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"Through the researcher's gaze". Field roles, positioning and epistemological reflexivity doing qualitative research in a kindergarten setting

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ABSTRACT

Qualitative research is an intersecting contextual relationship between place, time and people. A focus on reflexivity will increase the credibility of the findings and deepen the understanding. The field roles and interaction between you as the researcher and the informants is vital in this respect (Berger, 2015; Crapanzano, 1992; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019). With an ethnographic starting point focusing on participatory observation and field roles where distance, closeness and interpretation are relevant concepts, this paper aims to illuminate and discuss how to implement reflexivity in qualitative research. Grounded in concepts of epistemological reflexivity based on empirical examples from an empirical study of pedagogical leaders' understandings and work for cultural diversity and leadership in a kindergarten setting, it raises the following questions: *What consequences do field roles and relations have for constructing and interpreting knowledge? What challenges and opportunities does the*

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field role give? The methodological discussion of empirical findings suggests that the closeness of participant observation, reflexivity and transparency of the researcher's field role thus provide a deeper understanding of the field studied. I argue that awareness and reflexivity in power relations, biases, preconceptions, and interactions with people give a more holistic insight and knowledge into the field studied.

Keywords: qualitative methods, positioning, reflexivity, fieldwork, research roles

INTRODUCTION

Qualitative research is contextual between people in a place, time, and situation. An intersecting contextual relationship will increase the credibility of the findings and deepen the understanding of the field studied, people, relations, situations, and cases. The field roles and interaction between you as the researcher and the informants are vital in qualitative reflexive research (Berger, 2015; Crapanzano, 1992; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019). This article takes ethnography as a point of departure for methodological reflection. The concepts of distance, closeness, and interpretation are relevant to understanding the challenges researchers experience doing fieldwork and participant observation and the influence of potential field roles and preconceptions have on knowledge production and interpretation.

Method, derived from the Greek *methodos*, is defined as “following a path towards a goal” (Christoffersen & Johannessen, 2012, p. 16). My experience from fieldwork is that rather than following a specific path towards a goal, it is more a challenging and, at times, shaky search for the unknown. The way forward can be twisty and time-consuming; it can change direction and focus, be emotionally demanding and challenging, inspiring, exciting, and tedious (e.g. Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019; Wadel, 2014). The methodological norm of participant observation, “being in the field for a long period”, “living with them,” and “taking the perspective of the informants”, may also be overwhelming. My first fieldwork in Japan in the 1990s was not what I had imagined beforehand, and “understanding the others” and “living like them” was not only exciting and inspiring but also tiresome and frustrating. However, this experience gave me

helpful knowledge transferable to later fieldwork, such as in kindergarten, the empirical examples presented in this paper.

The characteristics of field research and participant observation, are extended periods spent in the field with informants and the social character where the researcher uses their personal capacity to interact with the informants (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019). Qualitative fieldwork has a theoretical perspective that is relational and processual; human actions are explained and interpreted according to these perspectives and the participant observation method is considered the most suitable method to present such interpretation (Wadel, 2014, p. 11). As the researcher is the main instrument of the method, interacting with informants with both intellect and emotion also makes fieldwork exciting, powerful, and demanding, and implies reflexivity to how one's position in the field impacts relations and interactions and the knowledge produced (Wadel, 2014). The purpose of the paper is to discuss reflexivity in qualitative research grounded in Bourdieu's (2003) concept of epistemological reflexivity exemplified with empirical examples from a study of pedagogical leaders' leadership enactment and construction¹² of cultural diversity in a kindergarten setting, using fieldwork and participant observation and semi-structured interviews as methods. Questions asked are: *What consequences do field roles and relations have for constructing and interpreting knowledge? What challenges and opportunities does the field roles give?*

The degree of participation is difficult to estimate in advance. It may be a challenge to get a meaningful understanding of others if one has *too* much distance between "we" and "them"; between the researcher and those being studied (Gubrium & Holstein, 1997; Holstein & Gubrium, 2003). Having an open approach to the field, the people you meet and what you observe will help the researcher to gain a more holistic and deeper understanding. At the same time, the observations are always through a filter, where the researcher, conscious and unconscious, selects what to "see". However, observing and noticing "everything" is almost impossible (Hammersley, 1987, 2003).

12 The empirical examples are retrieved from data collected in two different studies as part of a larger Ph.D. study. For more details of these studies, see: Lund, H.B.H. (2021b). 'We are equal, but I am the leader': Leadership enactment in early childhood education in Norway. *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13603124.2021.1969039> and Lund, H.B.H. (2021a). «De er jo alle barn» – Mangfoldskonstruksjoner i barnehagen. In: *Hvordan forstå fordommer? Om kontekstens betydning – i barnehage, skole og samfunn* (pp. 148–176).

This paper may provide some methodological tools and understanding of reflexive research, focusing on field roles in qualitative research with examples from a kindergarten setting, also transferable into educational research in general. In the following section, I first present the characteristics of ethnography and participant observation, before clarifying Bourdieu's perspective on the concept of reflexivity, both personal and epistemological. I will mainly address challenges and opportunities related to field roles and knowledge production and argue that the awareness of reflexivity, distance, and closeness is critical in this process.

ETHNOGRAPHY AND PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION

The very core of participant observation is to get detailed information and insight into a culture, a field, people, and the context you want to study. You want insights into the meaning of events, roles, routines, and statuses, and to go behind the actions of the people you study and try to understand the meaning behind their actions. Ethnography is a method to discover the obscured small sample, a comparative approach, studying the formal/informal, official/unofficial, ideals/practice (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019). What people say is not necessarily the same as they do. Ethnography also has a naturalistic stance, which implies researching people in their natural milieu, where the primary purpose is to understand the symbolic meaning of people's world (e.g. Fangen, 2010; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019).

The fieldwork and participant observation methods emphasise the importance of meetings between people more than words, and actions, relations, and interactions are considered as necessary as the dialogue, to access informants' knowledge and understandings (Hastrup & Hervik, 2003, p. 6). The culture or the social environment the researcher is studying, is people as individual actors in interaction. This perspective emphasises the importance of being present in social contexts where interaction occurs (in kindergarten: meetings between parents and pedagogical leaders, pedagogical leaders' meetings, and daily kindergarten activities). Thus, fieldwork requires the researcher to participate, observe, and experience the informants' social contexts (Lund, 2002, 2021a, 2021b). Therefore, to create distance from the "data" or to try to study the total universe should not be the aim: "[...] the total universe is not subject to observation from any given observer's position" (Bateson, 2000, p. xxvi).

It is essential to note that the researcher's presence, personal connections, and interests will influence access to data, construction and knowledge

production, and interpretation. However, focusing and awareness of the informants' interests, understandings, and practices can provide a more realistic picture of the social context studied (Lund, 2002, 2021a, 2021b). In this way, the researcher's impact on the data is considered a resource rather than an unfavourable colouring (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019). Nevertheless, as a qualitative researcher in a well-known culture (such as kindergarten in Norway), you will never be free of interest (Christophersen, 2011). Therefore, it will be necessary to be conscious of and recognise one's attitudes, understandings and values when facing a research field and interacting with informants.

Consequently, a reflexive epistemological perspective will question the research and the researchers' position. The theoretical point of view and the researcher's social position may affect what is emphasised and observed. Bourdieu (1996a) emphasises the importance of taking the *bifocal* research gaze, i.e., simultaneously creating proximity and distance to the research. Hastrup and Hervik (2003, p. 47) have a similar distinction emphasising self-understanding and subjective experience as an essential starting point for cultural understanding and emphasising that this alone is not enough. Therefore, knowledge production requires a social breakup with the social world or environment researched.

REFLEXIVITY IN QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

Reflexivity is the core of qualitative research and conceptualises the interaction between the researcher and research, acknowledging the researcher's impact on the research process. The researcher's preconceptions, personal preferences, theories, and concepts create and represent both personal and epistemological reflexivity. Epistemological reflexivity is the researcher's reflections and discussion on how the research questions, view on knowledge of science and knowledge production, may have limited or/and influenced the results. Epistemological reflexivity is linked to the researcher's view on the science of knowledge and the relation between theory and empirical data (Bourdieu, 2003; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). On the other hand, personal reflexivity implies that the researcher reflects on how his or her values, political stance, experience, status, and aim of the study influence and colour the research (Bourdieu, 2003; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; Fangen, 2010). According to Bourdieu, the researcher must distance herself or himself from the informants' preconceptions and reconstruct in order to avoid their self-understanding determining how the research object is constructed (Bourdieu & Wacquant,

1992). Through such a social disruption, the researcher brings out the perspectives and knowledge available from the inside. Therefore, researchers need to concentrate theoretically on the informants' actions and "local" self-perceptions and experiences, and question the conditions and opportunities of these experiences; contextualisation is therefore crucial. This reflexive position is also related to the concepts of *emic-ethic*. Emic-ethic is the distinction between cultural and anthropological knowledge, where *emic* is practical and implicit, while *ethic* is theoretical and explicit (Hastrup, 2013). In this perspective, the analytical process encompasses the transition between these two (Hastrup & Hervik, 2003; Longva, 2001). The interpretation of the informants' actions can be understood both from the informants' *inside* perspectives and from the researcher's *outside* view, interpreting the informants' actions in a broader context. In the following section, I first outline perspectives of reality as socially constructed before I illuminated the challenges and opportunities of fieldwork, with particular attention to fieldwork in a familiar culture.

SOCIALLY CONSTRUCTED REALITY

In Norwegian society, the relationship between minority and majority is often described as "cultural differences" or "ethnicity" (Gullestad, 2002). Such perceptions can contribute to specific cultural constructions and categories and an essentialisation of social categories that are considered valid and "natural." These constructions also influence one's understanding of values (Chinga-Ramirez & Solhaug, 2014); i.e. how we talk about, interpret, address and reflect on cultural diversity and concepts of culture is essential when we talk about Norway as a multicultural society. Being Norwegian and part of the majority population, studying cultural diversity in kindergarten reflects essential positioning as a researcher. In this respect, *Am I aware of my role and power? Moreover, how will this influence what I see? Alternatively, what do I not see because of my position?*

Consequently, it is crucial to be aware of existing discourses in the field and the positioning and take reflexivity into account. According to the social constructivist, knowledge is constructed in the social community (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2017). Social reality is constructed through language and is vital to the development of social phenomena. Through language, children, pedagogical leaders, and parents invest in their "linguistic habitus" in a particular market where they achieve social acceptance (Bourdieu, 1996b). A comprehensive understanding of the culture that draws in both social and societal conditions

contributes to a more holistic analysis of human social life, where historical, political, social conditions and organisation are all relevant aspects to understand kindergarten as an institution and the context in which social actions take place (Bourdieu, 2003; Luckmann & Berger, 1966).

Social constructivism is concerned with meaning and understanding as central to human activity (Lock & Strong, 2010). A vital tool in this process of constructing meaning between people is language. Meaning and interpretations are based on social interaction and rely on a shared sense of how these symbolic forms should be understood (Lock & Strong, 2010). Therefore, time and place are essential because individuals are always situated in sociocultural processes. Actions will always take place in a context or situation that impacts how and why people act as they do. As opposed to "essentialism," the social constructivists see humans as: "[...] self-defined and socially constructed participants in their own social lives" (Lock & Strong, 2010, p. 42).

The methodological discussion of empirical findings presented in this paper suggests that the degree of closeness in participant observation, reflexivity and transparency of the researcher's field roles thus provide a deeper understanding. I argue that awareness of how power relations, biases, preconceptions, and interactions with people are studied grounded in Bourdieu's epistemological reflexivity, give a more holistic insight and knowledge into the field studied. The following section will illuminate and discuss the challenges and advantages of fieldwork in one's own culture, exemplified by empirical findings, before discussing field roles and reflexivity considering closeness, distance and interpretation.

FIELDWORK AND PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION IN OUR OWN CULTURE

Fieldwork in a familiar culture can be more straightforward than in a foreign culture; you speak the same language and share mutual knowledge (Giddens, 1976, p. 16). Therefore, to analyse the culture from "the outside" and problematise what is "taken for granted", the *doxa* is essential. *Doxa* is the cultural understandings and practices in a specific context, culture or situation which people do not reflect upon or question (Bourdieu 1997; 2006). As pinpointed by several scholars, the purpose of fieldwork and participant observation is to get an in-depth view of the culture and people studied and enhance the importance of spending time in the field (e.g. Fangen, 2010; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019; Tjora, 2017; Wadel, 2014). Contextualising is therefore essential.

Understanding social phenomena and time spent in the field can be vital. In shorter fieldwork, you can test the informants' interpretations in different contexts, which is easier when living with them over time (Fangen, 2010). Other challenges may be more practical, which could be avoided with more time spent with the informants. For example, the researcher may not be notified when the schedule changes, lack of information because of absence, and difficulty separating the participants because you do not know your informants well enough. The researcher will have the opportunity to retreat from the field and reflect on what has been observed and experienced, which allows processing impressions with others, which can be crucial in projects that might otherwise be too hard to deal with alone (Fangen, 2010, p. 124).

As an anthropologist and a teacher, I have professional knowledge and experience from the Norwegian school system. On the other hand, I have limited professional knowledge of kindergarten, apart from the experience of having three children in kindergarten and only a short time teaching in kindergarten teacher education. My background as a social anthropologist also differs from most researchers in the field, who usually are from education, often with an academic background as kindergarten teachers. My academic background gives me both advantages and disadvantages in terms of positioning; as an "insider" or "outsider" (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). Because my academic background is different from most of the pedagogical staff in the four kindergartens in the study, to some extent, the role of a novice was easy to possess; I could observe, ask questions, try out things, and make mistakes (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019). This position may have reduced the staff's feeling of being assessed and viewed with critical eyes, the trust this gave me gave me access to knowledge otherwise not accessible.

A balance between being close to the field and the need to maintain distance is essential to achieve the objective of reflexivity, i.e. seeing the culture or social environment studied from *their* perspective. To access in-depth knowledge of the field, including the taken for granted knowledge (doxa), I argue that being as "naive" as possible is vital. However, this proved to be more challenging than anticipated. As a researcher, you are the main instrument of the method, interacting with informants with both intellect and emotion, making fieldwork exciting, powerful, and demanding (Wadel, 2014). Fieldwork in one's own culture makes it feasible to accomplish participatory observation on a part-time basis or in "sections" i.e., one can enter and exit the field and stay there for shorter sessions, from a few days to a week or two.

INSIDER OR OUTSIDER ROLE?

How do you know if you are inside and part of a culture or not? Furthermore, how do you determine "to be too much inside" the culture you are studying? When not problematised, how do you discover the "hidden" or tacit knowledge and understandings? As a researcher in a social context, you may wander between being "outside" or "inside". As mentioned, the ideal of participatory observation acquires as much in-depth knowledge of the social environment, institution, or local communities as possible, while at the same time ensuring analysis and methodological competence (Fangen, 2010). In addition, one must have reflexivity to those studied. As two contrasting research roles, we find the "desk researcher" where all research takes place from the desktop, to the field researcher who goes total "native" and loses distance and analytical ability as a full participant in the field being studied (Fangen, 2010). The degree of participation may vary from observation at the beginning of the fieldwork to entirely participant observation. The degree of involvement may also shift between an insider or outsider role of participant observation. To experience the culture from "the inside", you need to obtain a participant role of observation. Therefore, balancing the roles of a participant-observer and an observer is essential. The purpose of balancing these two roles is to get an insider understanding of the culture being studied and gain knowledge and interpret the culture or social setting being studied, i.e. the insider's perspective is to be interpreted from the inside to the people outside (Fangen, 2010). To obtain this, the researcher must view the culture, society, or local context from the "natives' point of view" (Geertz, 1974).

During the preliminary fieldwork stages, I partially experienced the role of an outsider, as a new employee, substitute, university college teacher or visitor, and partially as an insider with knowledge of the Norwegian culture and language, and the kindergarten as an institution, its existing norms and values. The outsider and novice positions changed as time went on and I became closer and learned to know them better. I gradually went from a "visitor" to "one who worked in the kindergarten". From the very beginning, I was careful to avoid positioning the role of researcher as different from them. I set up conversations about small talk topics, asked questions as a new employee, and deliberately avoided professional issues. To avoid answering professional questions turned out to be complicated. Professional issues kept popping up, and I was often assigned as teacher and "kindergarten expert" and a university college teacher, with the

confident expectation of getting professional advice or guidance. Fangen (2010) points out that it is essential to be aware of and reflect on the informant's positions and roles designated by the researcher. Wadel (2014, p. 65) argues that participant observation, therefore, requires the researcher to "be a sociologist on oneself". To do this, Wadel (2014) highlights three crucial points: 1) be aware of the role repertoire of informants' roles and those given to the researcher; 2) the researcher should exploit the local roles, both those given and taken; 3) be aware that the categories observed do not always apply to informants' categories.

An example of roles given to me in the field is illustrated in a conversation from the lunchroom: "I thought you were a substitute. Saw you outside the other day". Here, I was assigned the role of a substitute, a local category in which I was easily placed as most new people in the kindergarten were usually substituting. The following comment from the pedagogical leader (PL) indicates my role as a substitute or an employee more than a researcher: "So good with a few extra hands". I also experienced being assigned tasks the same way as the staff in the kindergarten: dressing, participating in play, cleaning, cleaning tables after meals and more. I was aware of being assigned or taking on tasks to minimise my "outsider" position and avoid being disruptive. As emphasised before, it is crucial to contextualise and participate in several contexts where the informants interact. Therefore, I attended several meetings, the staff and team meetings, where, among other things, "practice stories"¹³ (cases) concerning different children were reported and discussed. Because of my presence and interaction with the staff and the children discussed, I understood the cases presented more thoroughly than if only told to me. I understood why the staff handled the children as they did, the professional reasoning behind their actions, and discussions about their practice in meetings and talks with the parents. I would not access this insight if I only observed and participated in smaller units (houses). The experiences through participatory observation in kindergarten provided a fuller understanding of what "kindergarten life" may entail, both on the organisational and professional level and as a bodily experience.

According to Wadel (2014), researchers could benefit from wandering between different roles using participant observation, interviews, and field conversations. However, the informants can also wander between different roles

13 Practice stories were the term the pedagogical staff used about incidents and issues related to individual children.

(mother, father, kindergarten teacher, employee, pedagogical leader, colleague, and more). During my initial fieldwork, I talked to the pedagogical leader (PL) about daily topics, as I usually do when learning to know colleagues in a new workplace. At the early fieldwork stage, the role was as a newcomer to the workplace. The conversations were sometimes like supervision but could often switch to professional references to the framework plan. In interviews with the same PL, the conversation was more formal, professionally focused, and less accessible. I had the same experience from the department meetings and the pedagogical management meetings. The various roles I took on or were assigned could thus alternate between apprentice or a new employee, colleague, adult, researcher, expert on cultural diversity and ethnic minorities and university college teacher.

These roles were partly situational and contingent depending on the time spent in kindergarten. These changing roles emphasise the importance of moving along with the informants in different contexts and, as time goes, might give access to different types of data. Fieldwork as a method emphasises the importance of meetings between people as more than words and language, and that experience must be considered as necessary as the dialogue to access knowledge (Hastrup & Hervik, 2003, p. 6). The culture or social environment that the researcher studies are people as individual actors in the face of each other (Hastrup & Hervik, 2003). As pinpointed, this underlines the importance of being present in social contexts where interaction occurs, in the kindergarten, outdoor areas, different departments, the lunch room, departmental and staff meetings, and parent meetings.

Nonetheless, by entering kindergarten as a researcher, I am aware that I will never be interest-free but always situated in the context of a teacher from the university college and as a mother (Christophersen, 2011). Therefore, it will be crucial to be aware of and recognise one's attitudes and values facing informants and the field studied. As Wadel (2014) pointed out, it is vital to acknowledge one's cultural categories and the informants' local roles. Theoretical perspective and the researcher's social position may influence one's focus. Bourdieu (1997) emphasises the importance of what he calls the *bifocal double* research gaze, i.e. establishing both closeness and distance to research at the same time. Hastrup (1998) has the same distinction, arguing that self-understanding and subjective experience can be an essential starting point for cultural understanding but is never enough on its own (Hastrup 1998, p. 47). Interviews, participatory

observation, and field conversations will contribute to different types of knowledge and the opportunity to see the informants' diverse roles in different contexts, giving a richer and more holistic picture of the social environment studied (Wadel, 2014).

RESEARCH ROLE(S) IN THE FIELD: OPPORTUNITIES AND LIMITATIONS

As shown, the positions and roles assigned and acquired in the field provide both opportunities and limitations. They have an impact not only on access but also on how one can act. My different positions, a university college teacher, researcher and a social anthropologist, an adult married woman and a mother, created certain expectations and guidelines as to what I could say and do (see Bourdieu, 2003). For example, I could not be naïve in all contexts or portray myself as “young and inexperienced.” (Wadel, 2014). The objective is to acquire as in-depth knowledge as possible about the environment being studied. At the same time, the analytical and methodological knowledge indicates that it will be essential to create a position at the balancing point between participation and analytical distance (Fangen 2010, p. 101). My role as a mother contributed to some recognition from the staff that I was knowledgeable and experienced with children and raising them. Although my position on children was not as an expert, it contributed to themes for conversation. I often introduced my children in conversations during fieldwork etc., which I also deliberately exploited. At other times, I assigned myself a role as someone who observes their professional practice:

PL tells me that after a conversation with a father with Polish background: “I noticed I got a little nervous when I knew you were observing me.” In this situation, I stood behind (deliberately) not to intrude in the conversation between the father and the PL to avoid my presence affecting them somehow. (Lund, in press, p. 68)

As the PL comments above, creating an equal position between the informants and me as a researcher is challenging, and the risk of being placed in the role of assessing them will always be present because of our outsider position from the University College.

The kindergarten welcomes both students and learners, and the staff and people from outside coming and going is standard practice. On several occasions,

I experienced being assigned the role of an employee from the University College, a familiar role to them, both in student follow-up and training/additional education. When I was assigned the role of a university college teacher, I found it very difficult to put aside my professional assessments and not to provide input, especially when asked directly. To avoid considering or providing input that could have changed their view on the matter (which could have provided other answers), I just replied affirmatively: "yes, it sounds like a sensible solution" (Lund, in press). I also experienced that I sometimes "forgot" my research focus when talking to other employees or interacting with the children, which made me somewhat anxious: *Have I missed something? Did I lose essential data?* At the same time, I found it unnatural, and sometimes also uncomfortably intrusive, to follow the PL as a "hawk". In the first phase of the fieldwork I felt more like an observer than a participant observer and spent time navigating and "finding my place" in kindergarten (i.g. Wadel, 2014). It felt like starting a new job, finding out what is being done, when and how, and getting to know the employees. The first few days, I also felt some discomfort. I did not know how to perform: Should I take notes while I was with the children and staff, wait to take notes, what could I say, help with the children, other tasks, etc.?

As the fieldwork progressed and I learned about the staff and the daily schedule, I relaxed and fit in better. Gradually, I came to be considered more like one of them, one of the staff, an insider. As pointed out earlier, field roles can shift significantly, both because of the time one spends in the field – one gets to know each other and gets closer, and experiences security in the relationships – but also situationally dependent as the field observation above illustrates (Fangen, 2010; Wadel, 2014). This underlines the importance of spending time in the field and seeing the informants in different situations and contexts to contextualise events and social interactions. As Wadel (2014) points out, the researcher will be assigned local roles and may also take on these roles him or herself. The researcher role is not part of the kindergarten's local role repertoire. Therefore, it may be difficult for the staff to put me in a local category or role they knew (Lund, in press, p. 69):

I had spent two days in the department (house) feeling a little apprehensive of how I was going to act. I had told them to say if they needed help with the practicalities in daily routine, dressing the kids, meals, cleaning etc. The pedagogical leader (PL) gave me tasks, and I took the initiative to avoid intrusive or disturbing elements.

I found that PL was unsure what I was “looking for or what was interesting to me”, which she explicitly expressed and what role I should have in kindergarten. She wanted to appear professional towards me, as the following statement illustrates: “I try to tell why I do what I do. Should probably have prepared myself more for the ‘gathering’”. It seems that the PL does not know what local category to place me in, employee, college, visitor, substitute. This also comes to light when a child and youth worker (CYW) says to me, “Are you just going to sit there, or can you help me in the locker room”?

The other staff reacted to this incident where the CYW told me what to do or “commanded” me as the PL described it. The PL wanted to tell me that she did not think what he had done was acceptable. The reaction to the incident can be interpreted in several ways. For the CYW, a young man in his early 20s, it was only natural that I could (and should) contribute as an adult person in kindergarten. He simply wanted to get the job done.

On the other hand, the PL perhaps saw me primarily as an educated, adult woman from the university college who cannot be ordered or put to work by someone in his position. It was the pedagogical leader who delegated tasks, not the CYW. This reaction may be tied to a concern for the kindergarten’s reputation and connected to professional rank and age, or simply that as a visitor, I could not be treated this way. I did not ask why she responded to the incident the way she did so as not to be intrusive. This incident is an example of assigned field roles and how one can “disturb” the order of working relations. However, this situation gave me insights into working relationships, communication, tasks, and distribution of labour in practice, exemplified by the handling of the disagreement. Leadership role enactment was one of the research topics; this incident was valuable data.

SURPRISES IN THE FIELD AS METHODOLOGICAL RESOURCES

Before my initial fieldwork in kindergarten, I had some reflections. I had thought that I would probably focus most on the adults, the interaction, and relationships with them. However, I did less reflection on the significance of the interaction and relationships with the children. I had anticipated helping staff with the children, but not that the children should take as much attention and time as they did, nor the interest they had in playing with me. For the children, it went without saying that as an adult person in kindergarten, I would play with

them and do the same things as the other adults did, and they were curious as to who I was. Some kindergarten staff commented that "not all adults in our kindergarten are as well-received as you." The nature of the relations established with the children may have contributed to the staff's confidence in me, giving me tasks as if I were employed and thus gradually feeling like an inside position.

Also, the children took up a lot of "space", which made my focus on the pedagogical leaders disappear at times. However, the shifting focus was not insufficient and helped me better understand the complexity and hard work it is to be a kindergarten teacher and pedagogical leader. Nor had I imagined that I would experience that it was nice to be with the children and that I should look forward to coming to kindergarten and to the next fieldwork period. This experience from the preliminary stage of the fieldwork underlines that a field researcher doing participative observation uses the entire human register of emotions, thoughts and senses. Hastrup (1998) argues that the surprise begins with the individual anthropologist's specific encounter with culture in the ethnographic fieldwork, as my relations with the children exemplify. When one researcher studies people and the project's primary aim is to capture what happens in the interpersonal relationships, it will precisely be a methodical strength that one does not hold back but uses oneself as a person in relations with the people studied (see for example, Fangen, 2010; Wadel, 2014).

"THROUGH THE RESEARCHERS GAZE" – PRECONCEPTIONS AND UNDERSTANDING

The ethnographer does not, and, in my opinion, largely cannot perceive what the informants perceive. What he [she], and that uncertainly enough, is what they perceive "with" – or "by means of" or "through" (Geertz, 1974, p. 58).

The researcher is always *situated* and influenced by his or her background, position, and the relationships with the informants. Apart from being conscious of the different research roles, researchers need to develop closeness and distance to the people, or the social environment studied. Therefore, as a researcher, it is vital to put biases, perceptions, values, and expectations, and be conscious of what Bourdieu (2003, p. 283) calls the "scientific habitus": "It is indeed scientifically attested that her most decisive scientific choices (of topic, method, theory, etc.) depend very closely on the location she (or he) occupies within her professional universe [...]."

Research position and professional perspective will no doubt help influence the role and positing in the field, as well as data collection; what you “see” will be characterised by your “scientific habitus.” Also, it would help to view the research, both inside and outside, as both observer and participant (Skjervheim, 1996). Through participant observation, one will have access to first-hand experiences. First-hand experiences require closeness to the informants, but without being influenced to the same extent as when interviewed, challenging the informants about their expectations, and understanding. Participant observation is primarily an active method where the researcher is in direct contact with those observed, but at the same time, passive because they do not participate in the activities. The degree of participation is difficult to estimate in advance and will vary depending on the participation process, the context in question, and the relationship one establishes with informants (Holstein & Gubrium, 2003).

In the field, I focused on establishing good relations with informants. I consciously participated in conversations without seeming intrusive, active, sometimes participating, sometimes as a member or listening observer. The closeness that participatory observation enables will thus provide a more meaningful understanding of being a pedagogical leader in kindergarten, what they do, their everyday practices, what they say, their perceptions, thoughts, and values through field conversations in interviews. Such proximity gives a better understanding and interprets tacit knowledge otherwise hidden.

SOME CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS

As I have illuminated and discussed in this paper, it is crucial in all qualitative research, and specifically in fieldwork and participant observation, to achieve access to data. One needs to be conscious of the role or, more precisely, the field roles assigned. As shown, one cannot, in advance, prepare for all the various roles to be assigned, the field’s local role repertoire, or what roles the researcher may consciously or unconsciously take on. The roles are also highly changeable from situation to situation, applied to different people in different contexts, and constantly evolving. Field roles will be influenced by how the researcher establishes social relations with informants and communicates and act with those studied. Being too focused on not influencing the informants or not being seen as intrusive or disruptive may limit access to vital data or give access to other data types. Researchers are often so concerned about their outsider role in the field that it can overshadow past experiences and theoretical perspectives applied

in other contexts (Fangen, 2010; Wadel, 2014). Hastrup’s (2013) concept of “astonishment” of the cultural and embodying experience underscores precisely this. Reflection on one’s own experience can contribute to an analytical distance and shed light on the familiar (Hastrup, 1998; Wadel, 2014). When distanced from the observations, the researcher may discover relevant and surprising data. During fieldwork, the project’s focus may change, friends may turn into informants, and the time we spend together may become the most crucial data for the thesis. Having an open approach to the field, the people you meet, and what you observe will ensure just that. At the same time, bear in mind that researchers will always observe and act through a filter and make conscious and unconscious data selections.

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