

# Global Paradoxes and Provocations in Education: Exploring Sustainable Futures for Children and Youth

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## Abstract

Global trends in education are accompanied by both paradoxes and provocations. The paradoxes constitute inherent educational dilemmas, such as the paradox of institutional education, wherein social rules and mandatory tasks are played out as a means of imparting lessons about freedom and independence. Our argument in this chapter is that we should reconsider the ‘future’ of planned and controlled education and instead become open to the perceptions of two groups that are at the forefront of educational futures – namely, children and young people and various experts on children and childhood. They meet face to face or indirectly on a daily basis in various educational contexts, and their experiences are interdependent and often paradoxical. This chapter explores possible sustainable futures in education as articulated by children, youth and child experts and highlights several qualities that sustainable futures will require, in relation to UNCRF article 28; children’s right to education and article 29; that education must develop every child’s personality, talents and abilities to the full.

## Keywords

education – sustainable future – child experts – children and youth – awareness pedagogy

## 1 Introduction

As pointed out in the present volume’s introduction, ‘sustainable futures’ is a political and utopian concept that has become prevalent in the global agenda. On a global scale, we have recognised that world cooperation, global and local

agreements, and common actions are necessary to solve problems and secure further life for generations of humans, animal species, and plants. As a concept, sustainability encompasses dimensions such as social justice, health, nature and natural science, economics, and government as well as local practices and individual agency and participation. We agree with Peter Kemp's claim that sustainability is an ethical concept addressing the questions of what is considered a good and worthy life for generations to come and how to live according to values that can ensure the longevity of life on Earth (Kemp, 2013).

Futuristic thinking is embedded in all forms of education as children are the hope and future of any society. At the threshold of the twentieth century, discussions about the future were certainly different, but they shared certain similarities to corresponding discussions today. In *The School and Society*, Dewey (1899) argued that modernity brought with it industrialism and the growth of big cities and that society as an organic entity was thus rendered invisible to most people. The purpose of education was to make society visible again and, since culture is the condition for learning, to make culture 'cultural' again (Lundgren, 1986). Ellen Key, in this volume (Chapter 2) followed up on the strategic role that education occupies in society.

Education consistently seems to function as a societal tool for keeping society visible and perceptible. The character formation that is a key objective of education then becomes a matter that is not merely for our own time but for posterity. Global trends in education are accompanied by both paradoxes and provocations. Paradoxes in education are inherent educational dilemmas, such as the paradox of institutional education, wherein social rules and mandatory tasks are played out as a means of imparting lessons about freedom and independence. It does not necessarily follow that freedom and autonomy are compatible with actions that are considered necessary in the name of sustainable futures (Gough & Scott, 2007; Hafner-Burton & Tsutsui, 2005). Sustainable futures should consistently impart knowledge about what is needed, political decisions and actions, sensitivity to local culture and global solidarity, and awareness of relations from both a micro and macro perspective. Since the Brundtland Report (WCED, 1987), sustainability has commonly associated with the appeal to not compromise future generations' ability to meet their needs. Sustainable futures will require advocacy and action for a better balance between social needs, resource consumption, and economic growth. In our study, we touch upon these well-known connections related to the United Nations Convention on Children's Rights (UNCRC) (United Nations, 1989) article 28; children's right to education, and article 29; that education must develop every child's personality, talents and abilities to the full. More specifically, this study aims to contribute to new ideas for education, ideas that

take into consideration the message from young people around the world and from an interdisciplinary group of child experts. Entering dialogue and making decisions regarding how best to organise societies and education systems may lead to provocations on both the political and personal levels that will challenge education as a system as well as local practices. A recent example of provocative action on the part of the younger generation is the school strike movement, which began with Greta Thunberg's silent protest every Friday from August 2018 outside the Swedish Parliament and grew rapidly to become one of the biggest environmental protests the world has ever seen.

According to the Norwegian educational philosopher Lars Løvlie (2008), a central pedagogical paradox that is frequently discussed in German and Nordic education traditions and is often associated with the paradox of making rules and regulations for the purpose of educating the autonomous child, is as follows: "discipline the child without making the child a slave; impose rules on the child but remember to allow for his free judgment; praise him but don't foster his vanity; constrain him but let him taste his freedom" (Løvlie, 2008, p. 1). The pedagogical paradox in education is that "autonomy – the freedom of self-determination – both belongs to the child and has to be brought into being by the intervention of others" (p. 5). Thunberg's personal initiative shows radical autonomy and is an example of a provocation directed towards the older generation as well as education as a system and as a set of practices. Even if her initiative was originally individual, it was founded on the principle of solidarity with planet earth.

The need to engage explicitly with values when making decisions about the future direction of education has been overlooked, particularly in times when effective education, big data, and cultures of measurement have been dominant (Biesta, 2010). 'The future' is unpredictable and still very present in educational policy. The future can also be considered an attitude and thereby represents a value judgement. When we consider 'the future we want', do we then mean progress, or do we imply value? Built into educational policy is the optimistic idea that through education the future will be better. In *The Beautiful Risk of Education*, Biesta (2014, p. 2) argues against 'strong' ideas and practices of education and advocates for a 'weak' approach through seven 'themes': creativity, communication, teaching, learning, emancipation, democracy, and virtuosity. He argues against the current dominant ideas in education and the "desire to make education strong, secure, predictable, and risk-free" (Biesta, 2014).

Our argument in this chapter is that we must reconsider the 'future' of planned and controlled education and instead become open to the perceptions

of two groups that are in the midst of educational futures – namely, children and young people and various experts on children and childhood. These groups meet face to face or indirectly on a daily basis in various educational contexts, and their experiences are interdependent and often characterised by paradoxes. To be positioned a ‘child’ or ‘young person’ and the notion of ‘adults’ itself places children and young people in a generational temporality as not yet adults, even if their life experience can be as rich and varied as adults’ (Kraftl, 2020). This chapter seeks to explore possible sustainable futures in education as articulated by a group of children and youth and a group of child experts selected by the authors. The authors have for many years led a Nordic network of children’s culture researchers, participated in dialogues, and witnessed a change in discourse, which shifted from a primary interest in children – in their right to play and to enjoy childhood in the here and now, largely inspired by the UNCRIC – towards a prime interest in children’s connection with society at large, nature and child-created culture in a complex world. With this background in mind, our research questions are as follows:

- a What concerns and ideas regarding the ‘future’ we want do children and young people articulate?
- b What are the concerns and ideas about the ‘future’ we want for children from the perspective of an interdisciplinary group of child experts?
- c How can these ‘futures’ contribute to the development of sustainable pedagogies for the future?

The chapter will begin with a discussion of how we might manage global paradoxes and provocations in education. The chapter goes on to present statements and perspectives on the kind of future that children, young people, and child experts want and concludes with insights that have the potential to inspire new improvements aimed at achieving sustainable pedagogies for the future.

## 2 Paradoxes in Education

Education’s role in global development and its impact on the well-being of individuals, society, and the future of our planet are unequivocally highlighted in scenarios for education, such as the Education for Sustainable Development (ESD, 2030) launched by UNESCO and The OECD Future of Education and Skills 2030 Project launched by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). Across different visions of ‘the future we want’, these scenarios offer metaphors of time travel towards an unknown future.

These scenarios also define 'learning objectives' (UNESCO, 2017) and 'learning frameworks' (OECD, 2019) that not only address learning and skills but also each student's well-being within a sustainable future. This optimism is also built into practice; we can see the continuation of global policy ideas of controlling education by measurement, for example, in the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) project, which has had a substantial impact on children and young people in kindergartens and schools in many countries. However, it has also prompted a substantial amount of research that criticises the ideas embedded in PISA.

Education is increasingly governed by digitisation. At the global, national, and local levels, we have witnessed a rise in big data made possible by digitisation. Database architectures, datasets, codes, algorithms, analytic packages, and data dashboards are all among the emerging technologies that are contributing to the development of the 'quantified teacher' (Buchanan & McPherson, 2019, p. 28). This wealth of data has generated new norms against which students are measured as well as new moral codes and social expectations and has defined students against data-derived categories (p. 33). Ronaldo Beghetto (2019) has highlighted the paradox of combining large-scale assessments (LSA) with creativity, problem solving, and personalised learning in the context of LSA formats. For instance, PISA assessment emphasises sameness, and any instincts towards creativity are hampered by time-limited test conditions. This emphasis on sameness is also found in the school system, wherein groups of students will typically be of the same age, doing the same thing, in the same way, at the same time, in pursuit of the same outcome. Sameness in LSAs is reflected in the fact that they tend to be standardised measures. Test designers aim to control for or remove any interfering factors that may result in inaccurate inferences with respect to observed differences in scores between test takers (Beghetto, 2019, p. 313). Conversely, personalised learning is unique. Judgements about creativity are situated both temporally (in a particular time) and contextually (in a particular place). As such, that which is considered creative in a fourth-grade classroom, Beghetto argues, may not be considered creative in another fourth-grade classroom, in an eighth-grade classroom, or in any classroom in the next year. Creativity is dynamic and dependent upon each individual person. A teacher's awareness of such dynamics appears to be crucial in enabling them to supervise, coach, and develop new approaches to teaching and evaluation. Critical voices claim that various alternatives to measurement exist for ensuring a good education.

The idea of progress through control as a means of evaluating education can be replaced by addressing values related to education, and to UNCRC article 28 and 29 about respect for children's dignity and the development of

every child's personality, talents and abilities to the full. In their study of PISA results, Faldet, Pettersson, and Mølstad (2019) compared countries with high performances in PISA to lower-performing countries, in relation to the Human Rights Watch World Report 2017 (Roth, 2017). Based on their review of this report, they ascertained that physical punishment is implemented in all five countries ranked at the top of the PISA list (OECD, 2016). In some of the countries, physical punishment is banned from school but allowed in homes, and several of the countries with high PISA rankings are guilty of human rights violations. Among the countries that stand out with good results in terms of high levels of well-being and quality of life, with, according to PISA, good results in math, that prohibit physical punishment of children and students, and appear to be relatively successful in international comparisons, is Norway (Faldet, Pettersson, & Mølstad, 2019, p. 50), and other Nordic countries (p. 48).

In education, paradoxes are troublesome and of no benefit to educational practices; they are also a nuisance for those with a definite goal in mind (Løvlie, 2008). While the manner and evidence-based practices of the politics of education are 'what works', educational researchers argue that no direct causal relationship exists between teaching and learning (Kvernbekk, 2016). Education in kindergarten, early childhood institutions, primary, and secondary schools is dependent upon practitioners' and teachers' careful consideration of how something can be made to work within their cultural context (Kvernbekk, 2017), and employ educational tools and didactics that allow students' voice (Aarskog, Barker, & Borgen, 2018). Thus, in a study of Norwegian education policy documents, Mølstad and Prøitz (2019) found that teachers are expected to be interpreters and translators of policy and also to play the paradoxical role of delivering expected learning outcomes to children. They are simultaneously expected to provide these children with life opportunities and to support them as unique and autonomous individuals. Teachers appear to be obliged to strike a fine balance between 'strong' and 'weak' ideas and practices of education (cf. Biesta, 2014).

Futures are not fixed. They are imagined and created, but the past will always create premises, some of which can come as a surprise, as the Covid-19 pandemic outburst in 2020 highlighted a new concern regarding the prevention of the spread of communicable diseases. Teachers will face new demands. School attendance in the midst of epidemics or pandemics will demand new considerations, not only for the sake of the children, but also for the teachers themselves and the population in society at large. Sue Robertson reminds us that we must be willing to imagine the creation of institutions and social relationships that maximise outcomes for all individuals rather than for a few (Robertson, 2005). When we look to the past, nostalgia is not necessarily the best guide. The

future, as well as the past, is a product of human action and agency and of how we as societies, professions and individual teachers respond to the unexpected. Connell's (2009) historical overview of teaching notes that education has never been static, and that education constitutes a complex assemblage of actions that cannot be reduced to 'tick-box' standards. Education is an embodied activity, a form of emotional labour, and it is located within systems.

According to Elliot Eisner (1984), imagination is required in education. While theory is general, classrooms and students are particular in character. Teachers must be able to perceive any connections that exist between the principle and the case. Unless teachers connect with their students, they will not contribute to their formation as participants in society. What skilled teaching requires, Eisner argues, is the ability to recognise dynamic patterns, to grasp their meanings, and the ingenuity to invent ways to respond to them: "It requires the ability to both lose oneself in the act and at the same time maintain a subsidiary awareness of what one is doing" (p. 25). When teachers draw on educational imagination, they consider options and can invent moves that will advance the situation from one stage to another. Preparedness for the protection of children will require the ability to imagine the unexpected and to systematically work upon the ideas, ways of thinking and procedures for new scenarios. "An imaginative leap is always required" (Eisner, 1984, p. 25), for instance to see the potential and invent moves that will advance situations and understandings, local and global.

As the Covid-19 pandemic that swept the world beginning in from early 2020 is a fresh example of the need to be prepared for the unexpected. Society agrees upon the necessity of innovation, new ideas, and solutions to new and old problems. To understand the relationships between political conditions, both global and local, and the people living within those conditions, focus should be on the children and the professionals they meet. We should also focus on the child experts that children and young people may not necessarily meet in person during their school day, since experts can possibly have power through their impact on knowledge transfer and innovation-action at a macro- and micro-level. Awareness as a dynamic approach is instrumental to understand the fundamental relationality in which children live their lives conditioned by so many aspects also by own agency in the world, as the Swedish young girl, Greta Thunberg, can illustrate. Starting out with a personal engaged action, she has inspired numerous peers and adults all over the world, becoming an icon of children's agency, and has had an impact on global conversations (for example, at her appearance at the UN in autumn 2019).

Here, we take a closer look at how children and youth and child experts, when invited to participate in different processes of collaborative exploration,

conceptualise their engagement and operate between societal and institutional frameworks, rules and regulations, and their personal intuitive and creative engagements in education. As described earlier, the OECD Education 2030 project is among the global initiatives of future planning in education. This project operates a website on which interviews with students are posted. First, we explore how these students articulate their concerns and ideas for the 'future' that they want in videos from this OECD 2030 website. Second, we explore child experts' concerns and ideas for the 'future' that they want, as expressed and discussed in an interdisciplinary workshop.

### 3 The Future Children and Youth Want

Considering the global impact of projects undertaken by UNESCO and OECD that seek to pave the way for a future-oriented education system projects on policy development in education, our interest here was in how students talk about the future they want and how their voices are expressed and heard within this context. To ascertain what children and young people from all hemispheres think about the future of education, we have built on information from video-recorded interviews with students who were selected and given a voice on the OECD Education 2030 project's website. Through "a common language and understanding about broad education goals that is globally informed and locally contextualised", the OECD 2030 project position paper (OECD, 2018) explains how this language is "under construction in co-creation processes" among policy makers, researchers, school leaders, teachers, students, and social partners from around the world (OECD, 2018, p. 2). Such language supports 'weak' ideas and practices in education (cf. Biesta, 2014). However, when discussing which competencies are needed to transform our society and shape our future, the OECD position paper also echoes a desire to make education 'strong', secure, and predictable:

If students are to play an active part in all dimensions of life, they will need to navigate through uncertainty, across a wide variety of contexts: in time (past, present, future), in social space (family, community, region, nation and world) and in digital space. They will also need to engage with the natural world, to appreciate its fragility, complexity and value. (OECD, 2018, p. 5)

Key transformation processes include the mobilisation of (student) knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values through a process of reflection, anticipation,

and action; these processes develop the inter-related competencies that students require to engage with the world. Set out as a 'learning framework', differing explicitly from the PISA assessment framework, the project still reflects the pedagogical paradox by defining the competencies (and constructs and measures for such competencies) that students will need to thrive in the future and for young people to be individually creative, responsible, and aware. Rather than reshape the invisibility of society to references in the material world, as Dewey (1899) asserts education can do, the future of education in the twenty-first century, as described in the OECD 2030 project, seems fluent, non-material, and language dependent. Our starting point for the analysis of these video-recorded interviews is the understanding that the educational paradox is embedded in all educational thinking, and we are particularly interested in how students articulate their understanding of these paradoxes.

On the OECD 2030 website, from spring 2019, students were given the opportunity to give statements about the future they want. The OECD asked students to describe their desired future and "to articulate their hopes, dreams and the actions needed to attain well-being. Listen to what they're saying". These interviews with students are video-recorded and edited by OECD staff. We interpret the videos as developed through a process in which the students voluntarily, having given their consent for the interviews' appearance on the website, have chosen a topic that they wish to talk about, and that they have received a degree of help with scripts and points. We do not know the details of these recording and editing processes. Therefore, we presume from the information regarding the intention to give voice and agency to students that they have had a voice and been heard. Video interviews can convey a sense of ordinariness of mediated communication amongst many young people and can counter the 'pressure of presence' of being heard and seen by unspecific others, with a sense of ease (Weller, 2017). However, a limitation of our use of these interviews is that the videos are aimed at various audiences within a particular context and were not created specifically for research purposes.

During the two-week study period in the summer of 2019, 17 interviews with students aged 10–18 were available on the OECD 2030 web site. Based on available information about their place of living, country, age and school, we found that these students live in all hemispheres and are from various social groups. We selected these 17 students as informants for our study. Later, several more interviews with children and young people were made available on this website. Due to ethical considerations regarding the anonymity of the students, who have no control over the use of these internet resources, we have chosen not to give more detailed information about each informant in our study. We transcribed the 17 interviews, and then conducted a conventional content

analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005) of these transcriptions. We then searched for key topics related to education and statements that illustrated how the students articulated their concerns and ideas of the ‘future’ that they want in terms of education. We organised the statements around topics of concern: education, individuality/agency, capabilities, community, health, quality of life, and environmental issues. Generally, we saw that economic and cultural contexts had considerable influence on the students’ concerns, which is also reported in a study of student experiences and quality of life in South Africa, by Savahl, Malcolm, Slembrouk, and September (2015).

### 3.1 *What Children and Youth Say*

In these interviews, when students talk about education, they often refer to ‘we’ and talk about ‘our’ experiences in school and in teaching. In discussing educational futures, some students express concerns about the availability of education for all. “What I want for the future of my community is a bigger school so that kids would want to go to school more” – while an older student reported that “what is currently missing in my education is that I must come away from my home to get that education that I need”. Other students, who perhaps take the availability of education for granted, wanted a future in education where mentorship is valued and a curriculum that encourages students to do voluntary work (and for such work to be credited in school), and “where different types of compassions can thrive, and change can happen in the world”.

Messages from the students about individuality and agency convey ambivalence. Greater awareness of students’ individuality is required. Everyone learns in different ways at different times, and “all education should be about all the possibilities of life and [to] find out what our strengths and interests are”. However, students also commented on the challenges of understanding the individuality vs standardisation complex – “are we equal or does the system want us to become all equal?” – and argued that “we need open-ended projects that can help us to bring out the best in ourselves and focus on the areas that interest us”. School and teachers’ trust in student capabilities seems to be a concern shared by these students, and one student said that “many adults still don’t have faith in our ability”. Another student said that “teachers need to have knowledge about us children having the virtue of being creative”.

In discussing the school and the community, a student stated, “I want to become a member of a community in which students can make a difference”. Another student talked about “the others” in the community that they want to help. Social inequalities became evident when a third student said, “I would like the community to be safer”, and “the future I want for the community is

more awareness of people's health". These students also voiced their awareness of challenges in their communities and for the future. For example, one student wanted social education in order to raise awareness on what a good community is and how to maintain it for future generations. Another student, who had to leave home to get further education, said, "I want to go back to my community and tell the kids what I have been doing and try to inspire them to get education". A well-situated student wanted to know more about the issues with which people in other countries (particularly countries with more poverty and rural areas) struggle and to help them solve their problems.

Housing is a key quality-of-life concern for many: "I want everyone in the world to have their houses to live in where they can feel comfortable, safe and happy". One student said: "Quality life to me means that a person could have access to good health, good education and facilities such as hospitals near-by and schools". Only a few students mentioned their concerns about environmental issues; this statement, however, contained a clear message of concern: "Western consumption harm[s] the environments and [our] communities".

From these interviews, we learned that these students' desire for the future they want are governed by material issues, such as security, housing, health care, environmental care, and access to education for all. They understand the impact these primary needs have on their well-being. They are also concerned about their role in society and wish to be given the trust and space they need to use their capabilities in school as well as in their communities. A few students referred to their difficulties of understanding the individuality vs standardisation complex and wanted more space for individuality in school. It seems that all students lack access to the discourse surrounding the educational paradoxes and dilemmas of which they are aware and which they experience throughout their everyday school lives. However, the students seek awareness among adults, teachers, and society regarding the issues they raise with respect to individual agency and challenges in their communities and for the future. All in all, the students' language echoes weak ideas about education within a context of strong messages, ideas, and educational practices (cf. Biesta, 2014).

#### 4 The Future That Child Experts Want

We were interested in the perspectives of experts because we consider expertise to be of high value for children's futures. The roles of expert competencies and insights into policy design and practices in institutions for our children and young people – such as kindergartens, schools, and health institutions of various kinds – are seldom celebrated, often vaguely integrated, and

sometimes contested (Young & Muller, 2014). Even if cross-sector partnerships, alliances, and collaborations have become commonplace in education and important for the promotion of kindergartens and schools as arenas for future societal policy designs, these professionals' experience, nonetheless, is that the complexity of their expertise has little or no voice in policy formation. Particularly at the science–policy interface, heterogeneous and often competing discourses come into play among researchers vs. political decision makers vs. first-line professionals (Lange & Garrelts, 2007). This heterogeneity is characterised as a transdisciplinary paradox (Hollaender, Lobl, & Wilts, 2008), since transdisciplinarity offers perspectives on how problems can be faced and solved (Klein, 2015).

The starting point for this workshop was interdisciplinary expert exchanges concerning which practices and pedagogical research topics are expected to be valid in the future in an urban municipality of Norway. The aim of the workshop was, first, to collect and create research data through a dialogue about 'the future we want' for children from the perspective of children and childhood experts; the second aim was to initiate a common exploration that addresses the paradoxes that experts live by and to create a common space for sharing ideas of what is required to contribute to sustainable futures. This workshop gave opportunities to share thoughts and expertise across disciplines.

We chose to hold a workshop as a research methodology for several reasons. Of chief importance were time efficiency and the motivation to engage in activities with the possibility of sharing, developing, changing, and learning. Acknowledging that experts are often dedicated professionals with work opportunities and restrictions, it appears that they will need to critically consider how they spend their time while still satiating their interest in learning from other experts. Since they also often will be self-determined in the judgement of time-use, we decided to create a situation that would include opportunities for learning as well as networking for future collaborations. A future-oriented workshop could fill these criteria.

According to Merriam-Webster (2016), the term 'workshop' can be traced back to 1556 with the definition of "a small establishment where manufacturing or handicrafts are carried out". Today, the term 'workshop' is used in various contexts, often with respect to an arrangement whereby a group of people learn, acquire new knowledge, perform creative problem-solving, brainstorm, or innovate in relation to a domain-specific issue. The methodology was further inspired by 'futures workshops', which refers to the work of Austrian futurist Robert Jungk, who developed the basic form of the workshop for the purpose of enhancing democratic municipal decision making in the 1950's (Müllert & Jungk, 1987). The main purpose at that time was to activate a basis upon which

people could cooperate to create ideas and strategies for the future. Originally, these future-oriented workshops were a tool for collaborative problem solving. In social sciences, workshops are also used for collecting information and creating ideas through dialogues comparable to focus group interviews. In addition to collecting and creating information, a future-oriented workshop can act as a tool for sharing and social learning, which is particularly beneficial if the people taking part in the workshop are also responsible for bringing about change and have the power to assert influence within their fields (Vidal, 2005). In this study, “Workshop – The Future We Want” was a half-workday arrangement whereby a group of childhood experts shared their knowledge and motivations for concern about children’s futures; in the workshop, they brainstormed, performed creative problem-identification, and unraveled ideas about possible directions for future research and pedagogical practices.

The participants (12) were invited based on their special expertise in their fields so that they would be complementary to one another with respect to expertise. They were either (a) high-profile scholars (professors) in fields such as psychiatry, medicine, physiotherapy, education, and early childhood pedagogy; (b) teacher educators and PhD students; (c) leaders and administrative personnel representing owners of schools and kindergartens; or (d) experts representing children’s best interests, such as non-governmental organisations (NGOs). The overall framework for the workshop was ‘sustainable future’, and the aim was to draw attention to a range of expert knowledge on children. Before the workshop, the special invitees were informed that a research assistant would take notes for research purposes and they were given a series of questions to prepare for the discussion. These questions were as follows:

What is needed for us, as experts in various areas of interdisciplinary cooperation, to help create the future we want for our children within and in relation to education? What do we want to achieve on behalf of each child? What can interdisciplinarity bring about for research? What might sustainable pedagogy for the future look like?

The workshop was led by the authors, Elin Eriksen Ødegaard and Jorunn Spord Borgen. A research assistant took manual notes from the shared dialogue and generated four pages of clean data altogether, all of which are included in the material. Post-it notes from the group sessions and the authors’ personal notes are also included in the material. The organisation of the workshop was as follows:

1. Introduction of experts and sharing expert statements about the future we want
2. Identification of main topics, which led to the identification of three main topics
3. Group session working more concretely with issues concerning problem-solving related to the three topics
4. Groups shared main ideas
5. Dialogue about main ideas and outcomes and possibilities for future research
6. Short evaluation
7. Analysis of the presentations and dialogues.

According to Ørngreen and Levinsen (2017), the existing research predominantly focuses on how to conduct workshops and less on workshops as research methodology. As this workshop was organised foremost for the purpose of generating data for empirical research and involved preparation, critique, and imaginative thinking about the future we want for children as experts in children and childhood, we analysed the qualitative data accordingly. We organised the prepared statements and dialogues according to the topics of concern:

- Interdisciplinarity: what values, contributions, and pitfalls can interdisciplinarity bring about?
- Critiques and provocations: what kinds of critiques and provocations were highlighted?
- Wishes and ambitions on behalf of children: what are the main ideas for the future?

The presentation of self and agenda resulted in a series of meta-perspectives. In the following, we present the experts' perspectives on the future they want for children organised into four main categories and a fifth point that sums up their views.

#### 4.1 *What Experts Say*

During the workshop, the main concerns that emerged in the experts' discussion about the future were the pedagogical paradox and dilemmas that they face in their role as experts in addition to discussions about what is 'good' for children and young people. In discussing their role in society, some experts expressed concerns about how they might come close to and keep in touch with the children who are their clients: "All the ideas that we as professional[s] have, of what children need, take up a lot of space in policy design and what we consider 'good' professional practice". We can lose sight of what the child is here and now. Are we losing the language of awareness and closeness in

micro-practices and responding merely to the signals and language of politics? For instance, one expert was “concerned about the concern” about children as sedentary beings and objects of health policy. Rather, we can learn from each other – both children and adults – that we are all corporeal beings in the world and that physical experience and language are interdependent and should not be separated. As experts, they are also concerned about the ways in which their professional language differs from the everyday language. More reflection on our own language as professionals will generate greater opportunity for change in micro-practices and everyday moments in kindergartens and schools.

#### 4.1.1 The Paradox of Early Efforts and ‘Future’ Prospects

The experts were also more concerned about the very young than they were about older children and adolescents, and this was justified by the sense of responsibility for the possible future of every single child. These concerns were related to the pedagogical paradox; Certain boundaries must be set; however, the child must also find his or her own way. The question of what constitutes pedagogy in this framework is a professional one: if you frame the child in a certain way, why and how do you know it will work well? The experts wanted greater awareness of procedural thinking; how to proceed should be more thematised and should include asking questions such as “What if?”.

Early efforts can lead to positive results. That positive outcomes is key, but we know little about the long-term outcomes of our professional decisions here and now. This is a dilemma, as one should not do anything for which there is no good evidence. However, it takes a long time for results to make themselves known and there is a lot from which you get no evidence. Should we ignore it simply because we do not know if it has an effect? For example, we can see that some children are living in difficult conditions. Controlled trials cannot be conducted among children experiencing neglect. Regarding children who have developed an identifiable disorder, perhaps related to these circumstances, should we not give them some support? As experts, we have some evidence that if these children are supported, they will visibly improve (at least in the short term), but it is difficult to say whether this will continue for 10 or 20 years. Recommendations may be made according to the level of evidence available, with some levels of evidence higher and some lower, but even if a measure does not have the perfect level of evidence it can be implemented nonetheless, as it is based on a comprehensive professional assessment. On the other hand, society and child experts know little about children’s first years of life prior to their attendance at kindergarten. Should we work more systematically to provide parents with instrumental aids, teaching parents how to interpret and communicate with children? This is a key issue for some experts with respect to health and pedagogy.

#### 4.1.2 Knowledge Dialogues and Good Practices

The positive aspects of kindergarten and school are not always made visible; rather, they must be experienced through shared practices. Experts often enter classrooms and stay for a short time before leaving again. Experts and researchers must challenge practices but not destroy that which is good within the educational context. For instance, when children's involvement (cf. UNCRIC, art. 12) became integrated into the curriculum, kindergartens suddenly had to professionalise the space and circumstances to accommodate children's participation. One of the researchers observed kindergarten practices and found that some activities were democratic and that a lot of good pedagogy was evident, but the activities were also guided by the employees' understanding of democracy. Can asking children what they want to eat and where they want to go be said to constitute democratisation? In that study, they saw that children became very tired of deciding these things. "Who am I to play with?"; on the other hand, was of more immediate importance for the children. The experts recommend more open and inclusive institutions with the aim of developing dialogical practices that achieve common understandings of culture and context for the children. It is not sufficient to merely talk to and understand each other; rather, the practice of doing something meaningful together is required for transformation to happen.

#### 4.1.3 Ideas of the 'Good' Expert

Experts have a common mission and social mandate. This changes over time, and experts and researchers also contribute to these changes. For instance, one of the experts at the workshop was fascinated by how rapidly things can change: "The way we think the world is and the image of the child (within which our mandate lies) can suddenly change". For instance, politicians who earlier paid no attention to children in their municipality changed their conceptualisation of small children in kindergarten and set out demands for changes of routines and practices. The experts involved appreciated these changes because this was more in line with the professional understanding of small children's needs. However, knowledge exchange across the various sectors of society is lacking. For instance, kindergarten education knowledge and pedagogy are not transported to other institutions and sectors in society, such as into the school and health system and vice versa. Parallel insights that do not become synergy between sectors become society's smallest multiples of knowledge about children and young people and are not sustainable for the future. Sustainable pedagogy must be thematised through more dialogue to develop our common language about what this means to us and the possible positive impact for children and young people.

Sometimes, the experts agreed, we must look up to determine whether we are on the right course. Changes in the global agenda include the examples

of Greta Thunberg and a new word in Sweden known as ‘flight shame’ – who could have predicted this? Suddenly, a sympathetic wave has swelled around this that we can either join or resist. What does this mean for our understanding of children and young people, power, and agency? As experts, we have some of the evidence for knowledge but, at the same time, we should remain open and do the investigative work to understand where we are headed and where we want to go? According to the experts, ambiguity and imprecision are present in everything they do. They can be caretakers with good intentions without agreeing on what is best in a particular practice. However, the experts agreed that it is important to consider what kindergartens and schools are already doing. Sustainable pedagogy already exists: “we have to find it and spread it” and make it visible. In sustainable pedagogy, those paradoxes should be discussed more so that it is easier to agree on an ideological level and so that ‘the child and I’ are partners in this. Ultimately, it is the child’s understanding and awareness of what they experience that is the end result and not what experts thought was best for the child. They also posed the question of whether we can create a pedagogy that makes us present in the moment, a pedagogy of awareness that constantly renews us and in which we are constantly asking “Where is the world now?”.

## 5 Conclusion and Provocations

So, how can these ‘futures’ contribute to the development of sustainable pedagogies for posterity? The pedagogical paradox is that education is dependent upon what is understood as important knowledge at a certain time within each new generation, but that education is also instrumental for the development of independent thinking and acting subjects in a future, unknown world. Biesta (2014) argues for a ‘weak’ approach to education, emphasising creativity, communication, teaching, learning, emancipation, democracy, and virtuosity. From the interviews and the workshop, we have many examples of these features of what is described as the desired future of education. However, paradoxes are not followed by solutions, and among the dilemmas are the many versions of visibility/invisibility of the world (cf. Dewey, 1899), the fluency and non-materiality of education in the twenty-first century, and the significance of language for dialogues across sectors and societal, institutional, generational, and personal perspectives.

The OECD 2030 interviews with children and young people yield new insights into the concerns that children and young people have regarding their well-being and access to education. They want safety and the opportunity to

be themselves and become who they want for the future. At the same time, they want belonging and to see themselves as participants in the good of society. When it comes to the specific learning context, they emphasise the importance of being taken seriously as learners and as individuals, particularly with respect to their knowledge, skills, and creativity, in line with article 12 in UNCR. From these interviews, it seems children and youth echoes weak ideas of education, thus have little access to language and dialogues about pedagogical paradoxes and dilemmas they are aware of and experience within the context of strong ideas and practices in education (cf. Biesta, 2014).

The workshop brought different knowledge and topics from the perspectives of child experts to the forefront, some of which we could predict and some that we could not have foreseen. This can be explained by the choice of research methodology. As the workshop included many participants and took the form of a dialogue, it made space for prepared utterances (answers to a research request), listening, sharing, and collaborative problem solving; as such, new ideas and understandings easily arose.

We found that the experts are working towards a future for the best of the child (cf. UNCR, art. 3). Experts are aware of the contradictory messages of strong and weak pedagogy (cf. Biesta, 2014); however, they require more extensive access to the micro context to be able to assess what measures are best both for the present and for children and youth to have the future we want for them. This implies time and space for the children and young people to talk and express themselves. However, as the students seem to have opinions and make choices, they also require access to a language with which to communicate with adults about the paradoxes they experience. Beyond the opportunity to speak and express themselves, children require an audience, their voice and expressions must be listened to and their view must be acted upon, as appropriate (Lundy, 2007, p. 933). Even if UNCR is high on the educational policy agenda, this gives no guarantee of an interpretation that will function in a complex practice. When practice isolates children's participation from other concerns, the risk of a one-sided understanding with a focus on self-determination and individual choice ensues. This is in line with the critique coming from Nordic researchers of the UNCR's interpretations of pedagogy. It seems to be biased towards a practice wherein the child's right to voice and influence is interpreted as denoting individual choice (Ødegaard, 2006; Lundy, 2007; Kjørholt, 2008).

How we deal with and talk about the educational paradox seems to be significant. An awareness pedagogy will be directed towards the ethical aspects of rights and obligations in society and will simultaneously safeguard the individual child. An awareness pedagogy will also need to consider paradoxes when

judging the best interest of the child. Since the best interest of the child can be difficult to determine, balancing information and imagining scenarios is necessary in order to ensure the best possible situation. Educational imagination requires the ability both to lose oneself in the act and at the same time maintain a subsidiary awareness of what one is doing, according to Eisner (1984); an imaginative leap is always required. Some paradoxes that must be considered are outlined below.

We perceive, based on the material from these students and from our experts, the primacy of the belief in the free, informed individual who seeks knowledge and aims to develop a future in which everyone is an equal participant in society. However, the kind of student agency that is at the forefront of the OECD 2030 project could become an individual responsibility and a burden for children and youth, assuming that these competencies are typically middle-class characteristics and thus are not as inclusive as we want. Do students get help and support within a liberal education logic where standardised measures are laid down as proof of sustainable education for the future? Is there room for dialogues and language development about imagined possible futures and paradoxes?

Educational systems and policymakers voice the need for control and governance, implying that standards and measures should be implemented. The OECD 2030 project aims at developing a future imagined in the here and now, and, since the time span of the project is 15 years, it also implies ideas about how the future might possibly change. However, the kind of future the measures are aiming at, while also arguing for an imagined future over a longer time span, is dependent on the short time frame of the next political term.

The experts, on the other hand, owing to their knowledge of the complexities of social dynamics (particularly regarding how the weak always become outsiders), argue for acting here and now upon what they imagine to be possible futures for the children and youth they meet in their professional work. As these experts argue for a combination of horizontal and vertical transdisciplinarity (Sandström, Friberg, Hyenstrand, Larsson, & Wadskog, 2004), they also argue for a transdisciplinary attitude (Augsburg, 2014) between themselves as experts and researchers in different disciplines and people who know the problem area, for example, by working with it in practice or being affected by it in other ways.

We suggest an awareness pedagogy that will be directed towards the ethical aspects of rights and obligations in society and, at the same time, safeguarding the individual and securing the well-being of children and society, that is in

accordance with UNCRC article 28; children's right to education and respect their dignity and rights, and article 29; that education must develop every child's personality, talents and abilities to the full. Such a pedagogy must be further theorised in line with the educational philosophy briefly introduced in this chapter. Sustainable futures will require greater awareness of children's situations, critical reflection, and new transdisciplinary initiatives and actions. Awareness must include reflections and actions towards the world and ourselves, towards actual life experiences. Or, will we – even despite this awareness and willingness to follow what the world is now – forget the educational paradox and dilemmas that are included in all pedagogy? Is acknowledgement of this paradox a premise for a sustainable pedagogy for the future we want?

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