



## Brief

# Construction of identity narratives in children's social play

**Berit Zachrisen**

University of Stavanger, Norway

Contact corresponding author: Berit Zachrisen, e-mail: [berit.zachrisen@uis.no](mailto:berit.zachrisen@uis.no)

This study examines *how children construct identity narratives in social play*. After inspiration from Yuval-Davis (2010, 2011), a sociological approach is taken towards the issue of identity. Identity narratives position individuals as social beings. The study emphasizes the *process* of constructing identity narratives (not the products). A person's construction of identity narratives is always in *process*, and in various ways expresses one's experiences of belonging. However, the relationship between identity and belonging is multifaceted.

The data consists of video observations of playful interactions from one kindergarten department (3–6 years), taken over three semesters. The study attempts to capture the richness of children's communication where non-verbal forms of expression are central.

It is the children's construction of collective identity narratives that is most salient in the material. Central here is the construction of «we-ness» as well as various expressions of collective agency. The building of the «we-ness» is primarily linked to three main features of the children's communication: *congruence*, *physical proximity* and *a listening and open posture*. *Congruence* can involve two almost identically corresponding nonverbal or verbal expressions. For example, two different expressions of a common tempo or the handling of a common artifact. *Physical proximity* occurs, for example, when a child leans against another child to whisper something to them. *A listening and open posture* can be expressed by the children when they have their attention focused on each other, and are quick to respond to the other's non-verbal and verbal input.

The experience of collective agency can be understood as embedded in an experience of «we-ness». Especially in connection with the feature congruence, there are many examples of collective actions as expressions of collective agency. Based on the findings from

the study, the children's collective actions appear to be very central to the construction of the «we-ness». Without participation in the collective actions, a child can easily be left out of the the building of «we-ness» in the group. However, children's construction of «we-ness» can also be related to different forms of demarcation. Hidden in the construction of a 'we' is the construction of a 'them' that is not included in the 'we'. Another demarcation can be linked to which «aspects» of the participants that are accepted within a common 'we'. The study highlights some educational challenges especially related to the construction of demarcations among the children. (Funded by NordForsk, 85644, and UiS.)

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