

Civilizing institutions.

A discussion of early childhood education in Denmark

Over the last decades we have seen a rising political interest in preschool arrangements and early childhood education in several European countries. Though the area of early childcare is characterized by a variety of institutions and arrangements in various countries, we see generally an intensified political interest even in countries with a long tradition of early childhood education e.g. France, Italy, and Spain. Young children and child-care have moved from being a subject in the margins of public administration to the centre of the political debate. Preschools or day-care arrangements have now become a fact in most children's lives though the form, content and extension varies from one country to another as do the degree of interplay with the educational system.

Comparative international screenings, more competition over market shares, knowledge economy and subsequently, competition over the educated labour forces, stronger international standardisation of educational demands due to increased political integration are but some of the factors to explain this renewed and intensified interest in the youngest children. The increased competition alongside further political and economic integration among the countries in the EU has turned childhood into an object of long-term investment. Another explanation is to be found in a strong and generally held belief that early intervention is a way to meet and prevent future social problems. Positioned in the front rank of the welfare state, day-care institutions and preschools are expected to discover and address social problems of families, and children in specific, as early as possible and to guide children and parents to correlate with the aims of the state. From being a place where small children could stay while their parents were at work, day-care institutions are now looked upon both as a societal investment in human resources and an outpost combating, and hopefully preventing, inequality and social unrest.

The rising political interest in the childcare sector reflects a will to hold and exercise the authority to define the process of upbringing and to control and measure the effects and outputs of institutional practice. Requirements of detailed documentation, descriptions of objectives and pressure to organize daily activities in learning-centered ways are just some of the interventions reflecting the increased political interest and administrative intervention in the sector of child-care. This development has been explored and discussed in academic analysis as an expression of a more global neoliberal current absorbed into different countries' political strategies and public administrations. As pointed out by several social scientists working with children and childcare institutions the neo-liberal process implies a rather instrumental way of conceptualising the role of institutions (Rose 1996, Olssen 1996, Apple 2006, Moss 2009).

In this lecture, I will discuss these changes in the childcare sector, though from another perspective than neo-liberalism and new public management. Inspired by the work by Norbert Elias on civilizing processes, I will discuss the cultural and social implications of political interest in early childcare and the general institutionalisation of children. Drawing on material from my fieldworks in day-care institutions in Denmark, I will analyse what the implications are for our conception of childhood that children on a large scale are brought up with institutions. What kind of ideas of proper behaviour, sociality and development does institutionalised childhood entail? My outset will be in Denmark but I do think that the points of arguments can be of relevance to discuss also in other national contexts.

Early childcare in Denmark

In broad outline, early child-care in Denmark resembles the care systems of the other Scandinavian countries. In all three countries, day-care is provided or supervised by public authorities and the political interest in the sector has increased significantly throughout the last

10 years. Though priorities vary in practice – not least when it comes to the amount of time spend on educational activities – early child care has become an integral part of the institutional foundations of society in all the Scandinavian countries. Day-care facilities are regarded as a pivotal factor in the participation of parents in the workforce. Equally, good day-care facilities are in the objectives in all three countries emphasized as an important start to a child's education or even a precondition for it. It is, furthermore, stressed that they provide an arena for early integration of children of different ethnic backgrounds, languages and cultures and helps to promote social equality.

In Denmark today, day-care institutions are an integrated part of the lives of most preschool children. Over the last 30 years, the number of children enrolled in the Danish day-care system has greatly expanded. 64 % of all children between the age of one and three are now enrolled in day-care and 96,1 % between three and five (compared to 34% in 1975) (Social Jura 2007). This situation is the result of a longer period of enlargement of the day-care sector. The process began as early as the 1960s, correlating with a situation of almost full employment. Economic upturn, changes in gender roles and the structure of the welfare state slowly altered the conception of early childcare. From being an offer mostly for families in need – low-income families and single mothers – early childcare has become a non-controversial part of ordinary family life for all kinds of families. A policy of state subsidization has made day care a universal provision to the extent that day-care institutions today are the obvious place to be for children under school age.

Mirja Satka and Gudny Björk Eydal have noted that in all of the Nordic countries, the day-care policy is based on the strong belief that the welfare state has the capacity to undo social wrongs and create equality among citizens (2004, p.41). Early childcare is, thus, an integrated part of the policy of the welfare state aiming at taking care of small children while their parents

are working but also to teach children social skills, prepare them for schools and ensure certain conformity in the attitudes, knowledge and behaviour of the up-coming generations. These are concerns in all countries engaged in the international economic and educational competition and standardisation, but the political strategies to meet these challenges vary. Structurally speaking, the situation is alike, but the strong confidence in political and institutional solutions is, I suppose, a distinctive characteristic of the Nordic countries. In Denmark at least, this confidence in institutional solutions is remarkable.

Institutions as the right place to be

This confidence is articulated in several ways not least in policy documents, guidelines from authorities and public debates. A recent example concerns a bill suggesting obligatory day-care attendance from the age of one year for children of parent's who are not regarded sufficiently fluent in Danish to support their children's language acquisition. The argument for enforced inscription is a firm belief in the ability of day-care institutions to overcome social barriers and to enable all children to speak fluent Danish before entering school. If children from an early age learn to get along regardless of background they are expected to be better able to participate, more democratic engaged and less motivated for conflict in a later age. It is, furthermore, argued that the years spend in day-care will teach children norms and manners, dominant in society but not necessarily in their homes. Childcare institutions are, thus, regarded as authorized means of integration and a corrective to families which are considered to be exposed to social risks. The bill has not yet been passed and will probably be modified before being so. It bears, nevertheless, witness to the extent of socializing forces attributed to the public day-care system and the societal interests that are seen to be at stake with regard to children. Political proposals like this indicate how day-care institutions are regarded as important means to ensure societal cohesion

and overcome social divisions in a context of a welfare state founded on one dominant language and culture.

A similar confidence in the socialising potentials of institutions was also expressed in interviews with municipality authorities during my ethnographic fieldwork in two day-care institutions and local communities. Several officials were asked to elaborate the political visions for the day-care institutions of the municipality. From this material it was apparent that enrolling children of minority ethnicity in public day-care had high political priority. Though, treatment of minority children is not the scope of this lecture, I find that the statements reveal ideas of normal childhood and the political interest in early childcare. The leader of the municipality's Family Department emphasized the great efforts being made to enrol minority children in pre-school institutions, into what she referred to as 'the official socializing system'. She described how the municipality had established procedures to ensure that all families were informed of the benefit of sending their children in day-care from the age of one.

When asked why it was so important to have minority children enrolled in 'the system', the official answered that the offer is meant to familiarize children with the Danish language and common norms of social interaction with other people. The aim of the pre-school institution is, she stated, to teach children proper ways to behave, to manage themselves and to be co-operative and considerate towards others. Thus, from this perspective, day-cares provide a normative social training; training that should be undergone prior to the more intellectual demands placed on children in schools.

Statements like these are found in numerous political documents and local guidelines from recent years. Day-care institutions are seen as playing a key role in teaching children behavioural norms and in transmitting national traditions that comprise and construct a collective system of values and reference points. These official accounts thus encapsulate the role of public day care

institutions as civilising agents. This, in itself, is not remarkable, since aspects of socialisation are inevitably part of the aims of any social institution. Systems of tutelage build on moral regulation, aiming to cultivate successive generations in accordance with dominant understandings of traditions, values and social norms. However, the statements referred to here go further by giving the impression that children who are left in care of their families are not necessarily in proper hands. A radical change from former views on public day-care, young children who stay at home now seem to be out of place, in particular if their parents are immigrants or refugees, uneducated, unemployed, and do not speak Danish fluently. The official socializing system is, however, not only targeting children at risk. It is, rather, a universal endeavour to teach children to 'be social' in ways considered proper. The responsibility of upbringing is, at least in part, transferred to institutional settings and children not enrolled in these are therefore considered at risk of not learning how to behave in socially sanctioned ways. Considering returns of the financial investment in public day-care institutions current policies are much more explicitly regarding the aim of daycare as a universal upbringing aiming at establishing an international competitive educated population. To this end, the role of professionals includes compensating for potential harmful influences on children by families.

Whereas debates 30 years ago were concerned with possible emotional disturbances brought on by institutionalization, often referring to Bowlby's attachment theory, contemporary discourses reflect concerns about parental overprotection, the bad influences of unqualified parents and the social under-stimulation of small children who are not in public care. As a consequence, day-care has become so much a part of the normal trajectory of the child that being at home is interpreted as potentially damaging for a sound development, - also because no other children are at home. Or in the words of Jan Kampmann: "The day-care institution has become such an incorporated part of children's ordinary conditions that institutional socialization is seen

as essential to a 'normal socialization' of children. This new type of 'normalization' means that it also becomes a more central state function to be actively involved in the definition of the socialization qualities of this public institution" (2004, p.138).

This process has gradually altered the relationship between parents and authorities. The child has to some extent become a shared project between parents and the welfare state where the role of the state includes the right to define sound conditions for upbringing in institutional settings as well as in families. Good parenthood is not a private matter and the balance between the public and private spheres of society has in this sense shifted. The family no longer stands as the model for institutions. From an early age, the child is separated from domestic spheres in order to be transformed into a civil person capable of engaging in spheres of public sociality in non-offensive and socially acceptable ways. The definition of what it implies to be a civil person and the process of becoming a civil person are now matters of political concern as well as institutional interpretation and praxis.

Denmark might be an extraordinary case, as day-care institutions here in some important respects have taken over the task of socialising children. The challenges that the Danish society faces are, however, recognisable internationally where similar debates and concerns are raised as are the viewpoint that early intervention is needed to ensure the formative processes of the new citizens. The struggles are thus identical while the process and means are not; various kinds of childcare arrangements exist, but it is a general trait of modern welfare states, that the rearing of children has become more and more professionalised and subject to state responsibility and authority.

Civilizing institutions

The profound political interest in early childcare reflects an increased perception of children as objects of investments not only as future capital in an economical sense, but also in a social and cultural sense. Global competition, as well as increased integration and standardisation between countries have intensified demands to all citizens including children to be able to perform in different spheres of society. The civil person of today needs to be able to manage in relation to shifting contexts. The transformative process taking place in childcare institutions involve teaching children to be civil persons able to perform in relation to demands from labour market, educational settings and the shifting contexts of civil society. But what kinds of conduct and manners and cultural performances do this transformative process more precisely entail? In order to pinpoint the relation between the individual child rearing project in and out of institutions and the more general attempts in society to ensure the upbringing of future generations of citizens, I am drawing on the work of Norbert Elias.

In his argument on what he terms 'the civilizing process' Norbert Elias discusses the history of manners in Western Europe from the Middle ages to the 19. century. He shows how the development of societies with still more division of labours, mutual dependencies and regulation by state institutions correlate with a process leading to still more demands on individual restrictions and self-control. (This process has some parallels in the international competition and integration taking place today). Behaving civilised, that is balanced and in control, becomes a prerequisite for social acceptance. Elias' notion of civilising does not entail an evolutionary idea of an improved behavioural style; rather he shows a social logic where self-control and manners become signs of status in a long historical process, where societies become still more complex and interdependent.

The kind of behaviour that is considered 'civilized' - the kind of person who is seen as 'the civilized human being' - might vary across societies, but always seems to be equivalent to

what is considered the most refined behaviour and the most outstanding amongst humans - the opposite of which is bestial, barbarian, selfish and anti-social. Thus 'the civilized human being' is generally the person who does what is thought of as necessary to be able to live and associate with other people in what is considered 'decent' and socially distinguished ways. The specific content of these civilized ways is not a constant, but an issue for fierce negotiation. The norms of civilized conduct are used as markers of distinction but such markers are continuously challenged and negotiated by different groups struggling for their different positions and status in society.¹

As a consequence civilizing processes imply a paradox (Gilliam 2008). Groups in dominant positions are occupied with civilizing and integrating the 'uncivilised' groups into society - being it the lower classes, immigrants or children - and at the same time concerned with maintaining their own dominant positions. The relative equalization of social differences which results from the movement towards further integration and the diffusion of civilized forms, makes it necessary that these groups find new ways to mark and consolidate their own social status (Elias 1939/ 1994: 382-385). This paradox contributes to the dynamic of the civilizing process, but also to the intrinsic difficulty of civilizing groups of dominated social rank, as the established or defining groups constantly develop and refine the 'civilised forms', to distinguish themselves from these 'others' (ibid: 424). Thus the civilizing process does not just mould people in the image of the 'civilised human being' but appears to produce an amount of 'uncivilized' manners and persona, i.e. specific bodily and social forms of conduct as well as stereotypical kind of persons, which are marked and understood as 'uncivilized' and related to lower social status within a human hierarchy.

¹ Comparable to Bourdieu's theory of social 'distinction' (Bourdieu 1979).

The interesting aspect, in relation to the present discussion, is that educational and child-care institutions have been part of the civilizing processes and still work as important sites for social and normative learning. The child institutions of the welfare state have in some important respects taken over the aim of civilizing children; that is to teach them norms and values of society in order to transform them into proper civil persons. In this process, a lot of attention focus on installing a sense of what is ‘civilized’ and what is ‘uncivilized’ in society’s children or in more everyday terms – of what is acceptable and normal or what is unacceptable and problematic. As children are considered both closer to nature and immature, they are thought of as uncivilized, not yet apt for civilized society and must be kept in what Ariès has called a kind of ‘quarantine’ until they have learned the right ways and manners (Ariès 1965). The child institutions of the welfare state constitute such quarantines (Rose 1989; Lyttken 1986). As such, institutional childrearing is directed towards teaching children the bodily practices of public society, as well as installing shame in children of the conducts, which are thought of as improper, and supposed to be kept to intimate and private spheres (Elias 1998:199). Besides this, children must learn specific types of social behaviour: how to speak, move and use their body, how to touch, approach and conduct oneself in relation to others in order not to offend other people and to be well behaved and cultivated. They must all in all acquire a consciousness of the right relation between self and others, and how to behave in different social settings, contexts and situations, particularly to be aware of different expectations in private and public spheres. And they must learn to decode manners and performances as signs of social distinction in order to take up a position as educated and civilised – also on an international scale.

Concurrently with the expansion of the day-care sector and the increased political interest in the sector, the state has – as part of international competition – developed new ways of monitoring, testing and evaluating children. Interpreted from an Elias-inspired perspective,

the increased political interest and intervention in early child education not only relate to new forms of public management but also to a dynamic of social distinctions, where new modes of distinguishing and evaluating individual performances have been established. Children are observed, tested and classified and those who are found not sufficiently apt will be met with concern and further educational initiatives. Thus, the civilizing missions of the childcare institution work at one and the same time as object and standard for the individual child. The general institutionalisation of children works as an integrating process meant to familiarise all children with norms, values and social forms of society. Yet, it is at the same time a process of disintegration as the common norms set standards for sorting out those children who are in need for further attention and intervention.

Verbalising feelings and controlling oneself

In order to explore more closely how new political visions, ways of public management and civilising ambitions influence social life, I will now turn my attention more specifically towards the daily practices and priorities taking place in day-care institutions in Denmark. When looking more carefully at the everyday life in institutional settings, one notices a range of efforts to regulate children's behaviour. Ways of communicating, resolving conflicts verbally, interacting with others, paying attention, respecting others' wishes and ways of playing are matters of daily attention among staff. Particularly abilities to verbalise intentions and emotions, to express one's interest and feelings are highly prioritised.

It stands out of the ethnographic material that being aggressive in any physical sense is stigmatising in a very profound way. It is not allowed or recognized as legitimate to hit, kick, push, throw things, destruct the things of others, but children are encouraged to express emotions as anger and rage as long as they do it in balanced and preferably verbal ways.

Children who are able to verbalise their feelings - positive as well as negative - are privileged on behalf of children with more physical ways of expressing themselves. Approval and respect go with ways of communicating – at least when it comes to recognition from staff. Also control of oneself is part of the project. To behave is to be able to control outbursts of feelings, be patient, adjust to collective demands, to take turns, line up and take others feelings into consideration are part of what it means to be social. Controlling oneself implies an expectation of the individual child to behave sensible and considerate, in other words to be able to manage in accordance with institutional norms.

It has become an assignment of society to teach children from a still younger age how to behave in a public arena which implies to make children conform to the social norms of the institutional setting rather than to the norms of the private sphere. Interpreted from an Elias-inspired perspective, the educational stress on verbalising and controlling ones desires and affects can be seen as a civilising ambition, a way to teach children how to behave in a respectful way, that is in alignment with the historical development of the dominant codes of conduct. This implies, however, a continuous evaluation of children. Thus, abilities to interact and perform in socially sanctioned ways are at one and the same time educational aims and standards used to consider which children to be concerned about, or who need to be moved to their institutional arrangements. Civilized behaviour is not just polite ways of interacting but also an expression of dominance and social distinction.

Standardization of childhood

Given the fact that most children spend their preschool years in institutions made for them this has - as already stated - become the norm. Young children are more or less obliged to be in institutions and childhood has in this sense been standardised in accordance with institutional

expectations. Institutional norms define – at least to some extent - the markers of individual children's' development. Thus, the official institutional system organises the socialisation of children with new and still more explicit demands to the individual child's behaviour and development. This is seen in several ways and I will present a more detailed example from one of the institutions of fieldwork.

A group of children have just finished eating and the teacher asks them to tidy up their lunch-packets and bring them to the fridge if any food is left for eating later. Most children do as they are told, but Ibrahim, age 3½, just leaves the table leaving sandwich paper, bits of foods and crumbs in a mess in front of his seat. When the teacher demands him to clean up, he argues that he does not know what to do about it. Patiently, she explains how to do it and he does so reluctantly. He has been in day-care for 8 months and is thus supposed to know the expectations.

A little later, all the children have to take on their snowsuits and go out to the playground. Ibrahim sits in the entrance calling for somebody to come and help him with the clothes. Nobody reacts. The two staff members present are very busy helping some of the 1 and 2 year old children with their suits, boots and gloves. When all the other children have left, Ibrahim still calls for help now fumbling with his snowsuit. Annoyed, one of the teachers assists him in the end and he follows the others to the playground.

When Ibrahim re-enters the house 10 minutes later and asks for help to get off his snowsuit as he is going to the loo the teacher becomes rather annoyed. She helps him but whispers to me: 'He is a nice boy but he is simply not brought up as he should. They (his parents) have not taught him to do anything. When a child at his age is not able to take a snowsuit on and off or to tidy up his own lunch-packet, there is something to worry about. In some ways, he is developmentally behind. It is the parents fault. I regard it as lack of care. It is

as if they don't bother or don't understand what it means to bring up a child these days. There are simply things you need to master'. Ibrahim calling for assistance from the loo interrupts her.

She is not alone in her complaints and other staff members, who are also discontented with some of the children's 'service expectations', echo her views. Three teachers to 20 children - some of them just babies - means a lot of work and they don't have time to give extra services to the bigger ones to which Ibrahim counts. They have to manage themselves in basic matters such as eating, dressing, going to the loo, as teachers simply don't have sufficient arms to support them.

In an interview with Ibrahim's mother, a young Turkish immigrant, she stresses that she finds it important to nurse and comfort her child. She finds it so important that small children have bodily contact and constantly feel how much you love and care for them, especially when you are separated many hours a day. For that reason, she takes her son on the lap, helps him with food and dressing and try – as she tells – 'to meet whatever needs he has'. She tells how she does find the day-care centre very Danish in the way the teachers prioritise to make the children independent. She admires their ambition of teaching the children to manage themselves, but she also finds that it is important to have close contact with small children and that she sometimes feels they prioritise independence on behalf of comfort and care. Sometimes, she and especially her husband find that staff has too little close physical contact with the individual child. So, at home they prioritise to compensate for the lack of contact in institution by nursing him. They find it more important to comfort him than to demand of him to manage himself. Even though, she tells, the teacher has asked them to train his independence. He is only 3, as she says, and there will be plenty of time for him to learn. 'Now we enjoy him as a small child'.

It is probably a quite common phenomenon that parents think that institutional staff should pay more attention to their child and staff feels the expectations of parents hard to comply with. Institutional staff has many obligations and tasks and with the present staff – child ratio it is simply not possible to meet all demands. Thus, independent, self managing children are an institutional necessity, and staff count on parental support in this matter. Children need to do certain tasks themselves; independence in matters such as dressing and eating is a required skill in the busy everyday life of the institution.

It is, however, noteworthy that it is not these practical matters that teachers' raise as cause for annoyance. Their complaints are not referring to lack of time or possibilities in their work with the children; rather they point out how some children's lack of skills give cause for concern for the sake of the child. It seems that the expectations to children's competences are so much part of the routines of the institution that they are regarded as universal and reasonable expectations to children at this age. The institutional requirements have, thus, been transformed to a standard used to evaluate children's developmental progress. And the self-managing child has in daily life in institution turned into a sign of development. Every cultural notion of development has some markers signifying developmental progress. In contemporary day-care institutions in Denmark self-managing, self-control, Danish fluency have become markers of a successful developmental progression. These skills function, thus, at once as prerequisites for the social success of the individual child and as premises for the efficiency of institutional routines.

Day-care institutions in Denmark match a specific style of life. Most children in contemporary day-care are from families with two working parents. They have to wake up early and have to take on their own clothes and so on in order to fit the tight morning schedule. They are, in other words, met by the same requirements at home, as they are in day-care and have,

therefore, no problem in fulfilling the expectations. Also, norms and values have a considerable overlap. The self-managing child able to negotiate and verbalise intentions and feelings stand as an ideal and children are in day-care as well as at home encouraged to express their viewpoints and meanings from an early age also in matters of general concern. Thus, the day-care institutions reflect and correspond with the lifestyle of the double-working middleclass family. The perception of the child, of children's abilities and development mirror the prototypical middleclass child, stimulated and skilled in specific practices relevant in the family as well as in day-care. The two kinds of social institutions correlate and confirm each other in regarding these specific skills as markers of sound development thereby institutionalising a quite specific idea of the developing child as a norm of evaluation of all children. Children coming from families with parents outside labour market, with other ideas of care-giving and upbringing are not met with the same kind of demands at home and not skilled in doing them. As they are not able to do what they are expected to do, they become object of concern.

In the case of Ibrahim his parents are asked to train his skills in practical matters such as dressing, eating and going to the loo so he stops being so dependent on others. They are also told to come earlier in the morning for the sake of Ibrahim so he will not stand outside the social relations of the others who have been there from eight a clock. Though, this family, who does not need to rush up early as both parents have difficulties in entering the labour market, feel obliged to wake up early and adapt to the lifestyle of working middleclass families. The view on the development of the child refers to a child in specific circumstances with working parents, busy family life and parents in need of competent children. This mainstream lifestyle concerns the majority of children. Children with parents who stand outside labour market, live other lives, prefer other ways of bring up and relate to their children risk being subject to

observation, regulation and concern and so do their parents. Thus, the family is regarded as a supplement to institutions, rather than the other way round.

The example shows how child-care institutions are empowered with the legitimate right to define and control normality and proper ways of behaving oneself. Institutions have assumed some of the civilizing obligations and rights, including the right to intervene in families who are not bringing their children up according to acceptable norms. The purpose of institutions is to transform children into civil persons, which not only means to regulate their behaviours but also ensure that they adapt to a lifestyle commonly regarded as proper.

That public day-care institutions aim to bring up children in accordance with the surrounding society's norms is not, in itself, remarkable. More interesting, however, is what it is precisely in the institutional context that come to be regarded as problematic or normal. Participation 'as a child' in a Danish day-care setting requires the ability to engage in social interaction, to manage oneself, meet the expectations of the institution and to verbalise intentions and feelings in Danish. These demands set standards by which children are evaluated and met with recognition or concern. These views on children and child-development are, however, not only expressions of more general political visions on behalf of still younger children. The more specific content also reflect institutional life. The efficiency in the running of institutions has in itself effects on the civilising priorities and perceptions of children and childhood. Day-care institutions are extremely efficient workplaces framed by a narrow economy and subject to close cost-benefit analysis by municipalities. These circumstances defines the adult-child ratio and the activities that can possible take place. This material framing and the routines and activities define institutional life and establish a sort of everyday-conformity, a standardisation of expectations and ways of interacting with individual children. Thus, the rationales for interacting, intervening, supporting, evaluating and regulating are not

just based on political visions on what kind of knowledge and behaviour is needed for the individual child to do well in society and at the international labour market, it relates just as much to practical, functional and material aspects of everyday life in institutions.

New demands to the civilized child

In this lecture, I have turned my attention towards the implication of early childcare for the general notion of the child and childhood in Denmark. I have argued that the massive institutionalisation of children and the increased political interest in early child-education gradually have altered ideas of what constitutes an ordinary and stimulating childhood and what competencies and skills the normal child need to develop. Drawing on Norbert Elias concept of civilizing missions, I have pointed out the strong emphasise on teaching children what in contemporary society is regarded as civilised behaviour. Children are expected to manage themselves, participate in decision-making and verbalise their feelings and intentions. These expectations reflect structures of dominance more generally held in society, where self-control and ability to verbalise intentions are preconditions for social recognition, influence and status. At the same time, though, the expectations reflect material and practical aspects of institutional running as childrens' ability to manage themselves are preconditions for the functionality and efficiency of the day-care. Early child-care institutions have been delegated the task of socialising children from a still younger age. A consequence of this is that what is regarded as normal child-development is to a large extent formed and consolidated in everyday routines and priorities of the day-care. In this sense, ideas of children and childhood are as much products of the child-care institutions as the institutions are means to ensure them.