Children's perspectives on the relations between home and school.

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The aim of the article is to shed light on children's perspectives of the relations between home and school. The study is based on 52 interviews with children aged 12-13 years in Sweden about their knowledge and notions of the relations between their parents and teachers, and what they perceive their own role to be in this context. The study reveals that the children's understandings are drawing on both ideas of connectedness and autonomy to different actors characterised by a vertical or horizontal frame and that generational and institutional power are important in their understanding of the relations. The results reveals the different ways in which children talk about home-school relations, namely as (1) an asymmetric vertical "keep-apart-relation" characterised by institutional power, generational power and children's autonomy and power and (2) a horizontal relation that is characterised by a symmetric power relation between the actors, i.e. they think that the parties to some extent sometimes have an equal influence in the relation. In addition, the study indicates that children adopt different strategies in relation to the adults. The children's accounts show that they reproduce and also resist the social order and structure.

Keywords: home and school relations, child perspective, vertical and horizontal frame, institutional power, generational power.

Introduction

The fact that children's lives are characterised by alternating between the home and institutions such as the preschool and school makes the child's socialisation and education a concern of the parents (guardians), the institution and its professionals. In other words, in the modern welfare state, the responsibility for children's upbringing and education is in the hands of the family and the state (Donzelot, 1997; Hendrick, 1997).

This shared responsibility also indicates an increased interdependence. Parents are encouraged to take part in their children's education and in school activities. However, there are limits and boundaries to what kind of influence is possible and desirable.

To some extent, laws and regulations govern the shared responsibility of parents and educators.

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Although some laws do govern the division of responsibility, the legislation is never a clear-cut. In the Swedish curricula for early education (Lpfö 98) and the primary school (Lgr11), the formulations there imply that the significance of the home decreases with age. Earlier studies also show that there are shifts in the perception of responsibility for children and adolescents according to age (Edwards & Alldred, 2000).

The institutionalisation of childhood is both well established and taken for granted in the Nordic countries. In the last decades there has also been a paradigm shift towards an 'investing-in-children' model, which includes an institutionalisation of childhood and the "institutionalized separation of the world of children from that of adults" (Pilcher, 1995, p. 2). Children's lives have increasingly become curricularised and controlled by adults (Buckingham, 2000; Montandon, 2001; Pilcher, 1995). In a sense, the institutionalisation of children and childhood has also liberated children from the strong links of parents and family to the extent that he or she is now seen as an independent individual with relations to spheres outside the family (Dencik, Schultz Jörgensen &

Sommer, 2008; Franklin, Bloch & Popkewitz, 2004; Popkewitz & Bloch, 2001).

In recent decades more attention has been given to discussing the influence of children, parents and educators in relation to school. In Sweden, the importance of a good cooperation between home and preschool/school is emphasised in both the public debate and in the policy documents; something that can be linked to global discourses of democracy in modern society (Bauman 1998). According to a state inquiry (SOU 1997:121) and a report from the Swedish Agency for School Improvement (Myndigheten för Skolutveckling, 2007), educators bear considerable responsibility for the family. Paradoxically, it is also stated that education is increasingly regarded as a family concern more than a societal concern. At a time when the borders between home and school have become increasingly blurred, the responsibility of parents and children for success in school has also increased (Dahlstedt & Hertzberg, 2011; Elvstrand, 2009). In other words, the requirements for parental responsibility in the preschool and school have expanded to the extent that schools have been obliged to re-define their obligations and pass on more responsibility to the family (SOU 1997:121; cf. Persson & Tallberg Broman, 2002). In this context, discourses about democracy, individuality, free choice and neo-liberal thinking have become more important in both Swedish society and the debate about education and school (Englund, 2010; Tallberg Broman, 2009). Indeed, parental involvement has become even more important as a result of political and ideological tendencies to document and evaluate individuals and competing schools. Aspirations and demands for cooperation are embodied in the curricula and in different local documents (see SOU 1996: 22 and SOU 1997:121 about children's and parents' influence in school). There are implicit and explicit expectations that teachers and parents will develop partnerships and good relations (cf. Popkewitz & Block, 2001, p. 96). For instance, in the curriculum for the Swedish primary school (Lgr 11) it is stated that teachers are required to cooperate with parents. Partnership is defined in terms of information to and from parents, joint responsibility and working together. It is also stated that teachers should "clarify" the norms and rules that form the basis of work and collaboration in school, that there must be a close cooperation between school and home and that forming constructive partnership with parents is an important principle. Here the concept of partnership has a positive meaning and is often used in an unproblematic and seemingly neutral way. The point of departure seems to be that parents want and should have continuous contact and be involved in the life of the school in different ways, particularly with reference to the children's best interests. These demands are often referred to research showing that good relations between home and preschool /school benefit children's development, well-being and lifelong learning (de Caravallho, 2001; Hallgarten, 2000; Tallberg Broman, 2009).

Parents' and children's rights and voices in relation to school are also given increasing attention in research (Englund, 2010; Vyverman & Vettenburg, 2009) and here the importance of involving parents in education is often emphasised. Cooperation between home and school is described as something positive and desirable and is almost taken for granted, both in the public debate and in research. However, in practice it is not always clear who is responsible for what. In the meetings between the actors in school who are responsible for children's upbringing and education, an intermediate sphere or domain (Mayall, 2002) is constructed. In this intermediate sphere it is possible to cooperate, negotiate and reach consensus on different matters. However, it is also a sphere in which conflicts or even struggles concerning the differences between the educators' and parents´ preferences and attitudes can take root and grow (Karlsen Baek, 2010; Symeou, 2007).

Parental involvement and engagement in schools is complex and constructed, used and interpreted differently by different actors. It also serves a diversity of purposes and has become institutionalised in time and space. Previous research into people's views about home-school relations has usually been conducted from adults', teachers' and parents' points of view. In the present study on home-school relations, the focus is directed towards what children think about the relations between home and school. Hence, the overall aim of the study is to explore and understand children's standpoints on the relations between home and school. Moreover, the aim is to study children's experiences and notions concerning their parents' and teachers' (home-school) relations and their own role in them. Against this background, the research questions relate to how children position themselves, their parents and their teachers in these relations.

Previous research

Ideals and practices of how home and school relations should be realised have varied and changed over time and in different societies. International and Nordic research has pointed to some of the dominant discourses concerning partnership, parental involvement and parental support in relation to children's schooling (Crozier, 2000; Epstein, 2001; Eriksson, 2004; Forsberg, 2009; Gutman, 1999; Hanafin & Lynch, 2002; Kryger, Palludan, Ravn & Winther, 2008; Ravn, 2005; Vincent, 2000). Ravn (2005) talks about different rationales as a basis for home and school relations: the pedagogical rationale that implies an educational partnership, the humanistic rationale that contributes to a democratic partnership and an economic rationalism that should be seen as a producer-consumer partnership. Yet another way of describing the relations between home and school is, as in Epstein's (2001) typology, to point out that parents have different roles in relation to the institution: parents who create a good and supportive learning environment at home, parents who have a mutual communication with the school about their child's school performance, parents who participate in the work of the school and at home in the form of homework and parents who participate more actively in the governance of the school. Hanafin and Lynch (2002) describe parents' roles in relation to the prevailing discourses on home-school relations as advocates for their children, consumers, partners, supporters, problem-solvers, culture bearers, employees and learning entities (cf. Hallgarten, 2000; Vincent, 1996). All these different ways of understanding and practising home and school relations between parents and teachers have implications for the construction of interactions in any specific situation.

Previous research into home and school relations has often been normative and interested in good examples (Eriksson, 2004), i.e. it has tried to address 'what works'. Most often it is research that takes its starting point from adults' or institutions' perspectives. However, some critical voices and researchers have questioned whether cooperation between home and school is always a good thing (de Carvallho, 2001; Kryger, Palludan & Ravn, 2008; Lahaye, Nimal, & Couvreur, 2001; Ravn, 2005; van Zanten, 2006; Vincent & Martin, 2000). For instance, is the home-school cooperation good for the teachers, the children

and all parents (Vincent & Martin, 2000; Hallgarten, 2000)? Furthermore, in official documents such as the curriculum for the Swedish primary school (Lgr 11), parents and teachers are talked about as equal partners; something that has been rejected in recent research, which instead points to inequalities with regard to socioeconomic conditions (Forsberg, 2009; Högdin, 2006; Karlsen Baek, 2010; Vallberg Roth & Månssson, 2006) or ethnic backgrounds (Dahlstedt, 2009; Vincent 2000). Moreover, some argue that this is an effect of an increasing individualisation and marketisation of the Swedish and Nordic school system where parents´ background and social and cultural capital has become more important (Boukaz & Persson, 2007; Englund, 2010; Kryger et al., 2008; Vallberg Roth, 2011).

Furthermore, previous research has also been interested in how the relations are conducted, for instance through information letters or visits in classrooms and in different kinds of meetings (Castelli & Pieri, 2007; Crozier, 2000; Dannesbo, Kryger, Palludan & Ravn, 2012; Epstein, 2001; Forsberg, 2009; Hanafin & Lynch, 2002; Kryger, Ravn Palludan & Winther, 2008; Vincent, 2000). However, today there are increased possibilities for contact between the actors at home and at school, for instance using text messages or digital systems (Bodén forthcoming; Castelli & Pieri, 2007). In Castelli's & Pieri's (2007) study of parents', teachers' and students' attitudes to mobile-mediated home-school partnership in Italy they showed that mobile phones were perceived as a tool for an effective and quick communication that sometimes is needed. However, the children felt that this technology was "a real violation of their privacy and an intrusion in the child-parent relationship." (Castelli & Pieri, 2007, p. 186).

Children's views of home-school relations

Children's perspectives of their own everyday lives have been highlighted in recent decades, for instance with regard to schooling (James, Jenks & Prout, 1998; Jenks, 2005; Ayton, 2008; Elvstrand, 2009). When it comes to research concerning home and school relations, the idea of children as actors taking charge of their own lives and of children's individualisation has often been regarded from an adult's perspective. Children are often viewed as passive objects for adults' or institutional interests (Edwards & Alldred, 2000). Consequently, in previous research on home and

school relations, less attention has been focused on children's own views in comparison with adults' views (Crozier, 2000; Edwards & Alldred, 1999, 2000; Edwards & David, 1997; Vyverman & Vettenburg, 2009). It is often presupposed that younger children prefer parental participation and adolescents dislike it, although this has also been questioned (Vyverman & Vettenburg, 2009).

However, Edwards & Alldred (1999, 2000) suggest that children are competent, have their own opinions and can influence their parents, despite there being differences between children in terms of class, age or gender (cf. Crozier, 1999; Deslandes & Bertrand, 2005; Deslandes & Cloutier, 2002; Edwards & Alldred, 2000; Lareau, 1997). According to some researchers, children have a negative view of parents' participation in their school activities or parent-teacher-interactions, because this is often associated with teacher's complaints about them (Lawson, 2003). In addition, some research points to the disappointment felt by young adolescents if their parents are not interested or engaged in their education (Crozier, 2000). Using a survey, Vyverman & Vettenburg (2009) studied the attitudes of 10-year-old children to their parents' participation at school and argued that they were related to the extent to which parents participated and how children influenced their parents' relations with school. Furthermore, their study showed that most children's views about parental involvement in school depended on how such involvement affected them as individuals. Their survey also showed that children from deprived schools seemed to enjoy their parents' participation more than other children, and that this phenomenon could depend on whether or not the schools involved tried to engage the parents.

Like Crozier (2000), Edwards and Alldred (2000) developed and elaborated a typology related to how children and young people talk about their behaviour and activities in relation to parental involvement in their education: children as active in parental involvement, children as passive in parental involvement, children as active in parental un-involvement and children as passive in parental un-involvement. Deslandes and Bertrand (2005) and Edwards and Alldred (2000) argue that a positive relationship between children and their parents is an important factor in young people's attitudes to parental participation in school.

Cooperation between home and school and parental involvement in school are complex matters and can be seen from different points of view by the different actors involved, namely the children, parents and educators. Both internationally and in a Swedish context, few studies have been conducted in this area, especially with regard to children's own notions about how and when cooperation between home and school is shaped in everyday school life and what they think about that and their own role. In this article, children's experiences and notions of home-school relations and their own role are highlighted.

Theoretical framework

This particular study is based on children's standpoint and a child-oriented approach to the relations between home and school that includes a broader context than the individual (Alanen & Mayall, 2001; Mayall, 2002). Attention is given to the fact that children have and can express their own opinions, that they are able to act in different ways in relation to their everyday lives in school and that their voices should be heard (Ayton, 2008; David, Edwards & Alldred, 2001; Edwards & David, 1997; James et al., 1998; Jenks, 2005; Mayall, 2002).

In this research, the competent child is seen as competing with other discourses, i.e. not as a dominant/hegemonic discourse (Brembeck, Johansson & Kampmann, 2004; James et el., 1998) and in a relational view of childhood (Alanen, 2009 a, b; Jenks, 2005; James et al., 1998; Mayall, 1994; Prout, 2005). In other words, children own their experiences of and thoughts about school, schooling and home-school relations. However, as children vary in age and gender and come from families with different ethnic or socioeconomic backgrounds, they are obviously not a homogenous group. Consequently, children will have different opinions depending on their experiences of home and school and the school context in which they find themselves. That means that notions about children and childhood are understood as negotiated and constructed and thereby influence educational institutions and intergenerational relations. For instance, children may have similar attitudes to home-school relations as their teachers or parents, but there may also be differences or variation in their meaning-making that are important to study and highlight in order to understand the home-school relations.

Additionally, in previous research the institutional relations between citizens and the representatives of an institution - such as the school - have been interpreted and talked about as power relations that can be asymmetric or symmetric (Foucault, 2002). Furthermore, these power relations emerge from different tensions between people and have different causes. The tensions can emanate from institutional power, generational power, gender power, economic power etc. (Mayall, 2002; Morrow, 2006). When it comes to generational power, adults often position children as "not yets" or as "human becomings" (Alanen, 2009 a, b; Halldén, 2003; James et al., 1998; Lee, 2001). This view is something that can be seen as being rooted in adults' mutual epistemic positions and knowledge regarding the best interests of the child (cf. Foucault, 2002), where the child is positioned as having little knowledge about his or her own life. Generational ordering, in terms of adult's institutional roles as professionals and parents' versus children's roles as pupils, are well-known roles in the institutional school context.

In addition, Alanen (2009b) discusses power relations in relation to children and generation; an approach that has largely been ignored in home-school relations. Alanen argues that the influence of broader structural aspects is often under-emphasised and that adult's influence on children's lives is over-emphasised. Moreover, Alanen and Mayall (2001) and Alanen (2009b) argue that the concept of generation should be interpreted as relational, i.e. as a system of relationships between different social positions. As Alanen expresses it:

"The relations between the generational categories of 'children' and 'adults' (or 'parents' and 'children', or 'teachers' and 'students') present us with a simple and lucid example of such relations that are internally related in the sense that one category (such as 'children') cannot exist without the other, and the socially constructed meaning of one category is dependent on the meaning of the other category. The categories are constructed as generational through the specific set of internal relations." (Alanen, 2009 b, p. 311).

Consequently, as many sociology of childhood researchers have problematised, the concept of

generation is important when it comes to studies of the relations between children and adults (Alanen, 2009a, b; Mayall & Zeiher, 2003).

As mentioned above, very few studies have examined children's views about and experiences of home-school relations, especially in a Swedish context. That is, there is more to be explored when it comes to children's own notions about how, what and when cooperation between home and school is shaped in everyday school life, what they think about that and what they consider their own role to be.

Methodology

The main focus of the study is on the discursive aspects of the children's accounts of their experiences and notions on home and school relations. In the analysis, attention is paid to various discursive aspects. The findings are slotted into categories that depict the child's points of reference when describing the home-school interaction and that elaborate the complex ways in which children talk about the relations between home and school and their own role in them.

The article is based on a qualitative case study of children's experiences and views of the relations between home and school. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with children in grade six in the Swedish primary school, i.e. aged 11-12 years. The interviews were conducted in seven schools located in two cities in the south of Sweden in 2010 and 2011. The schools were purposefully selected to ensure that the children came from low to middle income areas of the cities and had different economic, ethnic and social backgrounds. Head teachers from different schools were contacted and represented the first step towards gaining access to the school and the teachers. The teachers were then asked to help to recruit children (including parental permission) for the study.

The empirical material consists of 52 qualitative interviews (with 23 boys and 29 girls) ranging in length from 14 to 34 minutes (the average time was 19 minutes). The author conducted the interviews in school with the children after obtaining informed and written consent from the children and their parents, in accordance with ethical research standards. The voluntary participation was also emphasized in the meetings with the individual child (cf. Harcourt, Perry & Waller, 2011).

The semi-structured interviews were audio-taped and transcribed verbatim by the author. The

interviews concerned the children's experiences and notions about cooperation and relations between their home and school, and, more specifically, between the children, their parents and their teachers. The questions covered their experiences of and thoughts about the extent of the relations between home and school, the kind and forms of interaction and communication that took place between their schools and homes, their parents' and teachers' interactions, what they thought about the interactions that took place, what they perceived their own role and activities to be in this interaction and their hopes and concerns about the cooperation between home and school. On the basis of the children's responses to these questions, the interviews were analysed using a process of abduction, that is, an interaction between data and theory (Alvesson & Sköldeberg, 2008).

Discourse theory was used to describe the children's statements and how they were inter-related and produced meaning chains (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). The discourses are constructions of what is possible to articulate in relation to the context. A close, empiric, open-reading coding was both associated and tested with tentative theoretical questions and interpretations. In the first stage the content and phrases were categorised. The material was then investigated in relation to the research questions. The second stage involved analysing different kinds of accounts about the relations and in the third step different ways of talking were analysed (Wood & Kroger, 2000). The analysis focused on key themes that showed dominant and deviant statements and was built around different dimensions and discourses based on the children's understandings of the relations.

The results of the analyses are presented in the following section. Here the focus is on the types of cooperation described and how the children understand the relations in the intermediate domain (Mayall, 2002), i.e. those of the children themselves, their parents and their teachers from a horizontal and vertical frame.

Results

Types of cooperation

In order to capture the children's understanding and experience of the types of cooperation that existed between their parents and the school, they were first of all asked

questions about the kind of interaction or contact their parents had with the school. A typical answer at the beginning of the interviews was that their parents did not have very much contact or cooperation with their teachers, and as on girl said "I really don´t have a clue". However, when the interviewer asked more specific questions the children gave different examples of how the relations between home and school could be expressed according to their experiences. It can be interpreted that contact like this is taken for granted, that they are not used to reflecting on it or that they do not understand it in terms of contact or cooperation.

During the interviews most of the children mentioned different ways or interaction between home and school that they had experienced and that can be seen as typical for the Swedish school context: log books/ contact books, IDP- meetings (Individual Developmental Plans) and parents' evenings as ways in which their parents and teachers have contact with each other. Some of them also mention phone calls, text-messages, e-mail and parents' visits to the classroom. Some of these contacts and activities are directed towards all parents (information letters, information on the Internet, parents' nights and classroom visits), although the majority either concern the pupil as an individual in school or at home (cf. Vyverman & Vettenburg, 2009).

When it comes to written messages, teachers send messages or letters – about things that the pupil should bring to school, information about developmental talks, parents' evenings or homework – using the child as a messenger. According to the interviewed children some teachers also write messages to the parents in the children's logbooks and, in some classes, the child has to write the teacher's message in his/her own logbook and then take it home for signing. In addition, the parents sometimes write messages for the teacher in the logbook.

An important result of this study is that the children point out that they are expected to carry messages about their schoolwork and performance in school, take information, logbooks and forms home to their parents and influence and sometimes convince their parents to attend parents' evenings and visitors' days.

Interviewer: You said that you have to inform them [the parents]. What do you have to inform them about?

Kim: My teacher wants me to tell my parents that it is important that they come to parents' evenings. They can't decide about our school trip if our parents don't come.

In the above example it is obvious that Kim thinks that he is not only supposed to inform, but also to exert pressure on his parents to get more involved in school. Additionally, the interviewed children also talk about their task of taking messages from the home to the school, i.e. from their parents to their teacher, in order to explain what their parents think about different things connected with the school. In some cases they talk about having to protect parents from the school.

The school initiates most of these activities and ways of making contact. Also, many of the activities that the children involved in take place in their homes rather than in school. In some interviews the children also say that contact could be initiated by the home with regard to telephone calls, text messages, e-mails and, in some cases, written messages. The different forms of contact that are mentioned are familiar and routine in a Swedish school context. A question that can be asked is how the children understand and view these different kinds of contact.

In the following section the analyses are deepened and directed towards the children's understanding and interpretations of these contacts and relations in a broader way.

Horizontal and vertical frame

The analyses of the interviews and the children's accounts reveal that the children's understanding of the relations between themselves, their parents and their teachers are to a large extent characterised by a hierarchical thinking and symmetric or asymmetric relationship patterns between the participants (cf. Foucault, 2002). Additionally, the interaction order can be interpreted as an interaction of a horizontal or vertical frame (Aronsson & Evaldsson, 1993; Alasuutari, 2010). Alasuutari (2010), who interviewed preschool teachers concerning their relations with parents, uses the concept of vertical frame to emphasise the asymmetric relations between parents and preschool teachers, i.e. the professional's power of knowledge as opposed to that of the parents. The concept of horizontal frame is used to show that the actors are equal

partners. The horizontal frame illustrates a relation in which the parties have different and/or complementary knowledge, for instance about the child, and facilitates a broader interpretation of the phenomenon than is possible with the vertical frame.

In the following, the results of the analyses of the interviews with the 52 pupils/children are presented. In the analyses, I have been inspired of the concepts horizontal and vertical frames. Here the main focus is on utterances that evoke questions regarding the positions of the parties in relation to a horizontal or vertical frame. The results reveal that the children's understandings varied between the different interviews as well as within the same interview in four different ways: 1) an asymmetric vertical "keep-apart-relation" between home and school, 2) an asymmetric vertical "keep-apart-relation" between the children and the adults, 3) an asymmetric vertical "keep-apart-relation" in terms of the children's autonomy (sense of being independent, cf. Halldén, 2003) and 4) a symmetric horizontal relation between the various actors. This type of reduction is a tentative way of synthesising the children's experiences and views expressed in the interviews.

1) An asymmetric vertical "keep-apart-relation" between home and school. The first way of talking about the relations between the children, parents and teachers is characterised by a separation discourse (cf. Epstein, 2001; Eriksson, 2004; Gutman, 1999). Some of the accounts show that the children regard the relations between home and school as relations between two separate and different spaces, namely the school and the home. The teacher (and the school) is seen as the upper part and the parents and pupils as a lower part of a top-down relation.

The accounts that characterise this understanding of the relation point to the teachers' (and the schools') powers to define and decide the relations. For instance, the teachers "make all the decisions in school", inform the parents in different ways, expect the pupils to do what they have to do, such as write and read, do maths etc. at different times and places (things that are sometimes also regarded as the parents' responsibility) and expect that all parents are able to help and support their children. The following example illustrates this kind of asymmetric relation, where according to the interviewed boy, both the child and his parents were expected to "do" the set homework.

William: My parents can't help me with my homework. Mum doesn't understand anything. They don't speak Swedish very well, you know. Interviewer: Okay.
William: It´s unfair I think.
Interviewer: Do you have anyone to ask at home?
William: I don't do the homework if it is too hard anyway.

In the example, William talks about his experience and view of school and home relations as a vertical relation. He says that as his parents are unable to help him with his schoolwork, this sometimes results in him not doing it at all. His sense of autonomy can thus be interpreted as reduced or threatened. Other children say that they sometimes forget or don't bother to take messages home. That is, the schools' and adults' powers are here talked about as being subject to resistance (cf. Hockey & James, 1993).

In addition, in some of the interviews the children talk in terms of that their parents act as advocates in their favour (cf. Hanafin & Lynch, 2002). One girl says that her mother use to phone the teacher for an explanation if something is wrong, for instance if the teacher has been unpleasant or if a peer had done something wrong. In other words, there is an alliance between the girl and the parent that strengthens her. Consequently, the teacher's power is seen as something that can be challenged and something that can be used to get help.

However, the image that emerges from some of the children's accounts about the relations between home and school are characterised by an understanding that the teacher and the school have the power to decide on matters relating to school and that the child and his or her parents have certain obligations and have to accept those decisions. This relation is talked about in terms of a keep-apart relation between the institution and the citizens, which can be interpreted as a lack of power from both the children's and parents' point of view. This understanding takes its point of departure from a view of relations that are characterised by tensions or conflicts between ordinary citizens and an authority (the school).

2) An asymmetric vertical "keep-apart-relation" between children and adults. The second way in which the interviewed children talk about and understand the relations between home and

school, namely between the pupils themselves and between the parents and the teachers, is expressed in generational terms. The children say that the adults make contact and talk about different matters concerning them as pupils and/or children and what they are supposed to perform at school and at home. Moreover, the relations between the adults versus the children are talked about in terms of the adults (parents and teachers) working together and as superior to the child. For example, one girl says that "they 'phone our parents if we don't listen or something like that". This can be interpreted as the teacher talking to the parents in a way that indicates threat or punishment.

Moreover, some of the children say that they think that their parents and their teacher have a good relationship. Those whose parents are involved in school activities feel both power and powerlessness in relation to their own situations. For example, Daniel, a very ambitious and "good" student, says that his parents and teacher meet or talk to each other on a regular basis and that he likes that. However, in the following example Daniel indicates that he is not always comfortable in the development conferences when he, his parents and the teacher meet to talk about his education and development.

Daniel: They always have to say something negative in the parent-teacher conference. They always have to point to something that I haven't done well, something that I have to do better. They always talk about that.
Interviewer: How does that feel?
Daniel: I feel nervous from the beginning.
Interviewer: So, you feel a bit uncomfortable joining this conference?
Daniel: Yes, I never know what kind of reactions I will get from my parents.
Interviewer: Is that why you get nervous?
Daniel: Yes, for example I don't like it when my father comes. Because if the teacher says that I have not done well enough in something, my father takes it too seriously and they – the teacher and my father - start to discuss that.

Interviewer: Okay.
Daniel: The adults shouldn't take it
so seriously.

In this example Daniel says that he feels that the adults gang up against him. This can be interpreted as a "keep-apart-relation" or a separated relation (cf. Epstein, 2001; Eriksson, 2004; Gutman, 1999; Kryger et al., 2008; Vincent & Martin, 2000) based on a generation gap; a relation that he feels uncomfortable with. The adults talk about him and he says that this make him nervous. This can be regarded as an imbalance of power: in the generational power of the teacher and his father together in this situation and his own lack of power. In this example the boy's sense of autonomy in relation to the teacher and his parents is reduced or threatened.

In the following examples, other children express their notions of the power of adults to make decisions, assess and define them as pupils. Examples that the interviewed children talk about concern telephone calls and developmental talks between the teacher and the parent:

"I want to know what they have been talking about. I am curious. What have they talked about and what will happen" (Anders about telephone calls).
"They have some forms and talk about my performance in class, my schoolwork and such things. Then I get to know what I am like in school - if I've done something well, get a star or something like that" (Linda about developmental talks).

In these examples the children reveal an awareness of having to act as recipients of the adults' information, decisions and activities. In the last example, the girl says that the adults tell her what she is like in school. Here the relationship between the child and the adults is described as asymmetric, in that the adults have the power and the child is positioned as an object of the adults' assessments and aspirations. The adults seem to be viewed as owners of knowledge (cf. Foucault, 2002) about the children and can tell her whether or not she is doing well. This understanding seems to emerge from a view of children's positions as dominated by adults and that they have to learn how to behave and find out who they are from the adults' point of view.

3) *An asymmetric vertical "keep-apart-relation" and children's autonomy.* A third way of describing the relations between the actors is an asymmetric vertical "keep-apart-relation" that draws on the children's autonomy. That is, some of the children make utterances that indicate that the school (pupils and teachers) should be separated from the home and the parents.

A separation of home and school in terms of pupils and teachers versus parents is talked about in different ways in this study. In the following example, Emma says that her parents think that the teacher and the school send too much information and too many forms home that the parents then have to respond to or deal with.

Emma: The teacher sends a lot of information, forms and stuff, every week. My mother says that there is "God, it is too much paper". She thinks it is too much.
Interviewer: What do you think about that?
Emma: I think that they don't have to tell parents about everything. We can deal with it in school. I can manage, why should they [parents] bother?

This example shows that the girl's mother thinks that the school sends too much information home and that the girl thinks that the school and the home should be more separate. Other children clearly state that they want autonomy in relation to the school, i.e. that they resist the institutional incorporation of home and family life in school and try to block their parents' involvement in their education (cf. Edwards & Alldred, 2000).

Interviewer: Do your parents visit you in class?
Miriam: No.
Interviewer: Have they ever done that?
Miriam. Yes, when I was in the lower grades. Sometimes I wanted them to come. But not now. Never.
Interviewer: Not in grade six?
Miriam: No, it is so embarrassing.
/.../
Interviewer: Would you like your parents to be able to influence or collaborate more in relation to school and your schoolwork, or with your teachers?

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Miriam:No, never. It would be annoying. I can speak for myself.

This example shows that the girl does not want her parents to visit her in school and that she actually wants them to be separated from school and schoolwork. She argues that she wants to manage by herself in relation to the school and in doing that claims her autonomy in relation to the parents and the home. That is, parental involvement in school can be experienced as a way of intervening in a child's private space. Miriam's understanding of the relations shows that she positions herself as capable and active in her own school life and that she both wants to and views herself as capable of negotiating and making her own decisions in relation to her parents.

4) A symmetric horizontal relation between actors. The final and fourth way of talking about the relations in this interview study is that the relations are characterised by a horizontal frame. The examples provided here draw on a discourse of equality and complementarity and consist of accounts that describe a symmetric relation. The interviewed children think that the relations between them, their parents and their teachers are characterised by an unproblematic two-way flow of contact and information between the actors as in the following example:

Linn: If I can't answer the question they (parents) sometimes send text messages and ask about something they don't understand or whatever. And I usually write in the logbook on Fridays. I take it home and they read it and sign it. I tell them about what I have done in school during the week. I don't know, but I kind of like that they have contact too, because sometimes I don't like to explain everything. And they phone each other. And I talk to them all the time.
Interviewer: What do you think about that?
Linn: It's okay. It is my teacher, my parents and I.
Interviewer: You all take responsibility?
Linn: And the principal I think. All together.

Although this kind of account is rare in the interview study, in the few examples that did emerge the children express a view of home-school relations and the responsibilities involved as an uncomplicated question for all the actors and that there are no tensions between them. The children argue that all those concerned – the children, the parents, the teachers and the principal – are both active and passive in the relations. Their accounts are characterised by the view that they all are important, that they complement each other and have the same opportunities to influence.

Concluding remarks

This article explores children's experiences and notions of the relations between home and school, parents and teachers, and their own role in these relations (Alanen, 2001, 2009a, b; James et al., 1998; Jenks, 2005; Mayall, 1994, 2001; Mayall & Zeiher, 2003). The study reveals that the children have experiences and opinions about the relations between home and school, that they think that they are expected to participate in the construction of home-school relations and that their lives are dominated by school even when at home. Moreover, the interviews indicate that they are governed and used as messengers in the relations between the parents and the teachers. Different artefacts, such as written messages, forms and logbooks, are examples of how parents and teachers interact with each other and that the children are expected to carry them back and forth.

The different ways of describing the power relations (Foucault, 2002) between children, parents and teachers that have been revealed in this study – the asymmetric vertical "keep-apart-relation" describing institutional power, generational power and children's autonomy and power, and the notions of a symmetric power between the actors – can be interpreted as different ways of understanding their own roles and the effect that these relations have on their own lives. Furthermore, the study suggests that children position themselves and their parents as subjects and objects in relation to the teachers/school context. The relations that show institutional and generational order and power (Alanen, 2009 a,b; Alanen & Mayall, 2001; Mayall & Zeiher, 2003; Morrow, 2006) implicitly point to feelings of a low degree of participation on the part of the children and to some extent also the

parents. The children's sense of being assessed, governed and used as messengers between the school and home is also typical. On the other hand, some accounts point to a higher degree of influence, especially when the children talk about how teachers and pupils construct alliances and how they manage their contact with the school, with or without their parents' interference. Finally, a few of the accounts indicate that some children think that they have influence and that together with their teachers and parents make joint decisions and have equal influence in the participation, i.e. they have a sense of participation in the relations between home and school.

In short, the results of this interview study show that the individual children's notions and descriptions of the relations sometimes overlap with each other and sometimes draw on diverse discourses about the relations at the same time. The children adopt different positions and carry out different tasks depending on the situation, their beliefs and their parents' cultural and social capital (cf. Lareau 1997; Morrow 2006; Symeou, 2007). That is, they think that they have to be flexible regarding relations between home and school depending on individual and structural issues. The children's accounts show that they

reproduce and also resist the social order and structure. The power held by adults seems to be subject to resistance (cf. Hockey & James, 1993), for instance when the children mention different ways of ignoring or avoiding tasks that are imposed on them by adults. The common features of and differences in children's different experiences and notions indicate how social processes of individualisation, familisation and institutionalisation are concretely constructed (cf. Alldered, David & Edwards, 2001; Bache-Hansen, 2002; Brembeck et al., 2004; Edwards & Alldred, 2000).

The results from this study can be interpreted as a an expression of the complex ambiguity that on the one hand reflects an increasing control of children and on the other hand, children's growing autonomy. However, the study doesn´t say anything about the children´s lived experiences in practice. How the children's experiences, accounts and meanings are lived and negotiated in practice in everyday school life is still to be studied in a Swedish context. An implication of this study could be that children's views and considerations about home and school cooperation should be taken into account in formulations of curricula, in instructions to school and in everyday practise.

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