality in participatory opportunities depending on skills in the spoken (majority) language. Against this background, the focus in the present study is on participatory opportunities for toddlers with a first language other than English. The toddlers' participation was video recorded over a six-week period. Participatory opportunities are understood in terms of pedagogical structuring, with an institutional and an interactional level. Through the use of a model of conditions for participation as an analytic tool, teachers' attending to children's perspective as a starting point for guidance is shown to characterize the pedagogical structuring. Non-verbal actions can become a useful tool for interaction, and offer a starting point for experiencing extended communication at an early age. In addition, the study shows an alternative way of interpreting decision-making in relation to the youngest children. A pedagogy built on a nuanced understanding of conditions for participation is emphasized and discussed.

Keywords

Participatory opportunities; early childhood; nonverbal communication; pedagogy; second language use and learning; decision making

Introduction

This paper aims to explore toddlers' participatory opportunities through the pedagogical structuring in a childcare programme. The ways very young children use nonverbal communication as they participate in early childhood education programmes has not received a great deal of attention. Non-verbal communication concerns young children who do not interact through spoken language, and also relates to children's language background. Children with a different first language than the majority language may need to rely on other communicative resources than the spoken (majority) language. It is therefore important to attend to and explore nonverbal communication as a tool for participation in early childhood education (ECE) in contemporary societies.

Interpreting the gestures and words used by toddlers requires a depth of knowledge about the child and his/her experiences (Harrison & Sumsion, 2014). With respect to nonverbal interactions, previous research indicates the need for teachers to improve their sensitivity and awareness in order to incorporate children's experiences and views as a starting point for the interactions (Degotardi & Davis, 2008; Venninen, Leinonen, Lipponen, & Ojala, 2014). Johansson and Emilson (2010) proposed that if active participation is described in terms of a competent child, then vulnerability and complexity might be ignored. Similar findings are discussed by Kalliala (2014), who emphasizes that toddlers are both competent *and* vulnerable. Kalliala uses the description "the child of the outer circle" (p. 7) for a child who does not actively engage in play by herself or with other children, in self-chosen activities. However, the child shows joy when participating in music activities led by a teacher. In these activities, the teachers offer her support. In the present study, the focus is directed to participation and teaching. It is argued that children, seen as competent *and* vulnerable, need support and guidance from teachers in their everyday life.

ECE can be interpreted differently across different cultural contexts, but also within a given one (Harrison & Sumsion, 2014; Johansson & White, 2011). Across cultural contexts, different terms and concepts describing the characteristics of early childhood programmes—such as childcare, kindergarten, preschool, educators, teachers, development, learning, teaching, and didactics—are used in research, policy documents, and institutional practices. It cannot be taken for granted that pedagogical structuring in an early childhood programme within a cultural context, through the provision of organized activities including materials and interactions, is based on teachers' theoretical understandings. Even personal beliefs about toddlers' learning needs may guide how the learning context is organized. In addition, attention can be directed to monitoring or controlling the children's behavior for safety reasons. Whatever the reason, the situated character of pedagogies and activities offers an interesting arena for exploring nonverbal participation, and therefore language learning opportunities in ECE.

ECE offers considerable space for the varied participation of individual children. Planned, teacher-initiated and teacher-led activities are a feature in organizing ECE. However, these activities are more likely to be offered to older children. For toddlers, so-called free play activities are commonly offered. Linking age and the nature of the activities provided or not provided entails that young children are expected to be able to initiate and maintain certain kinds of activities themselves. The responsibility for participation is then left to the children (cf. Kalliala, 2014, above). Seen from this perspective, a programme based on "free" play becomes somewhat problematic (Björk-Willén & Cromdal, 2009; Kalliala, 2014; Kultti, 2013, 2014; Wallerstedt & Pramling, 2012).

Language learning through participation

Non-verbal communication in activities in ECE does not exclude spoken language. As argued by Grøver Aukrust (2007), opportunities for “non-threatening participation” (p. 34) through listening and observing in group activities are beneficial to second language speakers. Organized activities in early childhood programmes are shown to allow toddlers with different language backgrounds to vary their participation through observation, physical actions, listening, and verbal communication (Kultti, 2013). This can include teachers offering singing activities, accompanied by gestures and with familiar songs as tools for sense-making. The toddlers gain familiarity with the general structure and organization of the routines in the programme through the repetition of activities and actions, for example during mealtimes (Kultti, 2014).

Materials also come into play when exploring toddlers’ participatory learning opportunities (Kultti & Pramling, 2015). The play objects (books, cars, engines, and carriages) offered to young children can be used in individual ways, but also as part of a mutual activity: under a blanket for reading stories, in a parking lot for driving cars, or on a railroad track for engines and carriages. Through these objects, the toddlers can be included in a joint activity with other children and adults with varied experiences and skills in the majority language and use of the artefacts. This participation does not require experience with the spoken language used in the context.

Early language experiences include talking about concrete and present topics, as well as abstract or non-present topics. Grøver Aukrust and Rydland (2011) argue that multilingual children need many opportunities to encounter new words and expressions through explanatory discourse. Quay (2011) showed how two different discourse patterns contribute to transparency in communication: the use of gesture-supported speech and onomatopoeic expressions. In a Swedish study (Kultti, 2014), toddlers with a different first language than the majority language were recognized as knowledgeable participants through teachers’ questions that clarified and expanded their actions. The questions encouraged the children’s imagination, and provided alternative ways for them to express themselves. For example, introducing concepts such as poor and rich extended a talk about money, in relation to a topic the children raised during a meal. Additionally, the teachers guided the children’s attention to each other as participants in the conversation. However, the majority language was the only one attended to and used in these activities, regardless of the children’s experience and knowledge in language(s). The quality of interactions and the guidance practices were shown to relate to the group size, as asserted by Duncan (2009); for example, when a large number of children were present, the educators’ control over activities tended to increase.

Theoretical perspective on learning through participation

Theoretically, the present study draws upon a sociocultural perspective. More specifically, the concepts of agency, the zone of proximal development, cognition and affect, and sustained shared thinking are used to understand the social contexts for learning and participation in verbal activities, teachers’ interpretation of children’s nonverbal actions, as well as opportunities for young children to express and share experiences and wishes with others without verbal language. This section ends with a model for understanding participation and influence as nuanced actions and interactions.

Regarding children as agents of their learning in a cultural context (Hedegaard, 2009; Vygotsky, 1998) differs from a traditional developmental psychological perspective, which is common within ECE (Fleer, 2010, 2011; Fleer & Pramling, 2015; Pramling Samuelsson & Fleer, 2009).

Rogoff (2008) claims that sense-making processes for children include individual, interpersonal, and institutional aspects. Children engage in joint activities with adults who support and guide the children more or less explicitly. Imitation of others' actions is a mechanism for children's learning through participation in everyday activities (Vygotsky, 1998). Vygotsky's (1978) term, the *zone of proximal development* (ZPD), highlights the relationship between individual and social contexts of development, as well as the capabilities and knowledge that may be available in interactions (Hedegaard, 1998; Vygotsky, 1978). The ZPD is evident when a child interacts with more knowledgeable others and the interaction is paced slightly ahead of what the child him/herself is capable of.

Within a sociocultural perspective on learning, communicating is understood as a way to coordinate perspectives and making common through verbal and nonverbal actions (Vygotsky, 1997; Wertsch, 1998). Vygotsky (1987; cf. Quiñones & Flear, 2011) recognizes the unity of cognition and affect for learning and development (the Vygotskian concept for this unity is *perezživanie* [emotional experience]; see e.g., Flear & Pramling, 2015). This is exemplified through research on siblings that shows how they may experience a joint social situation with different emotions, and that such experience and understanding form an important part of their development.

Extended communication through explanatory talk and about non-present topics is a way to communicate ideas beyond the actual context and to convey various degrees of abstraction (Vygotsky, 1987). Using words for non-present objects or events represents a developmental milestone. The importance of guidance, including spoken language, can also be conceptualized as *sustained shared thinking* (SST; Siraj-Blatchford, 2009; Siraj-Blatchford & Manni, 2008). This concept refers to pedagogical interactions in which a teacher and children share thoughts and create opportunities for the extension of experience. This may be done by clarifying a concept or expanding a story.

Conditions for participation

In the present study, potential development—that is, development within the ZPD—refers to children as agents and their nonverbal participation in verbal activities together with others. A way to study participation within the frame of the situated character of development used in this study is Shier's (2001) model for conditions for participation in ECE. Shier presents a five-step model as a tool for understanding conditions for children's participation, each level including individual and organizational commitments to children's participation that Shier describes in terms of openings, opportunities, and obligations. This model, used as an analytical tool in the present study, is presented below in the *Method* section.

Empirical study

The aim of this study is to investigate toddlers' participatory opportunities through the pedagogical structuring in a childcare programme. The research questions of this study are:

- What characterizes the activities available for the children to participate in?
- How do the teachers in this programme respond to the children's nonverbal actions in order to facilitate their participation?

In the study, I will analyse not only what is said, but also physical actions and activities within a certain context. The empirical data are generated through video observations, and the study is based on an interaction analysis approach (Jordan & Henderson, 1995). The unit of analysis (Säljö, 2009) is a tool-mediated activity, in line with a sociocultural perspective on learning.

Participants

The empirical data were drawn from a project studying experiences of young children with a first language other than English at two Australian childcare centres. The study was conducted at a childcare centre with 41 children in attendance, aged between 1 and 5 years, and six teachers. The children who participated in the research project were between 1 and 3 years old, and had a first language other than English. The first languages of the children were Danish (Aksel), Hebrew (Liam), Korean (Kiara), Malaysian (Aiza), and Norwegian (Edvin). English was the common language in the setting, and was used by the teachers.

Method

The empirical data were gathered using video observation. The children's participation in the setting was video recorded by the author once a week for four hours at a time, across six weeks. The children were followed through the activities they engaged in during this time. Their actions and interactions in the activities documented with the video camera offered the possibility to generate nuanced data that showed, for instance, how they moved within and between the activities and showed emotions.

The toddlers with a first language other than English who are represented in the activities are Aksel, Edvin, and Liam. Other children who participated in the activities were Emma and Charles, who were native English speakers. Aspects of nonverbal communication have been visualized by typified pictures in the transcription.

Analysis

In the analysis, institutional and interactional aspects of the childcare programme, rather than individual children's knowledge or learning, are foregrounded. Participatory opportunities are analysed in terms of Shier's (2001) model outlining increased forms of participation on five levels:

- 1) children's opportunities for being listened to when/if they express their opinion,
- 2) teachers supporting children in actively expressing their views and opinions,
- 3) taking into account children's perspectives when making decisions,
- 4) children being actively involved in decision-making processes, and
- 5) sharing power and responsibility for decision-making among teachers and children.

In contextualizing Shier's ideas in the present study, *openings* refers to teachers' personal engagement and intentions in how they engage with the children in the childcare programme. *Opportunities* are afforded by the nature of the practices that occur within the work team in the programme, including teachers' skills and knowledge of, for example, early childhood education and language learning and their views on the agency of children. *Obligations* refers to how conditions for participation are given to the children as a principle of practice within the policies of the childcare centre, as well as the broader policy context and curriculum for ECE. What the

dimensions of participatory opportunities outlined in the model, such as being involved in decision-making, mean is especially interesting when it comes to children who mainly communicate nonverbally and who are learning a new language in an early childhood education context.

Ethical issues

The teachers, and the parents of five children for whom English is a second language, were given information about the study and asked for written consent. Written consent for participation in the study was provided in line with the research requirements, approved by a university ethics committee. The limited possibilities for toddlers to give their approval for participation were met with respect by the researcher during the data production. The names used in this report are pseudonyms.

Findings

The particular social and cultural context of the childcare programme, understood from a sociocultural perspective with an interest in participation, highlights opportunities for the children to express themselves through the activities in the setting and teacher guidance. This means that the first level of participation according to Shier's (2001) model (how children are listened to when/if they express their opinion) is a premise for the following four levels in this particular setting. Levels 2 to 5 are focused on below.

Children are supported in expressing views and opinions

The pedagogical structure includes several ways that support children in expressing their views and wishes. There are simultaneously occurring activities in this setting, such as art, singing, reading, playing, and different kinds of motor activities. The teachers take the responsibility for initiating and maintaining the activities, and at least one teacher is involved in each activity. They communicate verbally and through other communicative means such as gestures, pictures, and song. The materials offered in the activities and around which the communication occurs are musical instruments, books, construction toys, cars, a railroad track, soap bubbles, balloons, a climbing frame, a trampoline, a sandpit, and bicycles. This kind of structure supports the children in expressing their views and opinions by choosing what to do and for how long. It does not oblige the toddlers to participate but instead offers ideas for what to engage in: individually, alongside other children, and/or in joint activities. The teacher guidance becomes a resource for the toddlers' participation with different constellations of participants. Materials within the activities are used as resources for the children's participation and for the coordination of perspectives between the children and the teachers, as well as among the children themselves. This is illustrated in three activities.

Excerpt 1:

The teacher puts down a blanket and places a basket of books on it. Some children gather around her. She sits down and picks up a book. She starts reading the story. The children sit next to her. The teacher holds the book so the children can see the pictures, and points to various pictures. The teacher: *What's that? It's a birthday cake.* She sings the song *Happy Birthday*. The activity continues, with the teacher reading, pointing and singing, until the book is finished.

The teacher's guidance in this cultural and social context is a crucial resource for encouraging the toddlers' participation in a joint reading activity. The teacher, as a more knowledgeable participant, takes responsibility for the communication. The communicative means used are a book for creating a shared topic, pointing at the pictures in the book, asking questions and answering them (in English), and singing.

The teachers both pose questions and support the children in answering them, as shown in the following:

Excerpt 2:

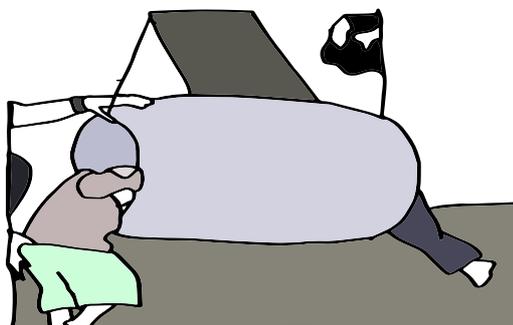
Some of the children are near the sandpit. Liam, two years old, is sitting in the sandpit, doing nothing. The teacher is talking with some of the older children. He then turns to Liam: *Liam, Liam*. He puts up his thumb: *Liam? Are you good? Are you good? Are you good? I'm glad you're good. It's all good.*

The teacher and the older children are talking. Liam is sitting by himself. The teacher, as the more knowledgeable participant, turns to Liam rather than waiting for him to initiate the communication. The child is acknowledged and supported in expressing himself when asked verbally, in English, how he is doing. This occurs through the repetitive question "Are you good? Are you good? Are you good?" and an offering of opportunities to answer "...you're good". Emotional aspects are acknowledged verbally ("I'm glad you're good. It's all good.") as well as physically when the teacher puts up his thumb and asks Liam if he is good.

The teacher's initiation and maintenance of verbal communication in the play activity below also focuses on the coordination of the children's actions:

Excerpt 3:

There is a swing in a tree (made of an open-ended plastic tub). A teacher (on the left) is sitting next to it. Charles (on the right) is climbing into the swing. The teacher: *Okay Charles, get on board*. Edwin (on the left) comes over. The teacher: *You're getting on board, Edwin? On board, that's it. Watch out. Remember, you're shipmates together. Okay, shipmates, are you ready? In you go, Charles. Come on, Charles. You can do it! In, in. We're all on board, on board, ready?* When the children sit inside the swing (the tub), the teacher rocks the swing and sings a song.



Knowing what is expected in this activity is challenging for the children. The teacher, as the more knowledgeable participant, coordinates the actions through questions in English: "Remember, you're shipmates together. Okay, shipmates, are you ready?". He expresses trust in the children's capacity and skills for participating in the activity: "In you go, Charles. Come on,

Charles. You can do it!”. He offers a way to use the language through his questions—“You’re getting on board, Edwin? Okay, shipmates, are you ready? We’re all on board, on board, ready?”—and the response “On board. That’s it. Watch out. Remember, you’re shipmates together. In, in”. Singing is an additional dimension in the communication. The guidance includes engagement, and the activity appears to be enjoyable.

Children’s perspectives are taken into account

Providing a diversity of choices for participation allows the teachers to take into account the children’s perspective, views, and wishes. However, these choices only become a genuine opportunity for the children to express a wish if the activities are presented and expanded in a certain way. In this setting, some of the activities recur daily (permanent activities). Some are temporal and are therefore new in a sense. The structuring of permanent and temporal activities offers participatory opportunities in which repetitive and extended dimensions appear as important conditions for participation, as in the two activities below, focusing on jumping.

Excerpt 4:

Some children climb up on the climbing frame and jump down onto the mattress next to it. The teacher stands next to the mattress, helping the children jump down and then move away from the mattress. She acknowledges every child and his/her actions, in an encouraging voice, such as when Edwin jumps down: *Edwin can jump. Go Edwin!*

The teacher’s verbal engagement is a condition for this activity. Several children can climb up at the same time, yet only one child at a time can jump. This activity offers a way to understand the word “jump” as well as turn-taking. The word “jump” refers to jumping down onto the mattress. Participation concerns timing, when to jump, in relation to moving away; that is, not standing in front of the next child whose turn it is to jump. This is done together with the teacher as a more knowledgeable participant. Participation in a temporal activity, jumping on a trampoline (Excerpt 5), shares similarities with the permanent activity (Excerpt 4).

Excerpt 5:

One of the activities on a particular day is jumping on a trampoline. Several children take turns jumping, one by one. They continue jumping as long as they wish. The teacher counts and claps for each jump. When a child is jumping the other children stand close to the trampoline, and try to get on as soon as it is available. The teacher tells them whose turn it is. Aksel is standing behind the children next to the trampoline, observing. He is not showing any particular interest or disinterest in participating. After a while, the teacher says it is Aksel’s turn and stretches her hand towards him. Aksel goes to the trampoline and takes the teacher’s hand when he steps up. Aksel stands there, holding the teacher’s hands. The teacher verbally encourages him to jump. Aksel stands still. The teacher lifts him up and down like he is jumping. Then she again verbally encourages him to jump. Aksel turns around and goes down. The teacher claps and says: *Great, Aksel!*

Jumping and taking turns are pointed out by the teacher. In this activity, jumping means that the children, one by one, can jump as long as they wish. The toddlers, expressing their wish to jump by standing next to the trampoline, become involved in the activity one by one. The teacher’s involvement is achieved by counting the jumps, and not allowing interruptions by others. The turn-taking is organized verbally and nonverbally. With enjoyment and encouragement through her voice and gestures, the teacher praises the toddlers’ actions. The teacher’s engagement supports the coordination of perspectives between the children and, therefore, makes the

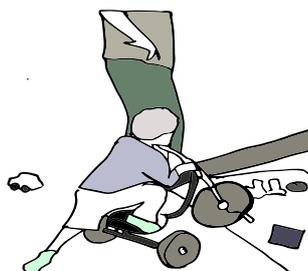
individual children's participation part of a joint activity. Their wishes are supported and their perspectives on how to participate are taken into account.

Children are involved in decision-making processes

The guidance practices focus on what the children do, rather than what is expected of them. Changing activities appears as a way for them to be involved in decision-making processes within play, as shown below:

Excerpt 6:

Some of children and a teacher sit on a blanket surrounded by books and toys. Edvin finds a bike next to the play area. He turns it around several times, but there are always toys in front of the blanket. When the teacher moves, Edvin turns the bike in his direction and looks at him. Edvin shakes his head and says: *No*. The teacher: *Are there too many things to run over here?* Edvin continues trying to ride the bike. The teacher: *You want to stay here? Well*. Edvin picks up a toy lying in front of the bike and throws it. The teacher: *But be careful*. The teacher moves some more of the toys away and Edvin rides by, keeping one foot on the seat and kicking with the other foot. The teacher: *That's a little unorthodox, Edvin*. Edvin continues.



Edvin is offered an opportunity to change the conditions for his participation; that is, a way to decide what to do, where, and with whom. Edvin changes his activity from reading books to bicycling, by taking a bike. He tries to stay close to the blanket and the toys. He turns to the teacher, shakes his head and says "No". This is understood by the teacher as an expression of something Edvin wishes to do: ride the bike and stay close to the teacher. The teacher responds verbally: "Are there too many things to run over here? You want to stay here? Well". He creates an opportunity for Edvin's participation in this new activity by explaining that he understands Edvin's wish and what needs to be done. The teacher's nonverbal action, moving the toys away, is in line with his verbal statements. The teacher comments on the way Edvin rides the bike without "correcting" it.

Sharing power and responsibility for decision-making

The kinds of participatory opportunities shown below require the engagement of a more knowledgeable participant for several reasons: to interpret the children's actions; to support them in verbally expressing their wishes and ideas; to take into account their views; to involve them in processes of sharing materials; and to explain the actions offered.

Excerpt 7:

Edvin, Emma, Aksel, and a teacher are at a play area where a railroad track is set up. Edvin and Emma are playing, and Aksel is watching them. Edvin says something in his

first language, Norwegian. The teacher points to the carriages Edvin is playing with. The teacher: *How many carriages now, Edvin?* He sounds curious and points to the carriages: *How many? How many?* Edvin says something in Norwegian. The teacher: *One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight.* Emma: *One, two, three, four.* The teacher: *You've got four, Emma! In fact, you've got three engines and one carriage.* He points to the engines and carriage. Then he points to the engines: *See, they're engines.* The teacher continues commenting on and explaining the children's actions for some time.

The teacher: *Don't you have an engine at all, Aksel? Could Aksel have an engine, Edvin?* He points in Aksel's direction. Edvin looks up and points in the same direction. Emma says something. The teacher: *He's got one carriage. Emma, Emma, can Aksel have an engine? You've got three. Here you go, Aksel. You have an engine to go with your carriage.*

The teacher initiates communication by commenting on what the children are doing, using the railroad track, and observing the material use. The teacher acts to verbally coordinate perspectives between the participants. Edvin uses Norwegian to express himself to the teacher, who does not notice it as an incorrect language but rather as an invitation for communication. Learning opportunities regarding early language and mathematics are addressed. The content is extended verbally: "You've got four, Emma! In fact, you've got three engines and one carriage". The opportunity for imitation within this group activity is used by the teacher when counting the engines and carriages with each of the participants individually. The communication occurring within the activity also addresses aspects of care: children's right to play. The teacher acknowledges Aksel's right to participate, saying: "Don't you have an engine at all, Aksel?". He communicates to the other children that Aksel needs to be included in the activity: "Could Aksel have an engine, Edvin?; He's got one carriage. Emma, Emma, can Aksel have an engine? You've got three". Several explanations are given. The activity involves joint decision-making in which the toddlers' ways of communicating nonverbally are considered, instead of the teacher deciding how to share the toys or giving Aksel another engine or carriage than those Edvin or Emma are using.

Discussion

The present study has explored the pedagogical structuring of a programme involving children who do not yet use the common language of the childcare centre. The analysis shows an early childhood educational environment that is characterized by simultaneously ongoing activities initiated and maintained by the teachers as more knowledgeable participants. The activities provide flexible and various conditions for the children's participation and, therefore, favourable opportunities to act within the ZPD. The children are able to move between the activities and change activities as they wish. Imaginative and repetitive actions can then become potential learning resources. In line with the study by Kultti and Pramling (2015), the analysis in this study confirms that materials cannot be taken for granted when investing ECE practices that create a frame for young children's learning and care.

The findings imply how aspects of teaching are part of the interactions between the participants with different experiences and knowledge. The teachers take the responsibility for the communication and language use within the activities. The children are not only listened to but also supported in expressing their views. These views are taken into account, and the toddlers are involved in decision-making processes by teachers who encourage and praise them, and explain activities and actions for them. They are, in Shier's (2001) terms, offered several openings for

participation through the social situations and activities concerning how to participate, how to communicate within these activities through the teachers' guidance, and how to contribute to the interactions.

In a way, the toddlers' participation is similar to findings reported in Kalliala's (2014) study. Some of the children, simply observing the ongoing activities, have a significant need for adult-led activities. However, in the practices observed in the present study, the teachers actively offer the children playful activities. The young children appear competent in the analysed practice. Yet, they are not left alone (cf. as vulnerable). One could argue that toddlers have different participatory opportunities, and that these can be explored by analysing the pedagogical structure of activities. In terms of opportunities (Shier, 2001), the analysis illustrates how a work team with skills and knowledge of early childhood education and (language) learning structured the activities for the 41 children of different ages at the centre.

The communication in the analysed practice seems highly encouraging, and the participatory opportunities can be understood as nonthreatening (Grøver Aukrust, 2007). In addition, optional participation by the children in the activities is an important finding. The children's expressions in their first language are interpreted as ways to communicate; English is not a necessary resource. The focus is on *seeing* the children. Expectations for the children to express themselves in the majority language occur in different ways than previously seen in a study conducted in a Swedish ECE programme (Kultti, 2013; 2014).

Shier's (2001) model is useful for making visible the conditions for participation, rather than only children's skills and knowledge. Using this model in the context of young children's nonverbal actions highlights the need for a nuanced understanding of conditions for participation. Therefore, one aspect of participation concerns how children can participate when guided by others: in Vygotsky's (1978) terms, action within the developmental zone. A contribution to the early childhood research literature is the importance of offering opportunities that facilitate *and* challenge toddlers' participation; for example, expectations concerning their (second) language use. In this particular practice context, it is expected that toddlers might need and want to use their first language. Teachers can learn to use words in the children's first language with the support of parents or by listening closely to the children's spoken language.

As mentioned, recent research (e.g., Degotardi & Davies, 2008; Venninen et al. 2014) indicates a need for knowledge concerning interpreting nonverbal actions as a way to participate in ECE. This study shows how nonverbal actions can become useful tools for interaction in different activities in ECE practices, but also how these actions can serve as a starting point for new participatory opportunities for and experiences of extended communication. This has previously been described in terms of sustained shared thinking in interactions between adults and older children (Siraj-Blatchford, 2009). Based on this study, it is argued that the concept of SST is important for children's learning already at an early age, even before they themselves use spoken language. As theorized by Vygotsky (1987), learning occurs first through social interaction and then on the individual level.

Conclusion

The present study stresses the importance of teachers' responses, in order to allow children to create new resources for participation. Teachers asking questions and giving answers means that the children become familiar with this form of talk and activity, for example, as a resource for

participation and decision-making. Therefore, the study shows an alternative way of interpreting both the decision-making *and the conditions for* decision-making concerning children without experiences and skills in spoken language and/or the majority language. Children need diverse ways to express their views, wishes, and opinions through the involvement and guidance of teachers in interactions and activities. This study highlights professionals' *awareness* as a key feature of teacher-guided practice with very young children, and for regarding these children as agents in their own learning. This finding has implications on how to outline ECE.

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