

## **A situation where children see only a little bit of agency**

In Tallinn Conference (Tallinna Pedagoogikaülikool, Tallinn Pedagogical University, march 27-28, 2003) I presented results concerning children who saw a lot of agency in situations. I promised then to present results for a situation that the children saw only a little bit of agency. Here goes.

Fifteen situations were presented for the children. The answers were categorized in two: those answers that had an element of change concerning the given the situation and those that had not. Children's actions were observed and teachers and parents evaluated children's actions. For a look at the research methods, see

[http://www.helsinki.fi/~reunamo/article/you\\_fail.htm](http://www.helsinki.fi/~reunamo/article/you_fail.htm) , research methods.

In the next table the number of answers that had an element of change in them can be seen.

**Table 1. The number of answers with an agency of change in them**

Situation presented to the child	Number of answers with change
Teacher will not play with you	4
Teacher comes to stop your play	6
You want to change play but your friend does not	13
Teacher gets annoyed at you	13
Somebody else is having the toy you want	18
You want to go home already	19
Your friend wants to change play	25
The other does not follow the rules	35
You fail	38
Your friend will not play with you	39
You are left alone in the kindergarten	44
Somebody comes to disturb your play	45
Somebody comes to disturb your work	45
Somebody takes your toy	49
Somebody comes to tease you	54

The smallest number of change strategies was founded in the situation 'adult will not play with you. Altogether 62 children gave a strategy that did not change the given

condition 'adult does not play with you'. Most often (n=40) the children say that they play with a friend instead. For example children said:

*'I play with somebody else',  
'I play with a child',  
'I go and find somebody else',  
'then I don't play with her,  
'I play with a friend' etc.*

The second popular strategy was that the child played alone (n=11). For example

*'I play alone again',  
'then I play puzzle',  
'I play with legos'.  
'I take sand in my hand, I do nothing else'*

Third biggest group (n=8) were those that could not be categorized of the children said that they do not know what to do. Only four children gave a strategy that was categorized as changing the given condition. They were:

- 1. 'Then I ask or I play alone',*
- 2. 'Some time in Christmas, I interrupt her when she talks with another teacher',*
- 3. 'I tell her can you play with me',*
- 4. 'She will play with me'*

It seems that children very often consider that it is no use trying to get the teacher play with the child if the teacher does not want to. Two thirds of the children just turn to other children, if the teacher will not play with them. They may even prefer to play with other children. Many also start to play alone. Only four children feel that they are capable of changing that condition. It seems to be no easy task to change the teacher's head when she does not play with the child. The situation where teacher comes to stop child's play has the second smallest amount of change strategies. The situation where the teacher gets annoyed at the child has the fourth smallest amount of change strategies. It seems that in kindergarten situations that has a teacher as the other actor children often feel that they will not change the teacher's way of behaving.

What are those children like that see teacher's behavior as changeable. To find this out, a Mann-Whitney –test was conducted for the two groups, children whose strategy did not change the given the condition (n=62) and those four children whose answers

were categorized as change strategies (see above). The result was surprising and can be seen in the table below:

**Table 2 Adaptive and change strategy group differences in the ‘teacher does not play with you’ situation**

Variable	Adaptive group mean	Change strategy group mean
(Teacher evaluation 1-5): the child withdraws and seems not to contact others. (p0.016)	2.00	3.75
(Teachers evaluaton 1-5) the child defines also what others do, child uses his/her influence on others.(p=.029)	3.31	1.50
(Teacher evaluation 1-5) Child is in the center of the developing action, child changes situations together with others.(p=.008)	3.35	1.50
(Teacher evaluation 1-5) The child is socially bold. Fright does not restrict his/her actions.(p=.020)	3.71	1.75
The average of the nearest contact’s action categorized as ‘orientation’(p=.044)	6.07%	2.44%
The average of the nearest contact’s influence on others as evaluated by teachers (p=.014)	3.43	2.07
The average of the nearest contact’s attention to the ‘whole situation (p=.044)	48.5%	35.5%

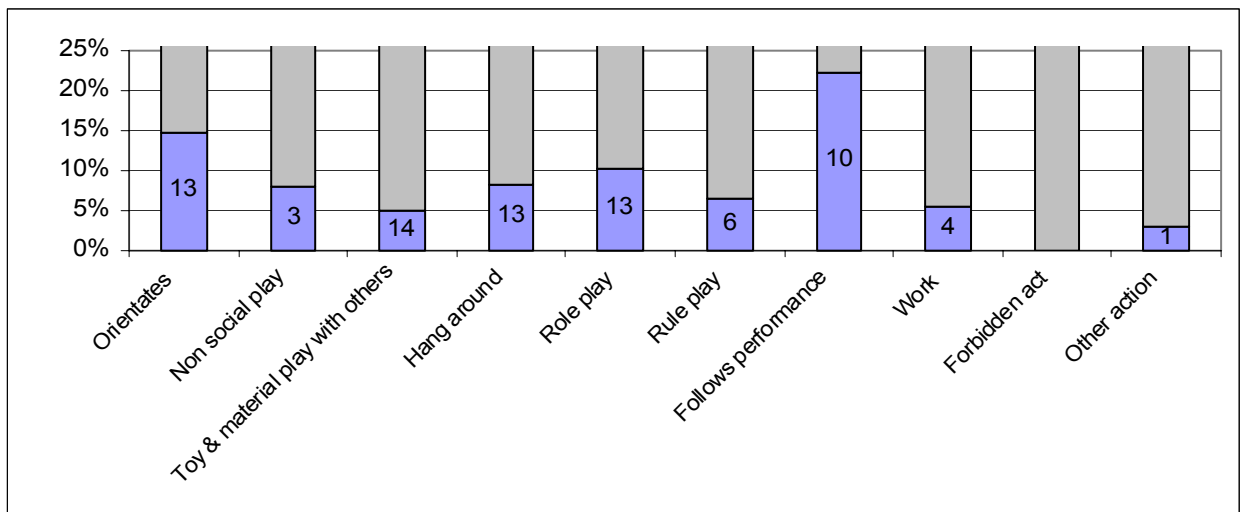
There are several striking things. First the teachers seem to recognize these children. No other question had so many statistically significant connections with the teachers’ evaluations. Because the situation deals teachers and the child, it is easy to understand, that teachers’ evaluations of the children’s actions match. The teachers make their evaluations according to their experiences with the children. In this situation the teachers have found children with change strategies different from others.

Another striking thing is that children who see that they may change teachers behavior (make them play with him/her) are evaluated not being strong and bold. The teachers evaluate these children as withdrawing and not contacting others. The child does not use his/her influence on others and fright restricts his/her actions more. Still the children feel they can make teachers play with them! There may be at least two explanations for this. The teachers treat these four children differently and try to help them to get them out of their shells. The other reason might be that the withdrawn, timid and not participating manner makes it impossible for them to turn to friends with whom they could play.

The third striking thing is these children’s nearest contact’s qualities. These children are together with children who do not orientate and wander around. The nearest contacts

are also more often not dominating and they pay less attention to the dynamic ‘whole situation’.

Let’s see what we find out of the relationship between these children’s actions and their views.



**Figure 1 The percentage of different actions of those children who think they may make teacher to play with them**

The difference in the categories is statistically significant ( $df=9$ ,  $F=2.803$ ,  $p=.003$ ). In the post hoc test (Tukey) the difference in following performance and toy and material play is .004 and with work .039. Children who think they may make the teacher to play with them is more often e.g. listening to a book or watching a video than playing with toys with friends. These children are also more often following a performance than working or e.g. independently exercising. The difference is between a passive and social and independent action.

The results highlight the flexible nature of the kindergarten action. Even withdrawing and socially timid children find situations where they can be participants in the development of the social interactions. Socially active children do not have the same opportunity, they do not see the opportunity, or they do not seek for the same opportunity as withdrawn children. The children’s own orientation plays an important role in the development of their social environment. The children do not encounter similar

kindergarten. In studying children's orientation we are on the track to find out about the development of children's personal development.