

## **Symposium at VI Conference on Childhood Studies | 7–9 May 2014 University of Oulu, Finland**

### **Beyond viewing children as ‘beings’ or ‘becomings’ – appreciating plurality, difference, and unpredictability in education and research**

*Chair:* Ulrika Bergmark, Assistant Professor, Luleå University of Technology

*Discussant:* Eva Alerby, Professor, Luleå University of Technology

#### *Abstract for symposium*

In Western countries, two different ways of thinking about children in education have been predominant: the binary notions of the child as *becoming* or *being*. The child as becoming is manifested primarily in classical developmental psychology. The notion of the child as being has been highlighted mainly by sociological researchers in their critique of developmental psychology as overemphasizing the child’s status as ‘becoming.’ This notion of the child as being is also visible in a totally different manner in the philosophy of Rousseau, which emphasizes the free and natural child.

In this symposium, we explore temporal notions of childhood and illuminate alternatives from theoretical and methodological angles, concerning issues relating to education and educational research with children. We move beyond linear views of time and binary notions of children perceived as ‘becomings’ or ‘beings.’ This view is signified by an intertwined and ongoing connection in our discussions between the temporal notions of *have been*, *being*, and *becoming*, as well as an appreciation for plurality, difference, and unpredictability. We suggest that such multi-dimensional conceptualizations of children have significant implications for education and educational research: allowing for greater valuation of children’s voices and diverse experiences through their participation in matters affecting them.

### **Individual paper presentations**

#### **Recognizing the Child through Philosophical Collaboration**

Michael D. Burroughs

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I will begin by briefly discussing a dominant and, I contend, problematic conception of the child in the Western philosophical canon. In the work of figures ranging from Plato and Aristotle to Kant (as well as a number of contemporary philosophers) the child is regarded as the *non-adult* and *being-to-be-transformed*. That is, the child is conceptualized by means of a negation of the qualities and characteristics of the adult. Given her supposed deficiency in relation to the adult, the child is regarded as in need of correction, with education serving as the primary tool of reform.

In response—both to this to conception of the child and this approach to education—I will discuss my philosophical work with children in primary and secondary school classrooms. I will describe the process of participating with children as co-collaborators in philosophical dialogue and, in turn, the recognition of children as philosophical,

expressive persons. I argue that this work provides a foundation for effective critique of both historical and contemporary conceptions of the child as mere *becoming*. Further, I problematize the being/becoming division as applied to the adult-child distinction and attributions of agency more generally. Agency—whether as possessed by persons classified as adults or children—should be understood in a *relational*, as opposed to strictly *individualistic* (and linear-developmental) sense. Whether one is developed/undeveloped, rational/pre-rational, moral/premoral hinges, in large part, on the presence or absence of substantive relationships of recognition in one's life.

## **Temporal ambiguities beyond linearity in teacher work and children's learning**

Susanne Westman  
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From a philosophical perspective, temporality is a central dimension of teacher work. Educational settings are, to a great extent, governed by considerations of temporality. This is evident not only in school schedules and timeframes, but also in predominant temporal notions of children, knowledge, and learning. These temporal notions may produce a binary opposition between process and outcome and create a divide between conceptions of children as *have been*, *beings*, and *becomings*, which can be regarded as problematic. In contemporary Western education these divisions are evident in a strong emphasis on linear progression and on outcomes.

The overall aim of this paper is to explore and discuss temporal ambiguities in teacher work and children's learning. In addition, I suggest a reconsideration of temporality beyond linearity—a chiasmic be(com)ing—based on the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Gilles Deleuze. These ambiguities and the suggested reconsideration of temporality are exemplified through interviews, drawings, and visual documentation from teachers in pre-schools and schools in Sweden. The data shows that the teachers experienced the ambiguity of being open to children's life-worlds, desires, and past and present experiences, while still working towards predetermined outcomes in the future.

## ***“We knew what we were going to do – a kid would just play around”*: Co-theorising puppet elicitation with high school student co-researchers**

Eve Mayes  
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Australia

Conceptualisations of children as ‘becomings’, ‘beings’, or ‘becoming-child’ have implications for research methods used with children and young people. Puppets are typically used with younger children for therapeutic or research purposes, with adults analysing the works produced by children. This paper explores the use of puppets with high school student co-researchers (12–18 years old) in a participatory ethnography of student participation in school reform. The young people created puppet shows related to their experiences of student participation in school reform in focus groups. A few weeks later, the same young people analysed these research products collectively and co-theorised the value of puppet elicitation as a research method. Thinking with a

Deleuze-Guattarian ontology of childhood, I examine their discussion of puppet elicitation in relation to age, and their discussion of one particular puppet show that explores the relationship between age and teacher/ student interactions. I argue that puppet elicitation, analysed with young people, may open up other possibilities for considering issues affecting children and young people, but must be examined alongside the dynamic spatio-temporal conditions of their production.

### **Creating opportunities for diversity and unpredictability: inviting children to be co-researchers**

Ulrika Bergmark & Catrine Kostenius  
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Multidimensional conceptualizations of children beyond 'beings' or 'becomings' allow for the greater valuation of children's voices and child participation in educational research processes. This paper focuses on methodological issues relating to children's participation in different phases of a research process concerning relationships and well-being in school. Based on a life-world phenomenological ontology, we use two research and development projects - *Full of Value* and *Arctic Children* - to shed light on children's (10-15 years old) participation in research. The methods used in the projects were open writing, group reflection, drawings, and exhibition discussions. The children created and analyzed the data together with the researchers. This research showed opportunities and challenges when inviting children to be co-researchers. It implies the importance of including the diverse perspectives of children and adults in educational research, allowing for plurality and unpredictability to be vital parts of a research process.