

## **Instructional Strategies, Discipline and Children's Participation in Educational Institutions for Children under Three-Years-Old – Cases from Brazil and Finland**

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### **Abstract**

*In the cultural psychological and educational literature, recent studies have addressed the educational activities and settings for young children, discussing practices and conceptions in different countries. This study approaches early childhood education and care practices as local, historical and social constructions linked to global trends and commitments to children's well-being. This paper presents qualitative case analysis on discursive practices and mediational tools used in daily activities with children under three years of age. The focus is on cultural conceptions embedded in the educational activities with cases from Brazil and Finland. The analysis builds on the major themes and conceptions embedded in the practices as instructional strategies, discipline and children's participation. Differences between these cases were due either to economic or cultural ideological aspects that constrained educators' activities. In both cases, educators' challenge was to coordinate the actions of the group while individuality was diversely valued. Despite the strong role of the educator, in the Brazilian case, there was encouragement for peer interaction. In the Finnish case, educator-child relationship was privileged. Actions and tensions carried discursive practices constrained by cultural issues*

**Key Words:** under three-year-olds; early childhood education and care; cultural-specific domestication; Brazil; Finland.

### **1. Introduction**

Studies of educational practices with young children have revealed some of the dynamics that interlink the institutional settings of children's care and education with the actions and agencies present in these practices. Through those studies, early childhood education and care (ECE) is characterized as a practice embedded with tensions that are observable and interpreted through the mediated actions of the children and the teachers. In the Nordic context, some of these tensions are related to the pedagogical emphasis on children's individuality, individual learning and competence, and on the governance of the day care group as well as children's collective participation, production and initiatives (e.g. Markström & Halldén 2009; see also Kjørholt 2008). The tensions also arise from the co-existence of surveillance of children and on the emphasis on children's self-management and autonomy (see Gulløv 2003). These discussions are supported by empirical observations of toddler groups.

For example, in their study in Sweden, Emilson and Johansson (2009) created three main categories of values that teachers encourage in their actions: caring, discipline, and democracy.

Moreover, in cultural psychological and educational literature, recent studies have addressed the tensions, activities and settings provided for young children, discussing practices and conceptions in different countries (e.g. Gillen & Cameron 2010; Tudge 2008; Keller et al. 2004). These works are important in providing new insights regarding how policies and practices of child care and education are both locally configured, but at the same time linked to global political-economic-social processes. The interlinkedness of the global and local contribute to the constitution of the institutional ECEC system and children's lives in each cultural setting (Fleer, Hedegaard & Tudge 2009). Theoretically, one approach to address the complex relation of the global and local in different countries is the 'domestication' paradigm. 'Domestication' (Alasuutari 2009) refers to the processes and outcomes of the adaptation of international models to local condition: exogenous policy models and arguments are actively adopted and adapted by nation-states and, in this processes, the practices imposed are significantly shaped by local conditions and discourses. Following this perspective, ECEC practices are understood as local, historical and social constructions linked with cultural-specific domestication of universal commitments to children's well-being (UNICEF 1989; Rutanen, Amorim, Colus & Piattoeva, 2014).

In this paper, supported by the domestication paradigm, we also apply the logic of individualizing comparison 'to contrast specific instances of a given phenomenon as a means of grasping the peculiarities of each case' (Tilly 1984, p. 82). Here, one national setting is treated as a reversing mirror that sheds light on the distinct characteristics of the other case (see *ibid.*, p. 90). This paper will then present some practices and tensions by analysing the actions of children (under three-years-old) and adults in two ECEC cases: in one Brazilian day care group and in one Finnish daycare group. The countries selected for the case analysis, Brazil and Finland, present some interesting similarities in their basis for ECEC. Both countries have signed the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNICEF 1989), and their educational policies are strongly based on the attempt to promote children's development of autonomy and citizenship (Rizzini 2011; Strandell 2010; Rutanen 2011). Nevertheless, the heterogeneous cultural, social and economic status of the people and states in Brazil present very different challenges regarding ECEC services compared to the relatively homogeneous population and public service structure in Finland. As such, the above universal ideals have specific local translations when interlinked with local ECEC practices (Rutanen, Amorim, Colus & Piattoeva 2014).

In the Brazilian political context, there is sensitivity to the structural inequalities and children's 'vulnerabilities' brought about by the extreme diversity of economic and cultural conditions within the population. Investment in children's rights is therefore a central goal of Brazilian ECEC (Brasil 1999; Rossetti-Ferreira et al. 2010). In Finland, as part of the Nordic welfare model and its political context emphasizing equality of participation and access to resources, individuality is also seen as a guiding principle (National Curriculum Guidelines on Early Childhood Education and Care in Finland 2005). A clear difference relates to the lives of the youngest children with regard to the provision of state-subsidized parental leave. In Brazil, the Federal Constitution guarantees paid maternity leave for 120 days (Brasil 1988), in addition to which legislation passed in 2008 prolonged the maternity leave period by a further 60 days (Brasil 2008). In practice, the youngest children in Brazil attending out-of-home care are often around four to six months old. In Finland, however, children under one year of age participate rarely in out-of-home care. The Finnish system of maternity and parental leave and allowances offers 105 weekdays of paid maternity leave as well as further maternity or paternity leave until the child reaches approximately nine months of age (Kela 2013). Interlaced with these legal aspects emerge discourses regarding the 'best' or 'right' places for young children to be and to develop. In Brazil, ECEC has in recent decades, partly due to social investments, begun to be considered as a viable practice to be implemented through partnership with families. Children are thus entitled to be cared for in institutions in non-domestic settings. The National Plan for Education even sets out a goal of increasing services by 50% by 2020 (Brasil 2001).

In Finland, the policies and practices for care for 0–1-year-olds are home-care oriented. One difference in the guidelines in relation to the youngest ones is the question of social relations. In Finland, the guidelines emphasize the dyadic relationship between the child and the teacher; the emphasis is on routines and use of language, and only later on peer relations (National Curriculum Guidelines on Early Childhood Education and Care in Finland 2005). In Brazil, the guidelines and legislation underline the child's social environment, including relations with peers also during the child's first year of life (Amorim, Anjos & Rossetti-Ferreira 2012).

The National Curricular Referential explicitly mentions the teachers' role in fostering an environment that affords interaction among infants (Brasil 2010; Amorim, Anjos, & Rossetti-Ferreira 2012). By considering all of these meeting points and differences, the aim of this paper is to identify and interpret the cultural conceptions embedded in ECEC practices through analysis of the discursive practices and mediational tools used in daily activities. The focus is on children under three-years-old as the education and care of the youngest ones is coloured with an array of tensions between institutional and domestic care and education. Structural changes in societies and increasing need for out-of-home work force challenge the discourses on the priority of mother's care. At the same time, critically debated views on the youngest children's participation in ECEC complement the developmentally oriented knowledge in the field (e.g. Johansson & White 2011).

### **Interpretative qualitative analysis of mediated action**

Instead of conducting a broad analysis of events and routines in both countries, this article focuses on two specific categories of video-recorded episodes, defined according to their overall structure. The first category can be described as 'adult-led' situations and the second as 'free-play' situations. These categories were chosen for analysis as they account for a major part of the children's daily activities in each country. The data was obtained from two sources. The Brazilian source consisted of a research project database from the Brazilian Research Center on Human Development and Early Childhood Education (CINDEDI), at the University of São Paulo. The database records consist of video recordings conducted three days a week over a four-month period during 2009-2010 at a day care centre in a medium-sized city in the state of São Paulo. The day care centre offers full- and half-day services for families working at a public hospital. The children are divided into groups according to age and ability. The normal adult-child ratio is approximately one educator<sup>1</sup> to seven children, with an additional educator providing extra assistance during the busiest hours. The episodes discussed here were recorded in two morning periods within a group of 13 children (Costa 2012) with an age range of 12 to 17 months.

The Finnish source consisted of a research project involving a variety of data and methods ranging from document analysis to ethnography and video recordings of a day care group for under three-year-olds (Rutanen 2011; 2012, <https://invisibletoddlerhood.wordpress.com>). The day care centre in question is a municipal centre offering both full- and part-time care. The episodes presented in this article were recorded during two morning periods. The recordings were conducted with the youngest children in the day care center, which, with an age range of 17 to 28 months, were older than those of the Brazil study (12-17 months). Following the age differences between these groups, we acknowledge that the differences in the abilities of the children are also visible in the diverse pedagogical actions and expectations.

However, regardless of the slight age difference, both groups were the 'youngest' in the day care centres. Instead of comparing, we attempted to study the culturally conditioned practices in both cases and juxtapose the interpretations seeking to increase the visibility and the possibility of grasping their peculiarities (see Tilly 1984). Our analysis is inspired by 'mediated discourse analysis' (Jones and Norris 2005), in which the unit of analysis is the mediated action, 'which is the real time moment when mediational means, social actors and the sociocultural environment intersect' (ibid., 5). The emphasis on 'mediational means' in mediated discourse analysis is largely based on the works of James Wertsch and Lev Vygotsky. These cultural-historical roots underline the idea that all actions are mediated through cultural tools, such as practices, identities, social institutions, objects, language and other semiotic systems. The central interest is in social actions and cultural tools (semiotic/material means of realizing actions which embody certain affordances and constraints) 'through which social actors produce the histories and habitus of their daily lives, which is the ground in which society is produced and reproduced' (Scollon 2001, 145). The central task is to explicate and understand how the broad discourses of our social life are engaged (or not) in the moment-by-moment social actions of social actors in real-time activity (Jones and Norris 2005). The short video-recorded episodes were analysed by applying qualitative microanalysis (Rossetti-Ferreira, Amorim & Silva 2007) to examine the discourses embedded in the practices employed. In the following, the four episodes are described in brief. All episodes are then analysed and discussed together, illustrating the diverse dynamics present.

### ***Negotiation in adult-led situations***

#### ***Episode 1: Looking at picture cards shown by the caregiver (Brazil)***

Participants: Children: Estela (12 months), Luciano (12 months), Daiane (12 months), Lorena (13 months), Leandro (14 months), Érika (14 months), Helena (14 months); Educators: Sônia, Marta

*Daiane, Leandro, Estela and Helena are sitting on the floor, in different places around the room. Sônia (educator) is also seated on the floor. She is holding up some picture cards (about 30 x 20 cm) and calls out loudly: 'Estela, come here!'*

*Daiane, who was sitting far away, gets up and looks at the educator. Sônia says: 'Look at what I found!', Daiane walks away. As she walks, she stumbles, at which Sônia says: 'Careful, Daiane! Come here! Come and see the bull! Sônia found a bull.'* Daiane approaches and Sônia helps her to sit next to Lorena in front of her.

*Sônia holds the picture out towards the children, and says to Helena, who is coming close: 'Look here!', at which Helena points at the picture.*

*Sônia holds the child's arm and says 'Sit here so you can see! Look how beautiful it is!' Leandro also approaches by crawling towards Sônia, who invites him to sit, helping him by holding his arm.*

*Sônia shows the bull picture to Lorena. However, the other children are sitting in front of her, blocking her view. At this point, educator 'Marta enters the room, bringing Érika, to whom Marta says: 'Go over there and play!' Sônia then says: 'Look, a bull!'*

*Lorena also comes close and points at the picture, vocalizing. She stumbles and sits. Érika vocalizes loudly and Leandro babbles, saying woof-woof (like a dog). Sônia repeats, 'It's a bull!' and, addressing Leandro, says: 'Woof-woof comes later.' She then calls Érika, inviting her to sit close and sing.*

*Leandro looks at Érika, points to her and babbles, while Sônia supports Leandro's arm. Then, addressing the children, Sônia says: 'I will now sing a bull song.' Marta re-enters the room, bringing Luciano, who walks towards the group?*

*Lorena touches the picture and vocalizes loudly. Then, Sônia asks indiscriminately: 'Shall we sing about a bull? Let's sing!' While Sônia sings, Érika and Lorena clap their hands, and one of the children vocalizes; Helena waves her hands; Leandro hits the floor and then waves 'bye-bye' to Helena. Sônia sings and moves the picture close to Daiane's face, who laughs.*

*Leandro, Daiane and Érika point at the picture, while one of them vocalizes. Sônia repeats: 'Look the bull'... Then she says: 'Oh, the bull's going away!!! Bye-bye, bull'. Sônia says: 'Now, I'll show you another animal.' She holds Helena, who was touching the box of pictures, makes her sit and says, 'Let Sônia take it.' Sônia then pulls out a picture of a horse.*

Initially, the children are spread about widely around the room. There are seven children in total, cared for by two educators, each educator carrying out a variety of tasks. One of the educators (Marta) looks after the children outside the room, while the other (Sônia) leads the current activity. Marta gradually sends her children into the room, one by one, inviting them each to join in with Sônia's activity.

The activity involves presenting various pictures of animals and linking them with their corresponding sounds (e.g. barking) and movements (e.g. galloping). The activity is mediated either by the educator explicitly describing the image ('Look, a bull') or by inviting children to identify the animal by asking 'What's in the picture?'. The educator recognizes the sounds produced by the children (such as 'woof-woof'), also correcting children's verbalizations to match the image. In addition to the clear instructional content, the educator makes use of a specific cultural tool, a Brazilian song, which the children each join in with by clapping hands, vocalizing and moving their body. Sônia introduces the activity to the children by inviting them to join her. The children come together as a group slowly, each in their own time. They reach Sônia either by walking or crawling, following explicit or less explicit invitations. The educator instructs all of them verbally, accompanied by nonverbal movements, helping the children to sit down and calling their attention.

The activity area is defined by a mat, on which the children sit in rows in front of the educator. As the picture is not big enough for the children to see clearly from a distance, most of them are compelled to move closer. Some children approach, pause and sit in front of the others without realizing that they are blocking the other children's view. However, not all children come near; some remain further off in the room, engaged in other activities.

The picture card activity is thus limited to the group sitting close to Sônia. She focuses her attention on the children that have moved close to her. She does not appear to follow any clear routine or plan. She modifies her initiatives and actions as the children start to become restless.

She is selective both with her responses to the children and with the timing of her responses. For example, when Leandro makes the sound of a dog, she responds that she will show the 'woof-woof' later. The way in which Sônia attracts children's attention indicates her awareness of how children's attention can switch rapidly from one point of focus to another. She uses different techniques to maintain the children's attention. For example, she alters the pitch of her voice and sings. When the other educator momentarily attracts children's attention, she calls 'Look here!' and holds the picture out closer to them.

### **Episode 2: Who wants to say next? (Finland)**

Participants: Children: Riku (17 months), Kalle (25 months), Lea (26 months), Matias (27 months), Veera (28 months); Educators: Eeva, Raisa

*The children are seated on small wooden chairs and a bench, the educators on higher chairs, all forming a circle. Matias, who started day care one month previously, sits on Eeva's lap, and Riku, the youngest in the group, sits on Raisa's lap.*

*The educators are singing about a car. Lea is in the middle, moving a car on a play mat illustrated with roads, fields and houses. On the final note of the song, she returns to her chair.*

*Raisa: 'There, let's park the car,' and takes the car away. Raisa: 'Now, how does the airplane go?'*

*Veera: 'Me!' rising slightly from her chair.*

*Raisa: 'Yes, come on then.' Veera sits in the middle of the circle.*

*Raisa: 'Where does the airplane go? Does it go on the lake?'*

*Kalle lifts his hand and verbalizes: 'theeo'. Raisa: 'In the air, right'.*

*The educators sing about an airplane. Veera moves the toy on the floor. Raisa shows with her hands: 'It flies here, in the air,' and continues the song. Veera moves the toy up. Kalle moves his hand similarly. The song ends and Raisa takes the toy: 'Good, let's put it here, it'll land here'*

*Raisa: 'And where does the train go?' Veera moves, points to the floor and verbalizes something.*

*Raisa: 'You can go back to your seat now.' Veera remains sat on the floor.*

*Raisa: 'There, on the rail track, it goes.'*

*Eeva: 'Do you want a go now Kalle? Is it Kalle's turn?' Kalle gets up.*

*Raisa: 'You can go back to your own seat now Veera.' Veera returns to her seat.*

*Kalle moves the train throughout the song and then goes back to his seat. Eeva says in a low voice to Matias on her lap: 'Does Matias want a go now?'*

*Raisa: 'Do you want to come and move the tractor?' Matias moves to the floor. Raisa describes how the tractor drives through the fields. Matias touches various objects.*

*Raisa: 'Take the tractor ... take the tractor, because now we're going to sing about the tractor.' The song begins and Matias moves the tractor.*

The children and the educators are all gathered together and focused on the same task. Raisa conducts the activity, while Eeva joins in with suggestions. The activity area is defined by the chairs and the physical objects within the circle. The children are expected to remain seated and interact with the educator. They are also expected to wait for their turn before going into the middle of the circle to describe the 'right place' ('Where does..?') in which the object (plane/car/train) should move. There is a fixed structure of action, mediated by roles, turns, objects and related songs for the children to follow. When Matias reaches for non-related objects, Raisa directs his attention back to the object in question. The situation also has a collective focus in the form of singing together. The children can choose to sing, move their body, point at or indicate the right place for the object or, alternatively, they have the option to remain silent and observe.

In the analysis of more extensive ethnographic observations within this group, it was shown that the educators' relationship with the children varied depending on the child's age and length of attendance in the day care group (Rutanen 2012). The youngest children often received special attention for being the youngest or newcomers in the group and for not knowing the routines. They were, for example, held in the lap more often than the older children, particularly in the 'circle-time' sessions, as in this episode. Here, the youngest children were included in the collective activity and learning process with others, even though the assumption was that they would not yet know how to behave in the circle-time routine. The children who already knew the routine could answer the educator's questions, not based on the question itself, but in relation to the activity. When Raisa asks 'How does the airplane go?' Veera, who has been in care for more than a year, says: 'Me!' and stands up, knowing that the

question implies an invitation to go to the middle of the circle and move the object. Some of the children want to be chosen out of turn or remain in the circle after their turn has finished, but the educators ask them to go back to their seats so that the others can have a turn.

### **Objects in ‘free-play’ situations**

#### ***Episode 3: Arrival of a new toy (Brazil)***

Participants: Estela (12 months), Luciano (12 months), Daiane (12 months), Lorena (13 months), Leandro (14 months), Érika (14 months), Helena (14 months); Educator: Sônia

*The children are playing with various objects all around the room. Some are playing close to each other. Others are walking around or playing by themselves, despite the educator’s attempts to draw their attention to what their peers are doing. Sonia suddenly enters the room and, speaking loudly, invites the children to see a new toy. It is an expensive, tall (50 cm) plastic table, with a variety of colorful knobs for the children to play with. Estela, Luciano, Lorena and Leandro gradually approach, looking at the toy Sônia is presenting. As the children begin touching the toy, Sônia moves away and remains at a distance. The children continue to touch the toy, while looking at each other’s faces and hands. After about three minutes, Luciano, Lorena and Leandro each begin pulling the toy closer to them in an attempt to play with it alone, each pulling the toy by one of the knobs. Sônia calls the children’s attention but does not directly intervene in the dispute. The tension between the children increases and they begin pulling harder, breaking the toy into pieces. Sônia calls the children’s attention. The children have different parts of the toy in their hands, which they continue to manipulate. A few minutes later, Sônia makes some remarks about the broken new toy. She then takes some of the pieces and puts them away. Some of the children follow her and mumble toward her.*

Again, the children are spread widely around the room playing. The educator calls the children’s attention by presenting a toy, inviting the children to come close and gather around it. The intention is for all of the children to play with the toy together. No other toys are given to the children. The toy is pretty, colourful and has many shapes. It is described by the manufacturer as a ‘pedagogical toy’, as it has a variety of knobs, each requiring different hand movements and each leading to a specific surprise outcome, such as a sound. The educator moves away from the children, letting them explore and experience the toy. The children group around the toy quickly and eagerly, and yet the educator does not orient or instruct them on handling the toy or on how to play together through turn-taking or interchange.

The activity moves around the room as the toy is moved about by the children. Thus, there are no spatial or verbal orientation constraints to coordinate the children’s actions and relations. The children move close to the toy, each trying to get in front of the other in order to be able to touch the toy more, or to keep it to him/herself. The educator does not intervene. As a result, the strongest children are able to remain closer to the toy, while the smaller, weaker ones are left out of the play. The educator returns her attention to the children and only intervenes when the toy is being broken due to the dispute. To solve the conflict, she gathers up a number of the broken parts, but allows the children to keep hold of some of them. Only at this point does the educator comment on the need to be more careful with the toys.

#### ***Episode 4: Who’s playing with what? (Finland)***

Participants: Children: Riku (17 months), Juho (20 months), Eero (25 months), Elias (25 months), Lea (26 months), Konsta (26 months), Matias (27 months), Veera (28 months); Educator: Eeva

*Eero and Juho are holding the same plastic toy. Juho starts walking towards Eeva, while Eero keeps hold of the other end of the toy.*

*Eeva: ‘Hey, who had this now?’ Juho: ‘Juho.’ Riku, Lea and Matias watch and move closer. Eeva: ‘I think Juho had it, Eero, I gave it to Juho. You can have it later.’*

*Eeva moves towards the toy closet: ‘I’ll get you a block puzzle.’ Eero and some other children follow. Veera rushes over and yells: ‘Yeee, me too, me too.’*

*Eeva: ‘Eero can do this now. Come over here, by the table.’*

*Eeva takes the puzzle to the table, the other children follow.*

*Someone yells: ‘Me, me.’ Juho leaves the first toy and Veera goes over to Juho’s toy.*

*Matias moves towards the puzzle, but Eeva blocks him, saying: ‘Hey, that’s Eero’s now.’*

*Eeva takes Juho back to the first toy: 'This was your toy over here, stay here; look what Veera's doing.' ... (looks around, addresses another child) ... And who's playing with those animals? ... Oh, good, you've made a tractor game.'*

*Veera, at the table, is putting blocks into the puzzle with Eero. Konsta joins them, and the children take turns. Konsta holds a block. Veera takes the last block from the table and pulls the puzzle towards her, saying: 'Me, me!' The box and the blocks fall onto the floor.*

*Eeva: 'Veera, pick the blocks up off the floor and put them on the table, please.' Veera and Eero start picking up the blocks. Eeva: 'I gave the puzzle to Eero to do'.*

*Lea, Matias and Elias crawl closer. Lea asks Veera: 'Me pick up too?' Veera moves the box towards the others and says: 'Thank you!' Rasmus carries a block away, Veera follows him. Rasmus says 'Mine!' and cries. Veera: 'I just borrow, I borrow it.'*

*Eeva interjects: 'Veera come here, let's go and see if we can find something for you to play with over here'. She takes Veera to the other room: 'Come and play in here with Lea'. Matias follows, but Eeva instructs him to stay and closes the door.*

The educator is momentarily alone with eight children and attempts to take control of the situation by providing a separate toy for each child. Her decision is triggered by an initial negotiation with one of the children about a toy. The children are not simply interested in the object per se. Their attention moves to the other child possessing the object; they also move physically towards the other child, still holding, or regardless of, the objects they are using (Amorim et al. 2012). Tension emerges as other children become interested in the new suggestions that the educator offers one of the children.

To resolve conflict, the educator assigns each child 'temporary ownership' of a certain toy, and checks that these decisions are being followed by the children. For example, she moves Juho back to the first toy that was assigned to him, even though Veera is now playing with it. Juho accepts the role of observer, and the educator is also satisfied with this solution. In previous interviews (Rutanen 2012), the educators had emphasized the importance of enhancing the children's concentration and persistency in their activities and minimizing random switching from one thing to the next.

Eventually, the educator divided the group into two smaller groups by taking two girls to the other room. The educator's interpretation was that Veera was causing trouble and interrupting the others' play. She had not noticed that the children had been playing together, taking turns with the blocks, and that Veera had helped the younger children around her to pick up the blocks by moving the box towards them and had thanked them. The children had engaged in joint activity with the objects, but this was not perceived by the educator. The educator's stance was both reactive and preventive. Eeva starts intervening when two children grab the same toy, she then moves about the group trying to separate the children into different areas to prevent conflict. She ignores any children who are holding an object, even if they are not visibly 'doing' anything with it and are just gazing. Having an object in hand is considered enough to be engaged in something. The children can choose to take an object, to follow the educator, to accept the object offered or not. The educator attempts to find a toy for each child and, furthermore, a toy that each individual child likes. For example, later in the episode Eeva offers Riku a toy drill that she knows he likes, even though he is already engaged in other play.

### ***Diverse discursive practices interpreted in the episodes***

Initial investigation of the two cases reveals very different structural conditions. The adult-led episode in the Finnish case is constrained by solid materials, such as the wooden chairs, the bench and the play mat illustrated with roads, fields and houses. The action is also mediated by the toys that are touched and played with by the children. In the Brazilian case the children sit on a mat and are shown animal picture cards by the educator. In both cases, the tools used to mediate the teaching-learning processes are constrained by the economic conditions. The possibilities for the children to touch, play and act are expanded or reduced, respectively, by the presence or lack of objects and furniture. One could argue that the more solid the pedagogical instruments are, the better the conditions are for the children to access their functions and characteristics. However, it is also the educator's ideological/pedagogical conceptions that guide how the materials are used. In both cases, the children do not have free access to the car/plane/train or the bull/horse. The educator governs the sequence in which the objects are presented and how (and if) the children are allowed to touch them. Besides the solidity of the mediational tools, centrality is given to the educator, whose role is to guide the children's use of materials and knowledge acquisition.

The diversity of toys is also evident in both free-play episodes. In both episodes, the children seemed to be particularly attracted to toys that are pursued by other children, i.e. toys that are in the field of interest or action of other children, regardless of the toy's characteristics. A key point of interest here is the fact that the toy causes the children to gather together in close proximity, which, in turn, affects how they interact together. The characteristic of the toy is not the most important element in attracting children's peer (Amorim et al. 2012). Moreover, it is not only how the sharing of objects is planned and carried out that is important, but how proximity is viewed and accepted (or not) by the educators. These plans and views are based on the educators' educational conceptions and their understanding regarding young children, young children's needs, and the relationships that foster child development. Cultural conceptions thus play a central role in guiding practices with children.

To further analyse the issues related to these constraints and the mediational tools and discursive practices present in the episodes, the results will be discussed in terms of 1) *Instructional strategies= the explicit methods and instructions that the educators use in attaining certain learning objectives*, 2) *Discipline = explicit governance of the child group and self-regulatory mechanisms introduced to the children*, 3) *Children's participation = children's involvement in and influence in the actions occurring in the setting*. These categories derived from a dialogue among previous studies and preliminary observations about this material. These categories covered some of themes discussed earlier as tensions and values proposed in day care centres (Emilson & Johansson 2009; Markström & Halldén 2009). These themes are also in line with the ideals described in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) that emphasize the rights for participation, protection and provision (e.g. rights to resources, skills, services), 'domesticated' to ECEC practices (Rutanen, Amorim, Colus & Piattoeva, 2014).

### **1) Instructional strategies**

In both cases, the 'adult-led' situations included instructional content ('What do airplanes, cars, trains or animals do?') to highlight the object that the educator was presenting to the children. The activities had instructional purpose, both in terms of investigating and increasing the children's knowledge about the topic (questions to the children) as well as a shared cultural routine and content that was transmitted in the situations (singing together, with related movements/actions). The instructional value of the situations became clear with the various corrections that the educators made to the children's initiatives: for example, they corrected the children's verbalizations, their choice of objects, and their movements in relation to representing the 'right place' for the object (the plane flies in the air instead of driving on the ground). In the Finnish adult-led situation, the educator gave individual attention, and addressed and acknowledged each child's knowledge. One-by-one, the children were invited into the middle of the circle to demonstrate what they knew and could do. Additionally, the children had to learn to wait for their turn. In the Brazilian adult-led episode, the children gathered together slowly, in their own time, responding somehow together without any clear individually-directed evaluation or action by the educators. In both cases the rules of the activity were conveyed to the children differently, yet both essentially sought to guarantee the children's rights: in the Finnish case the right of everyone to have a turn in the middle and with the toy; in the Brazilian case the right to choose to participate, or not, in the joint activity. These differences are rooted in conceptions and values regarding discipline in both countries.

### **2) Discipline – fostering social order**

Discipline is described here in terms of explicit governance of the group and in relation to the self-regulatory mechanisms introduced to the children. Previous literature notes that authoritarian forms of control and discipline in ECEC institutions have changed over time towards emphasizing children's self-regulation and conformity to routines and rules (for a review, see Emilson & Johansson 2009, 62).

The governance of the group included both explicit and more implicit mechanisms of control and surveillance (see Gallacher 2005; Leavitt 1994). Firstly, the educators engaged in directing the children's attention to the specific themes that they were introducing. In the Finnish case, the children sat on chairs in a circle and were expected to take turns: the action area was defined by the chairs and their physical arrangement (circle) and was mediated by song. The youngest children or those not yet familiar with the activity were held on the educator's lap. In the Brazilian case, governance was carried out by calling the children's attention, but the children were not necessarily required to do the activity altogether as a group. In both cases, however, the mechanisms for attracting and maintaining the children's attention were somewhat similar: the educators used gestures, whispered voice (Finland) and loud, high-pitched voice (Brazil, Finland) and moved the objects towards the children.



The educators also turned the objects and themselves towards the children to direct the children's gaze and called the names of a particular child to address him/her directly.

In addition to nonverbal signs and verbal instructions, the educator's control of the situation was also facilitated by the material arrangement of the group setting (see Gallacher 2005; Rutanen 2012). In the adult-led episodes, the material structuration varied from a more restricted setting to a more open setting featuring certain indicators of places for joint engagement. In the Finnish free-play situation, the final restructuration of the setting occurred when the educator separated the children into two groups by closing the door. Previous to that point, the educator had focused her attention on individuals, attempting to construct a more controllable situation at the group level. The action was both reactive and preventive, guided by the notion that children will (eventually) engage in conflict if not equipped with separate objects (Amorim et al. 2012). In the Brazilian free-play, the object was placed in the room, attracting a number of children to it. It can be interpreted that this activity was understood to assist the toddlers to learn to play together with the same object. The educator remained at a distance while the children gathered around the toy, touching and making sounds with the object, each child trying to reach it and remain close to it.

In all of the episodes, the educators used their bodies in negotiating the limits and boundaries of free movement for the children (see Valsiner 1997, 'zone of free movement'). Nonverbal communication enhanced verbal communication, as in the example of holding the child's arm in the Brazilian episode, and keeping the children on the lap in the Finnish episode.

The Finnish episodes featured a clear emphasis on children's developing self-regulation and understanding of routines and rules. Adult-led activity included a clear emphasis on 'learning to wait your turn' before responding. Similarly, the distribution of individual toys to the children in the free-play episode was based on the rule: 'Don't take someone else's toy if it's not your turn to have it or play with it.' Veera, the oldest girl in the group, attempted to negotiate this rule and (re)gain control of Rasmus's object: 'I just borrow!'

In the Brazilian episodes, with somewhat younger children, the emphasis was more on 'learning to share.' In the free-play situation, a single large, unfamiliar object was presented to the group for joint interaction and play. However, as the educator did not promote organized and social use of the toy, the situation led to somewhat unexpected consequences and ended with intervention by the educator. The ultimate removal of the object was an attempt to regain control of the group. In other words, in these episodes the emphasis on sharing and respecting others' belongings seemed to have a disciplinary function.<sup>ii</sup> Especially during free-play, diverse approaches were employed to foster the children's relationships with each other and participation in shared activity.

### **3) Children's participation**

Children's participation can be described as having two different emphases: participation as a group, i.e. collective and individual participation.

In the Brazilian episodes, collective, joint action was emphasized by the educator directing the main initiatives at the group collectively (showing images and singing, offering an object to the whole group). For those children who had moved close to the educator, looking, moving, clapping and vocalizing was associated with the reward of being together and participating in an adult-led activity. This emphasis on collective whole-group participation was also evident in the Finnish episodes where 'participation' was in line with the idea of providing democratic, equal participation and opportunity to all of the children (see also Emilson & Johansson 2009). The activity was carefully controlled to ensure that everybody could join in and have a turn. In the Brazilian adult-led episode the children joined in, but the educator did not highlight the activity of any individuals. The children all watched and reacted to the educators' initiatives, some more intensely, others less so. There was no explicit expectation to wait one's 'own' turn.

Furthermore, the children had the possibility and right to choose whether to join in with the activity. This observation shares similarities with Kjörholt's (2008, 15) analysis and review of previous works on children's participation in day care centers in the Nordic context. According to Kjörholt, conceptions of the 'modern child' are often played out in day care centers by, for example, giving the toddlers the right to choose where and what to play. These decisions are in line with the notions of individual freedom of choice and children's right to influence their everyday life (Kjörholt & Tingstad 2007 in Kjörholt 2008, 22; Brembeck et al., 2004). In all of the episodes, the children's individuality and individual choices for participation were present. In the Brazilian adult-led situation, the educator allowed the children various possibilities for movement and for engaging (or not) in the

activity. The invitation by the educator was directed first towards a particular child. However, the educator did not insist that the child must follow the invitation. As other children started to approach, she shifted her attention to them and began focusing on the opportunities presented by the group forming in front of her. Those children who chose (nonverbally) not to participate were allowed to remain outside of this group. The educator directed her speech at the whole group gathered in front of her, even when responding, somewhat selectively, to the initiatives of individual children.

In the Finnish adult-led situation, individuality was emphasized through individual choice in the question-response pattern of participation introduced by the educator. The children sat in a group formation, but were each in turn offered a privileged space for participation. In all of the episodes there was space for the children's resistance to the educator's guidance and control (see Markström 2010). The children moved, gazed elsewhere, rejected the objects, returned to earlier objects and made alternative verbalizations or movements. These can also be seen as indicators of the children's participation in the activity, albeit not in the manner intended by the educator. Another form of child participation was through social interaction. In the Finnish case, the children were expected to interact primarily with the educators. Peer interaction was not considered a main focus, and when such interaction did occur it was disregarded by the educators or viewed as a potential source of conflict. In the Brazilian case, peer interaction was allowed even during the first year. Interaction between the children was not seen as a disturbance and, contrary to being avoided, it was fostered and actively encouraged.

### ***Final remarks***

Many recent studies have addressed the activities and settings provided for young children, and some of these have examined the practices and conceptions of education and care in different countries.

To unfold and deepen these discussions, the present study focused on children's and adults' actions in two ECEC cases: a Brazilian and a Finnish day care group. The present study did not aim to conduct a strict comparison, but a discussion of the discursive practices and mediational tools present in these two cases. These countries were selected, first, because they differ vastly in many aspects of historical, economic and political development and, second, because both are striving to invest in children's education as a right and as a place to form citizens and autonomous persons (Rutanan, Amorim, Colus & Piattoeva 2014).

Despite the slight difference in children's age in the selected groups, both cases addressed the care and education of the 'youngest ones' in ECEC. The focus was on ECEC for the youngest children, as this age bracket is positioned at the juncture of institutional and domestic care and education, being exposed to a range of tensions in both countries. The central interest was on social actions and cultural tools (semiotic/material means in action that embody certain affordances and constraints) through which social actors produce histories and habitus of their daily lives. In the analysis, the three topics discussed were 1) Instructional strategies, 2) Discipline and 3) Children's participation. These categories were in line with the previous studies that have discussed various tensions and values in ECEC (e.g. Emilson & Johansson 2009; Markström & Halldén 2009). These categories are not all-encompassing, but represent some possible lenses for addressing the dynamics in children's everyday lives in ECEC.

In both cases, the educators faced the similar challenge of coordinating whole-group actions while at the same time addressing numerous initiatives from several children. The educators had purposeful instructional aims involving the presentation of specific knowledge areas and content. To achieve these goals, the educators employed specific strategies involving cultural tools and objects or verbal and non-verbal approaches to work with the children. The materials and tools used differed considerably in terms of their type and pedagogical application. These differences are understood as being due, to a large degree, to differences in economic conditions between the two countries, with children's access to learning resources/materials varying accordingly. However, in both cases, children's access to these resources was mostly constrained by the educators' conceptions of young children's needs and the educational process. In terms of pedagogical strategy, in both cases the educator was typically positioned as the central figure in the educational process; this centrality was guaranteed by specific mechanisms of group control. In the Finnish case, the attention given to the children was more individualized. The activities were organized such that each child was given explicit opportunities to participate; similarly, the educator's guidance was directed toward the children's understanding of routines and rules. The guidance was also aimed at fostering self-regulation and an understanding of turn-taking.

In the Brazilian case, a more collective approach towards the children was taken, through which all of the children were allowed to participate (or not) (see Markström & Halldén 2009; Kjørholt 2008.) Although both cases highlighted child autonomy, the Brazilian practices were more explicitly based on the child's right to choose what to do and where to be.

Finally, in both cases, interaction between the educator and the children emerged as the central focus. Despite this, in both cases peer interaction was observable. However, the ways in which the educators dealt with peer interaction contrasted considerably between the two cases. In the Finnish case, there was almost no perception of peer interaction, and when interaction did occur it was promptly disrupted. In the Brazilian case, in addition to being readily perceived, interaction was also actively stimulated and encouraged in order to teach the children how to share and play together. Very little explicit emphasis was placed on children's values of caring, such as not hurting others, showing understanding and compassion, helping others, and getting on well with others (see Emilson & Johansson 2009). The cases analysed here were thus deeply constrained and regulated by the presence or absence of other educators, the number of children per material resources available, and other affordances for children's action that can be justified as good educational practices and that support the educator in their governance. In summary, through domestication the local practices are embedded and continuously re-constructed in close relation to the pedagogical ideals, ECEC policies, and economic factors, just to name a few of the links to the wider cultural aspects.

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<sup>i</sup>The term 'educator' is applied here to all adults. All names of participants have been changed to maintain anonymity. In the Brazilian case, the educators have secondary and tertiary level training. In the Finnish case, the educators are 'nursery nurses' with secondary level training from vocational school.

<sup>ii</sup>Emilson and Johansson (2009, 62) discuss similar 'values of caring' in terms of fostering children's understanding of caring for others, sharing and respecting others' belongings.