Children's Perspectives

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1   Introduction

There is a long-standing tradition in Danish day care to take children's interests into account when organising pedagogical activities. In recent years, there has been a move towards considering children's perspectives in a more literal sense – at the practical level and in connection with formulating local and national policies concerning children and the time they spend at day-care institutions. Giving children influence on decisions that affect their own day-to-day circumstances is also a central feature of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) and of Danish legislation.

In accordance with this, the Danish Evaluation Institute (EVA) wishes by way of experiment to include children's perspectives in evaluations in order to create a basis for the formulation of policies for and a dialogue on the development of the day-care sector in general. The objective of investigating children's perspectives originates partly in the above-mentioned political declaration in this area and partly in the desire to gather knowledge and experience of how children's perspectives can be included in evaluations, studies and pedagogical practice.

1.1   Including children's perspectives

Including children's perspectives in evaluations, for instance, can be understood in two ways: as safeguarding (what are assumed to be) children's interests – i.e. acting as children's 'solicitor' – or more literally, as attempting to gain insight into children's own perspectives, opinions and experiences in relation to their own lives, with the aim of using this insight to optimise conditions in their surroundings and their everyday routines. We apply the concept in the latter sense in this report.

The purpose of the report is to isolate a number of options for including children's perspectives in EVA's future evaluations in the day-care area. In addition, the report may be of interest to others who wish to learn how children's perspectives can be included in evaluations and studies. The report deals in general with the options, challenges and problems that arise in connection with this and, more specifically, with methods for collecting data that can be used in this context, including in future evaluations by EVA. Where the more concrete reflections regarding methods are concerned, the report focuses primarily on children of kindergarten age.

The report was written with the help of studies of primarily the Danish literature in the field (there is a bibliography at the end of the report). Firstly, there is an outline of the changes in the view of children's rights and competences to talk about their own lives that underlies the more recent ambition of including children's perspectives in research and policy formulation in connection with children. Secondly, the report provides an account of the general methodical challenges and ethical problems connected with including children's perspectives in evaluations and studies.

The report ends with a review of specific data-collection methods and a discussion of their usefulness, advantages and disadvantages in relation to discovering children's perspectives.
It is not the purpose of the report to provide an exhaustive presentation of this subject, but to provide a brief, clear account of some of the general aspects of the area. Therefore, the presentation of the various concepts, positions and approaches may sometimes appear rather categorical. The aim has been to present a number of fundamental features of children's perspectives and to create a platform for their future inclusion in EVA's evaluations.

2 Children's perspectives – a new view of children and their rights

The efforts to include children's perspectives when making decisions about frameworks, conditions and opportunities for children are based, among other things, on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (which Denmark ratified in 1991) and later in Danish legislation in this area (e.g. in what was then the Ministry of Welfare's guidelines on day-care schemes, after school centres and recreational clubs, Guideline no. 26 of 26/5/2008). Article 12 (1) of the UN Convention states that "Parties must assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child." (UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989). The Convention also states that "(…) the child shall in particular be provided the opportunity to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting the child". This means that, according to the Convention, children must be heard in connection with decisions and circumstances that affect their lives.

The Convention confers the status of full citizens on children, and this means they have a number of basic social, civil and political rights. According to the Convention, children must be taken seriously as individuals whose opinions and thoughts it is significant and necessary to take into account, and who must be heard about the circumstances of their lives. The idea of discovering and including children's perspectives is therefore based on ethical and legal demands (that participation in and influence on decisions that affect them are rights) on the premise that this will benefit them.

At the same time, the necessity of considering children's perspectives could also be said to be based on epistemology: The idea of considering children's perspectives implies the idea that children can and must contribute their own unique knowledge of their lives because this knowledge cannot be obtained in any other way and is necessary to gain insight into in order to be able to optimise their lives. Adults' memories of their own childhoods do not necessarily constitute a valid frame of reference for children's experiences of their own day-to-day lives. Childhood today is characterised by structural conditions that differ from those of previous generations, and it therefore differs significantly from the childhood that adults of today have experienced. Thus, in order to live up to the demands of the Convention regarding the inclusion of children's opinions and perspectives when making decisions that affect them, it is necessary to attempt to understand childhood as it is experienced by the children themselves – it is necessary to ask children about their experiences.

2.1 A new view of children

Research into childhood includes ethical, ontological and epistemological dimensions and, within recent decades, there has been a paradigm shift that demands and enables the inclusion of children's perspectives in this research.

The ethical dimension is, as mentioned, included in the Convention's demand that children must be heard about their lives and be able to influence them. Danish legislation also reflects this focus on children's rights. Examples that can be mentioned are the abolition of the right to inflict corporal punishment on children (partly in 1985, finally in 1997), the establishment of the National Council for Children (1994) and the Act on Parental Responsibility which, among other things, affirms in connection with divorce that all children must be heard in matters connected with child

custody, residence and visitation rights in order that their perspectives be taken into account (Act on Parental Responsibility of 6/6/2007).

Ontologically, there has been a change in the view of children, and they are now to a greater degree seen as independent, competent players (on an everyday basis, in professional contexts and in a legal sense). This view of children is also fundamental to the Convention.

Epistemologically, there has been a general move away from a positivist research ideal in the social area. At the same time, it has been acknowledged that many of the methodical challenges that were formerly considered barriers in relation to using children as informants and regarding their statements as valid, also come into play in relation to adult informants and are therefore general conditions for research (this applies to issues regarding the trustworthiness of informants, for instance, how researchers interpret data, asymmetrical power relationships between researcher and informant, the problem of representativity, etc). Finally, as mentioned above, it has now become widely recognised that it is necessary to consult children in order to discover how they experience their day-to-day lives.

The changes in the way children's rights are viewed today compared to formerly, correspond to the changes in the way children are viewed as a social category and by the ideals that determine the way in which knowledge of the area is collected.

The ethical demands and the conception of rights in this field (as they come to expression in the Convention, among other places) have been described above. In the following, we consider in greater detail some of the significant changes in the basic view of children (the ontological shift) and in the approach to knowledge collection in the area (the epistemological shift) that have taken place in childhood research in recent decades.

2.2 Developmental psychology – changes in the view of children

Older and more recent childhood research naturally includes different disciplines, subjects and points of view. The descriptions of some principal features of the evolution of developmental psychology in the following are therefore highly generalised. We focus on the changes in the basic view of children in developmental psychology because they are central to the interpretations and methodical considerations the evaluator, researcher or practitioner must take into account when trying to understand children and their views of the world.

Child and developmental psychology were characterised far into the 20th century by a psychodynamic view of people based on the idea that the mind of the new-born baby was a blank page, and that the child learned to control its hereditary, biologically-determined egoistical drives with the help of socialisation processes and thereby (normally) became a realistic, socially well-functioning adult. Adults' socialisation task in relation to children was to influence them in an appropriate way. Mapping human development from child to adult so that the adult could organise his or her influence on children in the best possible way, was therefore central to child research. In this connection, the aim of research was to describe the series of universal development stages that all (normal) children could be expected to undergo.

The shift in the view of children in developmental psychology began during the 1970s. It was based, among other things, on new knowledge of children's perceptual and cognitive abilities contributed by research. This is referred to in the field of childhood research as the emergence of a new paradigm, and it gained momentum in earnest during the 80s and 90s. Unlike the earlier view of children as 'incomplete adults' and as egoistical, irrational and asocial beings, the new paradigm led to them being regarded as social, communicatively prepared and intentional beings who had aims and began to create meaning and connections as soon as they were born. In continuation of this, research during the 90s showed that even very young children exert an influence on and choose among the influences in their surroundings, and in this way play an active role in their own socialisation processes.

This leads up to present-day childhood research in which children's development is no longer seen as a transition from one universally-applicable stage of development to another. It is now seen as a cognitive maturation process that takes place in the child's interaction with its surroundings. From this point of view, children are seen as players in and co-creators of their own development and of their own conditions of life and of the contexts they find themselves in, rather than as passive recipients of upbringing and socialisation with the adult in the active role. This also implies a shift in the view of the position of children from the state of objects in an educational process with predetermined, normative development goals, to the state of subjects in their own reality. Thus, the educational task today is to recognise children's competences and to guide them in such a way as to enable them to function in a culture they have no experience of as yet. The development task for children – within this conceptual framework – is therefore to become familiar with and be able to navigate in the social order at the same time as they influence that order.

This new view of children means that their development must necessarily be seen as a development towards an indeterminable future that will differ greatly depending on the local context in which the individual child grows up – in spite of a certain inertia and stability in cultural and social developments and the human socialisation processes. This means that it is meaningless to attempt to define a universal, natural human development process. Child research must instead take a contextual approach.

2.3   2.3 A new scientific ideal

Children's perspectives in research have, as mentioned above, traditionally been based on adults' recollections of their own childhoods or on views of children as they have been experienced and interpreted by adults connected with the children's group that was the object of research. Children's own voices – according to the former view of children – were not considered relevant as it was assumed that children were not capable of making a realistic or relevant assessment of their own situation under any circumstances.

Furthermore, child research and childhood research were characterised by positivist ideals for many years. In child research, among other areas, this came to expression in the form of controlled experiments in what were actually laboratories. Since then, there has been a showdown with research inspired by these ideals.

The view of children's development in the new paradigm as context-bound makes such isolated experiments uninteresting. They change the context around the child and its actions and therefore cannot be regarded as representative of the child's preferences in its self-expression in general. In other words, the knowledge that can be arrived at by focusing research on children's actions in a laboratory, cannot be directly transferred to the everyday contexts that children are part of.

The new paradigm in childhood research prescribes that empirical material must be obtained instead from children's natural surroundings and their ordinary, everyday lives. This marks a shift in the methodical and theoretical orientation of child research – ethnographic methods now dominate the field. The emergence of a new view of children has thereby brought about changes in attitudes as far as the inclusion of children in research is concerned. Children are no longer the objects of investigation, but players in their own right, and it is necessary to include and understand the information they provide about their own lives in order to be able to say anything relevant about what it means to be a child. One area of child research has gone so far as to include children as co-researchers so that they can exert an influence on the object of the research. This also marks a shift in the balance of power that has otherwise characterised relations between children and adults in which the adult now assumes a much more modest role.

It could be said in general that there has been a move in childhood research during the 20th century away from a view of children as empty vessels into which contents must be poured (by adults), and who should be understood from an adult perspective within the framework of a positivist approach to science. Today, children are no longer regarded as objects to be studied, they

must be given a central place in research as subjects who are experts in relation to providing knowledge of their own lives. Children have become expert informants whose information on and understanding of what it means to be a child, adult researchers cannot ignore in their efforts to establish children's perspectives.

In the next sections we consider some of the methodical reflections and implications connected with efforts to include children's perspectives in evaluations and research.

3   Methodical and ethical considerations

This section contains a discussion of a number of overall methodical and ethical problems connected with the ambition to capture children's perspectives and include children as informants in connection with research. It also contains a brief account of some of the general features of children's cognitive development that are relevant in relation to the choice of data-collection methods. As such, it focuses on general reflections, while the next section contains a description and discussion of the concrete application of various data-collection methods in relation to discovering children's perspectives.

3.1   Children's perspectives in the plural

It will be problematic in connection with the new view of children and the new research paradigm in the area (cf. section 2) to write about children's perspective as it is necessary to consider childhood from different angles. There are many types of childhood, and different groups of children have different views of their everyday lives. There are differences in relation to age, gender, social and/or economic backgrounds, ethnicity and so on, and there will probably be many different perspectives, interests and views within any group of children. Attempting to present a single, common children's perspective for a group of children would be to run the risk of presenting the group as more socially homogeneous than it is and with more fixed patterns than it has. There are circumstances and interests that apply to children in general, but it is naturally important to consider the fact that any group of children, in a day-care institution, for instance, comprises children who differ from each other and have different perspectives and different options for self-expression. Therefore, according to current child research, it is not possible to operate with children's perspective in the singular, but to talk instead about children's perspectives.

The idea of capturing children's perspectives is relatively new in a Danish context to the extent that it is still at the pilot stage. For example, interviewing children has only become the object of systematic consideration within recent years. Ethnographic methods, however, have been used in the area a little longer. At the end of the 1980s – in the fields of anthropology and sociology – discussions began in earnest about how to include children's perspectives in child research and childhood research from a methodical point of view, and the use of ethnographic methods in studies of children has become widespread since then. This approach has provided a significant contribution and supplement to the attempts of earlier child research to identify the general conditions for childhood, and ethnographic methods have helped to strengthen a differentiated view of children.

As mentioned above, many of the methodological considerations, objections and challenges connected with collecting children's perspectives are also relevant in relation to adult informants. What knowledge do we gain? How valid is this knowledge? How can we interpret it? To what extent is the researcher's construction an interpretation and not a real picture of the informant's world view? Collecting children's perspectives thus involves many of the same metaconsiderations and theoretical scientific reflections that are also relevant in relation to all other groups of informants. But collecting and including children's perspectives in research and thereby using children as informants also gives rise to a number of special methodical and ethical considerations – or more accurately: Some of the general methodical problems are more pronounced when children are involved. We look at these problems in more detail in the following.

3.2　Problems of interpretation

One condition for looking into children's perspectives is that adults must translate and interpret children's expressions, actions and attitudes in various ways. Children's perspectives are established via adults by using children as informants and experts regarding their own lives, and in this sense they are presented by adults.

The interpretation or translation of data will always be an adult's communication of children's statements or actions, there are no unmediated representations of children's views. As a corollary to this, it could also be said that the merging of collecting empirical data and analysis is an unavoidable circumstance in connection with child studies. The observer or evaluator must necessarily decode and describe the underlying intentions and motives of children's actions. The interpretations of the observer are included in the registrations in such a way that, to a certain extent, the process of interpretation becomes unclear to the reader.

A critical objection to the very idea of including children's perspectives in research could therefore be that they are created by adults, that they are not in fact children's perspectives, but on the contrary, expressions of the views and interpretations of the information provided by children on the part of the adult researcher, evaluator or educator. In addition, it could also be objected that talking about children's perspectives at all is problematic because it is impossible to get close enough to children to be able to claim to have shared their experiences or to know their thoughts. It is possible for a researcher or an evaluator to gain insight into children's world, but this insight will always be of a different order to the empirical knowledge that children base their acts on in their day-to-day practice. However, this is a condition for all ethnographic method.

It is possible – as previously mentioned – to criticise many of the same points in the research methods that draw on adult informants. Furthermore, it could be argued that the purpose of presenting children's perspectives is not necessarily to present a pure reproduction of the individual child's reality, but rather to be able to interpret these perspectives in the light of a broader institutional or social context and to safeguard children's interests in this way. This involves interpreting children's statements and actions in relation to the general patterns and rationales that the individual child's actions are expressions of, but that the child itself is probably unaware of.
In this connection, it is naturally important to make the basis of the adult's interpretation and analysis of children's perspectives explicit.

3.3　The extent of the inclusion of children's perspectives

It is important to be able to determine when children's perspectives have been included in research. Children can be included to a varying extent and at different stages of a study or an evaluation. They can be included in connection with the collection of empirical data (an obvious move), but they can also – ideally – be included at the analysis stage (e.g. as commentators during or after observations). Finally, children can be included in the design of an evaluation or study.

Figure 1 illustrates various ways in which children can take part in a study, and how the way in which they take part is significant for the extent to which it can be said that their perspectives have been included. An exploratory evaluation with an investigative, open point of departure offers more opportunities to include these perspectives in the preparation of the study design and during the data-collection and analysis processes. On the other hand, it will be more appropriate to include children in the role of informants in a closed, concentrated evaluation with a predetermined focus.

Figure 1
Extent of child involvement in studies

Adult-initiated and adult-designed		
	Children as informants	Adult-initiated project in which children are informed so they understand what is expected of them when they take part and why. Adults respect children's views as part of data collection.
		Adults initiate a project based on their own ideas. Children are involved in planning and implementation.
	Children as participants in project design	Adults design and lead the project. Children are consulted about project design during all stages of the project, and their attitudes and opinions are taken seriously and included in project development..
		Adults are at the disposal of children, but do not play a leading role. The project is based on children's ideas about what they wish to study, and they determine project design.
Child-initiated and child-designed		

There is a general move in childhood research at present towards more participatory research in which children are to a greater degree included as 'co-researchers'. This means that the research process changes from taking its point of departure in predetermined research issues, to taking its point of departure in what children show an interest in and allowing them to determine the goal of the research.

We believe in this connection that a differentiation should be made between inclusion as a methodical tool and inclusion as an ethical demand. In the former case, the goal of the study is set out by adults. In the latter case, adults' efforts involve understanding children's conduct and explaining their statements as meaningful in the context of the situation they are in, focusing on what is central for children and then allowing an evaluation to take shape, rather than the adult focusing on his or her own goals in connection with children's participation.

The degree to which children can be included in an evaluation will naturally depend on the overall goal of the evaluation, the type of knowledge we want to obtain, and how this will be done. Is the purpose of the evaluation to map out existing circumstances, for instance? Is its purpose to take a critical view of existing circumstances and of their consequences with the aim of making changes? This could be the case, for instance, if the purpose was to discover children's perspectives on evaluations of language skills and efforts to stimulate these skills in the context of day care by investigating whether such measures have the effect of stigmatising some children, and whether they benefit only a few children. Or is the purpose to discover new, as yet unfamiliar, perspectives? This could be the case, for instance, if children were to find that they developed their language skills in completely different contexts or completely different ways than previously assumed.

This is naturally a question of a fluid transition between various goals and approaches, but the more children take part in the formulation of an evaluation project, the more likely it will be that the study will provide knowledge of phenomena of special importance seen from their position. In connection with studies that aim to map out a subject or an area, children's perspectives will be included on an equal footing with those of adult stakeholders, and their perspectives will in this case take on the character of a challenge or a control in relation to the other stakeholders' view of reality. It will be important in this context to pay attention to whether there are different stakeholder groups among children as there are among adults.

The degree to which children are included in a study will also be connected with the basic view of children inherent in the study and the view of children's social position (cf. section 2). An important element in this is whether children are seen as independent, competent social players who are capable of providing meaningful responses, and therefore possess insight on an equal footing with adults, or whether they are seen as a category of respondents who require a special approach – that is, whether children are seen as qualitatively different to adults. Naturally, there

are special considerations to take into account and there are other circumstances at play when children are included in studies or evaluations. However, a balance must be arrived at if children are to be seen not as genuinely different to adults (exoticised), but as competent social players.

3.4 Children's cognitive development – different questions for different age groups

In spite of the disavowal of universal development theories in more recent childhood research, psychologists have been able to identify a number of general features of children's cognitive development – based, among other things, on the biologically-determined development of human beings. We will now briefly consider these, as they are important for the way in which children of different ages can be included in studies and evaluations.

The features and phenomena described in the following should be regarded neither as exhaustive nor as absolute, as they can and do appear in all age groups. The division into age groups is therefore exclusively an expression of what can typically be expected of children of certain ages according to current research in general.

A year and a half to four years
To a considerable extent, children in this age group communicate with the help of adults' interpretations of and reactions to their emotional and physical expressions, but language is increasingly mastered in connection with body language. A four-year-old can therefore be very active linguistically in relation to his or her actions and experiences, which the child can express through play, for instance. In general, repeated actions and play sequences could reveal something about the child's central experiences.

Language will often be connected with here-and-now situations, and children in this age group will find it difficult to relate to chronological and relational concepts. This could make it difficult to talk to them about things that happened some time ago, and there will be little point in talking hypothetically about the future. It will be difficult in general for the adult and the child to understand each other if the oral expressions have no connection with a common experience of a concrete context. Hence, it will be a good idea to make sure that the adult and the child have a concrete, associative point of departure for an interview – what could be called 'visual scaffolding'. Attention should also be paid to the fact that the child's experience of reality very much depends on whether he or she receives social confirmation of what is said and of what he or she experiences. It may therefore be a good idea for the interviewer to use the child's own words accompanied by appreciative facial expressions and gestures and to repeat what he or she has heard the child say.

It will generally be a good idea in connection with a child between the ages of a year and a half to four years to supplement the child's statements with observations of his or her behaviour, as behavioural reactions are an equally valid source of information as oral statements from children in this age group (cf. paragraph 4.1.3 on observations).

Four to eight years
From four to eight years of age, children typically develop a rudimentary concept of time and become familiar with most of the basic, logically rational concepts in concrete contexts. They can talk about what they have seen and done in a dialogue with others and range over a limited period of time with the help of their imagination. They will also be able to reproduce subtle and stable views of an experience if they have formulated a story of the event soon after the time it took place. But it may be difficult for children to provide a detailed account of an experience that took place further back in time. This is due to the fact that, at the time, the experience was structured cognitively is a very different way than it would be reconstructed now because children's cognitive development takes place so rapidly. This is naturally central to what it is possible to talk to children about, and how this can be done in the context of a study.

Up to about school age, children will continue to use play and similar activities to express their experiences. It may also be a good idea to combine interview and observation in connection with this age group in the attempt to gain insight into their perspectives.

Eight to twelve years

When children are from eight to twelve years of age, they are far more capable of differentiating between reality, fantasy and stories. They can to a greater extent understand and express in words social events that are independent of them. They will begin to understand intentionality and will therefore not always react in such a concrete manner as previously. It is therefore important in connection with children in this age group for an evaluator to tell them about his or her intentions with the project in question.

It is only at about age twelve that children have mastered most of the logical and moral categories that adults make use of, and can follow the course of an adult dialogue. They can now think hypothetically and therefore imagine potential and ideal alternatives to reality. It becomes possible to talk to them without any connection to specific contexts and without the help of visual scaffolding, and they can express their wishes and ideas. Most of them must be a little older before they are capable of differentiating between the ideal, the logical and what is possible from a practical point of view.

It is very important in general to consider which age group the children who will be interviewed belong to, and to take account of the cognitive abilities they can be expected to possess when considering how to discover their perspectives and which data-gathering methods to use in a meaningful manner in a given study or evaluation.

3.5   The data collector

It is important to think about who should be responsible for data collection when attempting to discover children's perspectives.

It may be an advantage for the person responsible for data collection to be familiar with the children and their background. This will make the children feel more secure, and the children and the adult in question will have a common frame of reference, which will provide a broader knowledge base for the analysis and the interpretation of the data. However, if the person responsible for data collection and the children know each other well, there might be a challenge in the form of a certain mutual 'inside' understanding. This could mean that some thoughts and actions will not come to expression because it might appear superfluous to talk about or describe them, unless the evaluator pays careful attention to this and can detect such behaviour or such phenomena that could be taken for granted in familiar surroundings.

An external evaluator will not have such firmly-founded ideas about the children's attitudes and characteristics as somebody who knows them. This could make it easier for the person in question to meet the children without any preconceived ideas or impressions. On the other hand, it will be more of a challenge for the evaluator to gain the individual child's trust and to understand and translate the child's expressions.

These considerations must naturally be seen in the context of the children's ages and cognitive maturity (cf. paragraph 3.4 on children's cognitive development). The less their language and power of abstraction are developed, the greater the challenges of translating and interpreting their expressions (cf. section 4). One method that takes account of the above-mentioned advantages and disadvantages is to make use of co-evaluators, educators or parents, for instance, who know the children well.

Irrespective of who takes responsibility for data collection, it is important that it takes place in the children's everyday surroundings. It is also important to note that the imbalance in the power relationship between the child and the adult could prompt some children to say or do what they think is expected of them in the situation. This will particularly be the case in connection with data-collection methods that take the form of interviews and filling in questionnaires.

3.6   Ethical considerations

There are some special ethical considerations and precautions that must be taken in connection with evaluations that include children and are designed to discover their perspectives.

A basic and decisive question in this connection is when and to which degree it is in children's interests to have their lives examined in detail, and which difference this makes to their circumstances. The possible advantages of taking part in a study should be compared with the disadvantages of this (in the form of time consumption, inconvenience, interference with their private spheres, etc). It is also important to make sure that the approach of the study and the questions that must be answered are of relevance from the children's point of view – and this applies in particular to interviews. This can be done with the help of introductory observations designed to test the focus of the study.

Children and their parents must be given the necessary information about the purpose and framework of the project, including the communication and publication of the results. It is also important to consider issues regarding confidentiality, anonymity and the framework for data collection. In relation to this, visual presentations such as photos and video recordings that make it difficult to maintain the anonymity of the contributor constitute a special problem.

Permission must naturally be obtained for a child to take part in an evaluation or a study. This must at minimum be obtained from the child's parents, but it will also be preferable to obtain the child's permission as well – and it is important in this connection to inform the child that he or she is perfectly at liberty to refuse or agree to take part. But it is difficult to decide when a child has given permission to take part in a study, what he or she has agreed to, and whether he or she understands the use that his or her participation will be put to. A dilemma could arise after data collection if a child refuses permission to use the data he or she has helped to produce. The question here is whether a child is entitled to demand the withdrawal of the material – or whether an evaluator is entitled to use the material based on the fact that permission was originally given.

According to some researchers, asking a child to approve the results of observations and interview material after the data has been collected can be considered pseudo-ethical legitimisation. Their argument is that the child is not aware of the scientific context under any circumstances and therefore does not have the background necessary to give such approval.

It is relevant to consider how to select the children who will take part in a study, and how this selection can be justified in order to limit the risk that other children will feel excluded.

It is also important to consider the possible effect of focusing on the subjects the study is to illustrate on children. It could be ethically unjustifiable to ask a child to describe his or her possible exposure to violence, for instance, if this involves something that the child does not wish to talk about, or if it problematises something that the child has not previously experienced as problematic. On the other hand, it is not possible to resolve such a dilemma by simply not giving the child a voice in this. As an evaluator or a researcher, it is necessary in this connection to be very careful not to take a child beyond his or her limits and to conscientiously follow up anything that has been focused on that the child has felt to be difficult. However, even though children who provide information in this connection must be protected, it is also important to maintain the intention of regarding them as competent and expert informants.

In section 4, we take a more concrete view of the applicability of the methical considerations and describe various data-collection methods and their advantages, disadvantages and possibilities.

4 Data-collection methods

This section contains a description and a discussion of various specific data-collection methods and their applicability in relation to discovering children's perspectives. We describe a number of general dimensions and parameters that can be found in all of the different methods and then present and discuss the advantages and disadvantages of some of them in relation to including children's perspectives in a study or an evaluation.

4.1   Choice of data-collection method

Different data-collection methods offer different options for including children in the data-collection process. In general, the choice of data-collection method(s) must be considered in relation to the knowledge that there is a desire to obtain (the goal of evaluation), and which type of knowledge is required. The characteristics of the participating children and the context and the framework the evaluation will take place in must also be taken into account.

Although some of the methods are very resource-intensive, method triangulation will generally be a good idea. This will not only take the different strengths and weaknesses of the data-collection methods into account, it will also take account of the fact that children have different preferences, abilities and options for expressing themselves in the given context, which will often depend on factors such as gender, cultural and social background and age.

We have divided the methods described in the following section into four categories that reflect the nature of the data collected: interviews, questionnaires, observations and technical reproductions (e.g. photos and video or audio recordings).

The four data-collection methods have different advantages and disadvantages and present various challenges when they are used to capture children's perspectives.

As figure 2 shows, an important parameter is whether the data can be re-interpreted and verified by others than the data collector (by the children who have supplied data and/or by experts in the area). Some of the methods produce data that can be reproduced in their unprocessed form to – and therefore also interpreted by – others than the data collector. Other methods produce data that cannot be passed on in their unprocessed form and can therefore primarily be interpreted by the data collector. The more data are focused and sorted during collection, the fewer alternative contexts and options for interpretation it will be possible to arrive at with the help of analysis during the subsequent data processing. Data can therefore be made more or less dependent on the data collector's personal preconception of what has been studied. It is particularly relevant to take this into consideration when obtaining children's perspectives because children's logic and their understanding of context, its connections and opportunities for action may differ significantly from adults' experiences in the same situation. Where this parameter is concerned, data from the collection categories: interviews, questionnaires and observations can all be further qualified by choosing a type of registration that can be reproduced technically (e.g. photos and video or audio recordings).

Another important parameter that manifests itself in relation to the different data-collection methods – when they are used with the aim of obtaining children's perspectives – is whether the methods collect data at the same time as and in the context of the occurrence of the phenomenon studied, or whether the data are collected before or after a given episode or a given phenomenon takes place – i.e. are chronologically staggered in relation to the episode or context

studied. Data collected at the same time as the occurrence of a given episode or in the context of the episode reflect the concrete, experienced life, while data that are collected chronologically staggered in relation to the context can be regarded as reflections over the experienced life. When data are collected chronologically staggered, it makes great demands on the child's ability to recall the experience in the concrete situation (which may be a problem because younger children in particular find it difficult to understand a given episode as an isolated event), and depends on whether the child possesses language skills that are adequate to provide an account of the experience, which is not always the case. For these reasons, there is a risk that when data are collected chronologically staggered from the context, they will be less authentic than data that are collected at the same time as a given episode occurs.

Finally, yet another important parameter in relation to the various data-collection methods is that they require more or less translation in the transition between the conceptual worlds of children and adults. An obvious challenge in this respect is translating children's non-verbal expressions (facial expressions, body language, actions, etc.) into words. But it is equally important to note that the significance that children and adults respectively attribute to certain concepts may differ considerably, and it may therefore be necessary to translate quite ordinary everyday concepts and turns of phrase (the translation can be carried out by both the adult and the child). Translation is a fundamental premise when obtaining children's perspectives, but the different data-collection methods also involve major or minor challenges with regard to translation. A lesser degree of translation will typically be preferable as it will reduce resource consumption and will also help to ensure greater data authenticity.

The three parameters described which we relate the different data-collection methods to, are summarised in figure 2. The distance between the poles should be understood as a continuum and not in the sense that the individual methods can be placed firmly at one or the other end of the scale.

Figure 2
Significant parameters of data-collection methods in relation to collecting children's perspectives

Data can be interpreted by several people	Data collection is carried out concurrently with the episode.	Little data translation required in connection with a given episode/context.
↕	↕	↕
Data can be interpreted by one person	Data collection is chronologically staggered.	Extensive data translation required in connection with a given episode/context.

The following is a description of the different data-collection methods and their usefulness in relation to collecting children's perspectives and an account of where each of them is placed in the figure.

4.1.1 Interviews

As mentioned above, the idea of interviewing children has only been considered systematically within recent decades. Many of the same considerations regarding the use of interviews in connection with research in general are naturally applicable to interviewing children, and we will not go into detail with them here. But over and above this, there are some specific considerations connected with interviewing children which we discuss in more detail in the following.

When we look for inspiration in the existing, yet limited, research into the collection of children's perspectives, the general opinion is that structured interviews rarely work with children at kinder-

garten level (especially with very young children in kindergarten). Interviewing children involves a special adult form of communication, where the adults ask questions and the children answer them. Children cannot be expected to be familiar with this division of roles, and they are unable to administer it and are not motivated to take part in it. Therefore, an interview that has the aim of discovering children's perspectives, can to advantage take the form of a conversation or a dialogue, or simply consist of asking children a few central questions over a longer period of time when the opportunity arises, rather than interviewing them in a formalised (traditional) sense. For example, an interview can be carried out as a more informal, but focused, conversation, either in the child's everyday surroundings, i.e. in the physical space the child is normally in, or somewhere else where various aid facilities (photos, objects or a video) can support the child's focus on context in relation to the theme of the study or evaluation.

Questions asked during interviews must naturally be relevant and meaningful for the children. This makes it necessary for the data collector to be prepared and to have a certain amount of knowledge of the stages of children's development, including knowledge of their age-dependent linguistic, social and cognitive development (cf. paragraph 3.4 on children's cognitive development). It is also necessary to have specific insight into the everyday lives of the children in question in the context of the place where the study data are collected. And finally, it will be an advantage to know the children – or to form an alliance with somebody who does – with the aim of becoming familiar with the forms of expression used by the children in question.

The words used during the interview itself must be considered carefully and adapted to the child's conceptual world. It will also be a good idea to make use of what is known as a sensitive interview form (a semi-structured or an open-ended interview) that invites broader answers and makes it possible to adjust the interview as you go along in order to ensure that the conversation is always meaningful to the child. It is self-evident that the narrower the goal of the evaluation has been formulated, the less influence the child will have on the direction the interview will take. In practice, an interview will often be a balancing act between motivating the child to participate in and at the same time guiding the interview in order to obtain the answers needed in connection with the evaluation, rather than simply obtaining knowledge of what the child is interested in. The use of a dictaphone or a tape recorder could be an advantage as it will allow the interviewer to concentrate on asking the right questions, listening, maintaining eye contact with the child and observing his or her facial expressions. On the other hand, the use of technical equipment can be challenging if the interview takes the form of brief, impulsive conversations that arise spontaneously.

If the interview does not take place in – or immediately after – the concrete situation that questions are being asked about, the experience derived from research indicates that it is a good idea to use visual scaffolding (e.g. photos or video or audio recordings) to illustrate the focus of the evaluation. But, as previously mentioned, the interviewer must remember that younger children may find it very difficult to see a concrete episode as an isolated event, and this will make it extremely difficult to ask them about such an episode after it has taken place. Visual scaffolding can help the child to understand the context the adult is taking his or her point of departure in or is expecting an answer in relation to. Puppet play, role play, stories or games can also be used as the background for an interview. A third option is to make use of the 'walking interview' in which the child and the interviewer visit the various places where the child has experienced what is being studied.

There are also group interviews with the participation of several children. Research material generally recommends groups of between two and five children. Group interviews give children the opportunity to mutually comment on the proceedings, to supplement each other and to 'set the stage', and in this way to contribute their own perspectives to what is being studied. The fact that other children are present can also make the individual child feel more secure. On the other hand, the participation of several children can make it more difficult to maintain the focus of the interview. Furthermore, the dynamism and power relationships that manifest themselves in a children's group could possibly mean that the individual child will come up with different answers to questions when they are asked in a group context than if he or she were being interviewed alone (which also applies to adults in individual as opposed to group interviews). The individual

perspective becomes a negotiated perspective, and the data material produced in connection with this method must naturally be interpreted in the light of this instead of only being considered in the context of the relationship between interviewer and child.

The advantage of using the interview method compared with other data-collection methods is that it can provide insight into the child's assessment of various circumstances. When the interviewer asks the child about something (rather than simply observing or registering his or her behaviour), it offers the child the opportunity to contribute his or her own reflections about phenomena in his or her everyday life to the evaluation. As previously mentioned, this depends very much on the child's age and whether he or she possesses the necessary level of abstraction and sufficient language skills.

In figure 3, we have placed the interview in relation to the three significant parameters of data-collection methods. The figure shows that the interview cannot be unambiguously placed as a data-collection method in connection with children's perspectives. Its place depends on such factors as the children's age and the character of the interviews.

Figure 3
Significant parameters of data-collection methods in relation to collecting children's perspectives – interviews

Data can be interpreted by several people	Data collection is carried out concurrently with the episode	Little data translation required in connection with a given episode/context
Technically reproduced interview	Interview in the form of impulsive conversations in the situation	Interview with older children and interview in a very formalised situation
Interview not recorded	Arranged interview	Interview with younger children
Data can be interpreted by one person	Data collection is chronologically staggered	Extensive data translation required in connection with a given episode/context

If the interview can be reproduced technically (e.g. in the form of audio or video recordings), it will be possible to a certain extent to reproduce it for and have it interpreted by several people. In this form, the interview will be placed at the top of the figure (cf. paragraph 4.1.4 on technical reproductions). If, on the other hand, the interview has not been recorded, it will be placed at the bottom of the figure as only the people who were present during the interview itself will have full knowledge of what occurred.

If we consider the issue of contemporaneity, it will also be possible to place the interview in various places in the figure: The interview can be carried out in and as a comment on a given situation – as what we call small conversations – or it can be arranged and take place chronologically staggered with regard to the context it is connected with.

Finally, there is a place in relation to the extent of translation necessary. Depending on the child's age and on the standpoint taken by the researcher, the interview could be placed at either end of the figure. Some researchers find it meaningful to conduct interviews with pre-school-age children on the condition that they are designed in such a way as to take account of the specific children's communicative abilities. Other researchers take a critical view of interviews with children in this age group; they argue that many significant circumstances in these children's world (e.g. social logic) have not been verbalised, and that the linguistic competence of younger children in particular has not been sufficiently developed to enable them to express the same complexity in words as they can with the help of their body language and behaviour, and that verbal utterances are therefore less adequate expressions of children's views than their actions and body language, for instance – although the latter must be translated into verbal expressions. According to these researchers, data-collection methods of this type which are characterised by the registra-

tion of practice (e.g. observations in the child's natural surroundings) are therefore better sources for isolating children's perspectives. The challenge that lies in converting children's non-verbal actions into language are no greater than the challenge involved in translating children's verbal expressions into the linguistic categories and logic of adults.

Irrespective of which position is taken in this discussion, it will be particularly important for a data collector to question the preconceptions and preferences he or she focuses on when collecting and interpreting data.

Experience derived from research also indicates that – when the interview is chosen in connection with collecting children's perspectives – it generally pays to combine interviews with observations and/or technical registrations. It is relevant to supplement interviews with data-collection methods that focus on what develops in practice so that these data can be compared with the data from the interview concerning thoughts, reflections and attitudes to practice.
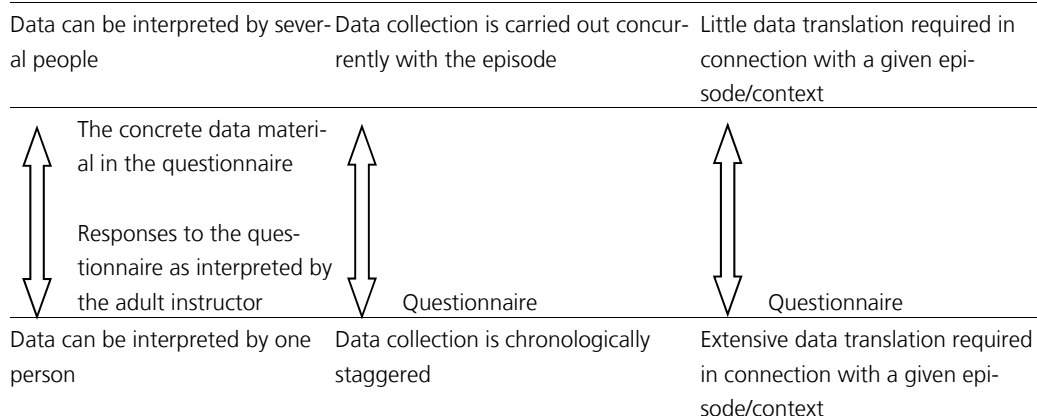
4.1.2 Questionnaires

As a relatively new departure in Denmark, an attempt was made to prepare questionnaires for children under the age of six. This was done in connection with the preparation of guidelines at the Danish Centre of the Teaching Environment (DCUM) for evaluating children's environment. The advantage of questionnaires is that they make it possible to include many children in evaluations, and that the data collected with the help of this method are quantifiable. But whether it is appropriate and productive to use questionnaires in connection with this target group is still a matter of debate.

A traditionally-designed questionnaire with standardised response categories does not offer children the opportunity to influence result categories (which are naturally designed from an adult perspective). Furthermore, answering questionnaires requires knowledge and a level of abstraction that younger children in particular can rarely demonstrate (cf. paragraph 3.4 on children's cognitive development).

If questionnaires are used to collect children's perspectives, it will be necessary for an adult to instruct the child before and/or in connection with filling them in. The questionnaire itself can be filled in by children independently with the help of special PC-based aids specially prepared for children (e.g. colour-coded response panels in red, yellow and green), but if such facilities are not available, the child can fill in the questionnaire together with an adult who has been instructed how to do this. Questionnaires can be designed to advantage with questions and standardised response categories accompanied by illustrations (such as smileys, for instance) that the child can relate to when instructed by an adult. The child can mark the illustration he or she finds most relevant by colouring it, for instance. Non-standardised response categories can also be used by allowing the child to draw his or her response, after which an adult notes what the child says about his or her drawing. It is a good idea in general to ask the adult instructor to note what the child says in connection with the various elements of his or her response so that an evaluator can gain insight into the child's possibly inquisitive response to the questions asked and the response categories. However, this means that the adult instructor must realise the importance of asking about the child's categorisations and to look into them with the help of value-neutral communication.

Figure 4 shows how questionnaires can be placed in relation to the three significant parameters of the data-collection method.

Figure 4
Significant parameters of data-collection methods in relation to collecting children's perspectives – questionnaires

Data can be interpreted by several people	Data collection is carried out concurrently with the episode	Little data translation required in connection with a given episode/context
The concrete data material in the questionnaire		
Responses to the questionnaire as interpreted by the adult instructor	Questionnaire	Questionnaire
Data can be interpreted by one person	Data collection is chronologically staggered	Extensive data translation required in connection with a given episode/context

The data material itself can be interpreted by several people, which places questionnaires at the top of the figure. It will be possible for anybody to detect connections between the data obtained with the help of analysis. On the other hand, it could also be argued that the adult instructor's interpretation of the questionnaire is so decisive for the child's responses that the questionnaire should be placed at the bottom of the figure, as an evaluator will not have access to the process of interpretation between the child and the adult instructor.

Data collection with the help of questionnaires will always be chronologically staggered in relation to what is being studied (unless the study involves discovering how a child experiences filling in a questionnaire).

A great deal of translation is involved in a data-collection process based on questionnaires. It includes translating the child's concrete everyday experiences into linguistic and/or visually abstract, predetermined response categories. The translation procedure is also lengthy because it takes a course from the evaluator to the adult instructor first, then to the child, and then back from the child to the adult instructor and on to the evaluator. Consideration must be given in this connection to an assessment of the central factor of how difficult or easy it is to translate a questionnaire designed for children. Questionnaires designed to obtain children's perspectives will therefore probably only be productive if they contain simple questions about concrete elements of the child's everyday life.

Including children's perspectives in studies is not necessarily the same as literally asking children questions. Other methods of isolating children's perspectives are described in the following.

4.1.3   Observations

We define observation as the concentrated attention paid by an observer to certain events or episodes (in real life) that are related to the focus of an evaluation. Observation as a data-collection method in connection with children's perspectives is particularly relevant when studying these perspectives in social, communicative or other complex contexts.

The traditional focus has been on collecting children's reflections as they come to expression verbally, but as younger children neither master language nor the level of abstraction necessary to take in complex contexts, attempts have been made in more recent research to collect children's perspectives by using observation as a data-collection method. With the help of observations it is possible to capture communication between children as it is manifested through their gestures and facial expressions. Research-related experience shows that the method makes it possible to gain a relatively subtle picture of situations and experiences in children (especially younger children) that they are not capable of putting into words. According to this research, by observing children's activities and relations it is possible to come closer to an understanding of the motives, emotions and thoughts that come into play in children's everyday lives. From this point of view, observation – especially of younger children – is far more effective as a data-collection method

than methods that focus on children's verbal expressions. However, there is disagreement among researchers about the degree to which adults are capable of performing a valid reading and interpretation of children's body language and facial expressions and translating them in such a way that they can enter into an adult linguistic universe. It is important in this connection for the observer to have had experience of the children observed and of the context the observations are carried out in over a longer period of time.

Observations are generally very time-consuming because, ideally, the observer will stay in the field for a long time in order to gain in-depth insight into children's social interaction and routines, etc. Some child researchers point out that it is important for observations of social relations to be made over longer consecutive periods as there will not necessarily be any linear continuity in children's activities and social interaction. A social episode in one context could be interrupted and resumed later without any problems, even after long breaks in a different context.
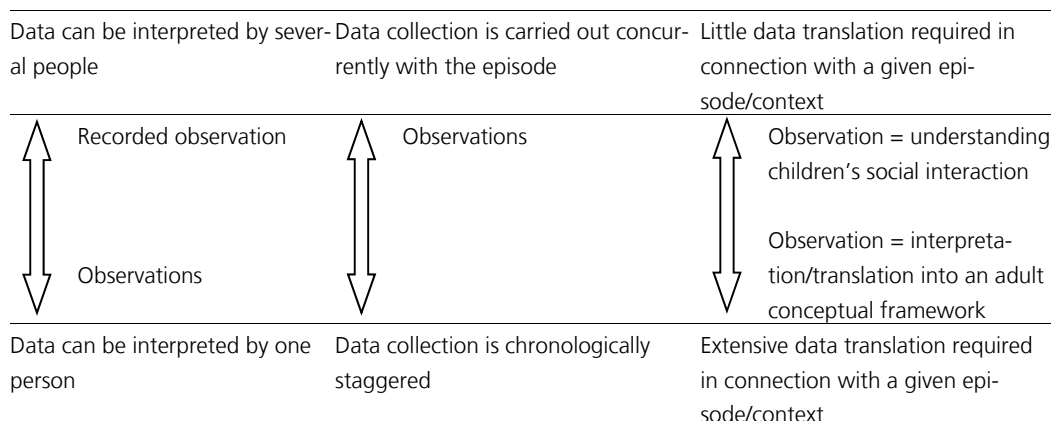
Observations must also be carried out in such a way that the observer's presence is as inconspicuous as possible to the children observed. The observer's role can vary – he or she can play an active role as an ordinary participant in children's activities, or a more unobtrusive, distanced role. In the former case, the observer will have the advantage of being able to experience the interplay with the children directly and can subsequently note this experience. In the latter case, the observer will be able to concentrate more on describing what is happening without it being necessary to relate to others' moves. Irrespective of the role played by the observer, his or her presence will have an influence on the observed context.

Furthermore, the observer must be aware that it is not possible to observe everything at the same time. Daily routines in kindergartens, for instance, are characterised by the presence of many children in the same place, by a great deal of input, many interruptions, a lot of movement, children chattering away at the same time, social contacts that are created and concluded, and so on. It will therefore be an advantage for the observer to set a limit to what he or she wishes to observe in advance, by selecting a number of child profiles that represent different positions relative to the focus of the evaluation, for instance.

As analysis and interpretation are carried out at the same time as data collection in connection with observation, it is particularly important in this connection for the observer to try to ignore his or her preconceived assumptions (which naturally originate in an adult perspective) and to take an inquisitive attitude to the children's activities, daily routines and creation of relationships, etc. A central task is to decode, interpret and translate these non-verbal observations of children's social interaction so that they become intelligible in an adult's conceptual world. However, observation as a method is often used in connection with children's interviews of one kind or another.

Figure 5 shows how observations can be placed in relation to the three significant parameters of the data-collection method.

Figure 5
Significant parameters of data-collection methods in relation to collecting children's perspectives – observations

Data can be interpreted by several people	Data collection is carried out concurrently with the episode	Little data translation required in connection with a given episode/context
Recorded observation	Observations	Observation = understanding children's social interaction
Observations		Observation = interpretation/translation into an adult conceptual framework
Data can be interpreted by one person	Data collection is chronologically staggered	Extensive data translation required in connection with a given episode/context

As the figure shows, observations cannot be passed on in their unprocessed form. However, as in the case of interviews, it will be possible to reproduce parts of the observations technically, but there will be elements of the overall impression otherwise experienced through observation that cannot be reproduced technically. In practice, it is also a challenge to organise technical reproductions of observations, as observations are typically made over longer periods of time and this will result in a very large amount of data. Furthermore, the observation could be disturbed if the observer were to bring along recording equipment.

The strength of observation as a data-collection method lies very much in the fact that it is close to its context and not chronologically staggered in relation to a given situation. Children are at the heart of the situation, so the problem of them not being able to recall a certain episode that the evaluator or researcher finds interesting can be avoided.

Where the extent of translation is concerned, the method can occupy different places, depending on the significance ascribed to the verbal expression. The non-verbal observation of children's social interactions must be translated so that they become intelligible in an adult's conceptual world, and the younger the children are and the less knowledge the observer has of them, the more complicated this translation will be. For those who are inclined to view children's facial expressions and body language, etc. as clear and valid expressions that can be understood by the observer without reference to the linguistic universe, the method would be placed at the top of the figure as, in such a case, the data will require less translation. On the other hand, for those who are inclined to question whether the observer can understand the child's physical expressions without reference to the linguistic universe and assume that the observer risks performing a false translation from the child's expression to the adult's conceptual world, the method will be placed at the opposite end of the figure.

4.1.4 Technical reproductions

Photos and video and audio recordings can function as independent data-collection methods and be used as aid facilities in connection with other data-collection methods, such as interviews and observations. The advantage of photos and video and audio recordings is that they can capture a wealth of information that cannot be captured during an observation because the observer can only direct his or her attention to one situation at a time. It will also be possible to review recordings again and again and perhaps spot new details each time, and several people, both children and adults, can discuss them.

In addition to the advantages already mentioned, video recordings are ideal for longer sequences of events – such as interaction between children – but editing such recordings takes time. On the face of things, photos are easier to handle and good at capturing certain moments, but they do not offer the same possibilities for capturing minor nuances in sequences of events as video and audio recordings do. The advantage of audio recordings is that they provide data of a different kind to those provided by the visual data-collection methods. When there are only sounds to concentrate on, it becomes possible to detect elements other than those that would normally have been detected.
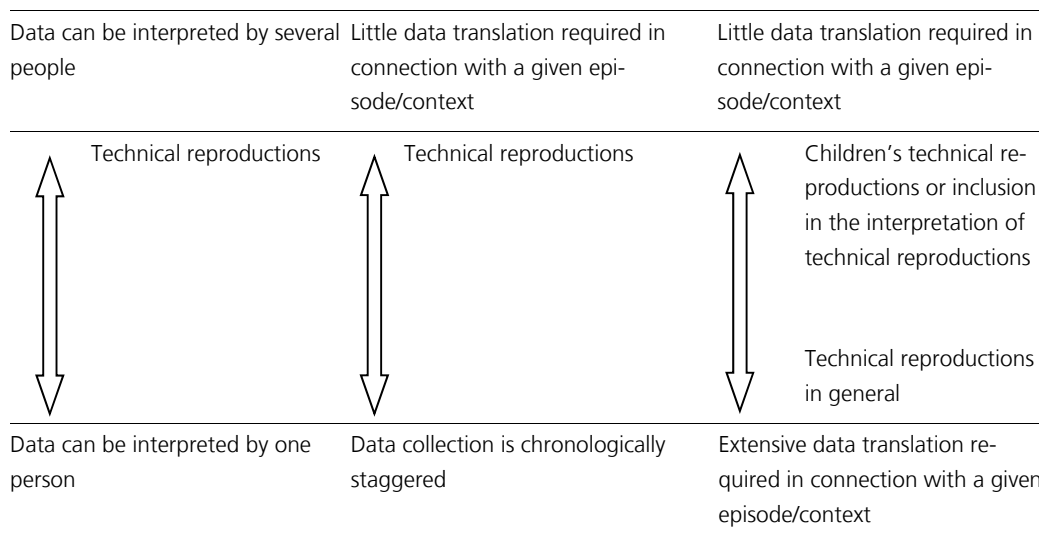
One of the disadvantages of photos and video recordings is that anything beyond the range of the camera lens will be lost. Furthermore, they do not make it possible to sense depth, odours and moods in the same way as is possible with observation as a data-collection method. It should therefore be borne in mind that photos and films certainly do not provide the full context, irrespective of how many cameras are used, although this is often felt to be the case.

The use of technical reproductions gives occasion for a number of special ethical considerations, irrespective of whether children or adults are the objects of the study. Photos, video and audio recordings can all reproduce situations that some people will feel are compromising or unpleasant. It is therefore important in connection with data material of this kind to have thought carefully about ethical considerations in connection with using the material as it can be difficult, if not actually impossible, to conceal the identities of participants.

Figure 6 shows how technical reproductions can be placed in relation to the three significant parameters of the data-collection method.

Figure 6

Significant parameters of data-collection methods in relation to collecting children's perspectives – technical reproductions

Data can be interpreted by several people	Little data translation required in connection with a given episode/context	Little data translation required in connection with a given episode/context
↕ Technical reproductions	↕ Technical reproductions	↕ Children's technical reproductions or inclusion in the interpretation of technical reproductions Technical reproductions in general
Data can be interpreted by one person	Data collection is chronologically staggered	Extensive data translation required in connection with a given episode/context

The figure shows that the advantage of technical reproductions is that the data collected in this way can be reproduced in their unprocessed form, that these data-collection methods are relatively close to their context, and that they are not chronologically staggered in relation to a given situation. But even though it may appear on the face of things that technical reproductions actually present reality, it is important to remember that they always register data from a predetermined angle and only reproduce a minor part of the overall context.

As far as the extent of translation is concerned, the same applies to technical reproductions as to observations and interviews: Technical reproductions cannot be considered in isolation without further explanation. However, the need for translation in connection with technical reproductions can be reduced by allowing children to play an active role in data collection and thereby in the selection of the places and situations they find relevant in the context, rather than allowing it to be exclusively defined by adults. Furthermore, children can take part in interpreting technical reproductions – which is one of the major advantages of this data-collection method.
As will be evident, each of the various data-collection methods contains its advantages, disadvantages and challenges in relation to capturing children's perspectives.

Which data-collection method is most suitable will depend partly on the context to be illustrated and the type of knowledge there is a desire to obtain, and partly on the characteristics of the context in which the children participate and the context of the study. As previously mentioned, method triangulation will be an advantage as it makes it possible to take account of the strengths and weaknesses of the respective methods and of the differences in children's preferences, abilities and options to express themselves in the context in question.

Summary

The purpose of this report was to discover options, challenges and problems in connection with including children's perspectives in evaluations and studies involving children, also where new evaluations from EVA are concerned.

The report has illustrated the view of children's rights and competences to make statements about their own lives, and this forms the background for the intention to include children's perspectives in research and policy formulation dealing with children. Furthermore, some of the general methodical challenges and ethical problems connected with including children's perspectives in evaluations and studies are discussed in the report. Finally, the report contains a review of a number of concrete data-collection methods and their advantages, disadvantages and applications in relation to collecting children's perspectives.

The intention with the report was not to provide an exhaustive presentation of the area, but rather – briefly and clearly – to provide an account of some of the general aspects of the subject with the aim of providing inspiration and creating a foundation for further work on including children's perspectives in EVA's evaluations. In 2009, EVA initiated a pilot study in connection with the project Sprogvurderinger af treårige (Evaluating the language skills of three-year-olds). In this connection we tried out various methods of collecting children's perspectives in relation to evaluating language skills and activities, which included video recordings of these evaluations, questionnaires that children filled in together with adults and brief group interviews with children. At the beginning of 2010, EVA published a summary of the results of using the various methods.

At present, there are many interesting studies and much interesting research in progress which, in various ways, are connected with trying out methods of collecting children's perspectives. New knowledge is steadily accumulating in this area, and the report should be seen as an outline of what is happening here and now in this connection. It should be borne in mind when reading the report that the work on children's perspectives is a rapidly-developing area. In writing the report, we have gathered knowledge that provides us with a fund of experience in connection with including children's perspectives in studies and research. While keeping up-to-date with developments in the area, this experience provides us with a firm foundation for including children's perspectives in EVA's future studies and evaluations.

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