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With the kindergarten teacher in explorative processes
Z nauczycielem przedszkola w procesach eksploracyjnych

Abstract

This article examines the notion of "secure-base relationships" in kindergartens. While this concept originally emphasized early emotional bonds between parents and children, recent developments in attachment theory highlight its interconnectedness with social relationships. However, the dichotomy between a secure base and exploration remains prevalent in the literature. Adopting a practice-based approach informed by rhetorical listening, we analyse kindergarten teachers' descriptions of exploratory processes with children. Examples from two phases of a project on the theme of the universe are discussed in light of the concepts of *ethos* and habitual places. Findings suggest that secure-base relationships in kindergartens are closely interwoven with exploration, forming a polyvocal and dynamic place that involves choice and risk. Embodied interactions in familiar activities are shown to support relationships, and alternating positions in play emerges as a beneficial pedagogical strategy to support a culture of sharing. Finally, the relevance of a civic notion of *ethos* for kindergarten communities is underscored.

W niniejszym artykule przeanalizowano pojęcie „relacji bezpiecznej bazy" w przedszkolach. Chociaż koncepcja ta pierwotnie kładła nacisk na wczesne więzi emocjonalne między rodzicami a dziećmi, najnowsze osiągnięcia w teorii przywiązania podkreślają jej powiązania z relacjami społecznymi. Jednak w literaturze nadal dominuje dychotomia między bezpieczną bazą a eksploracją. Przyjmując podejście oparte na praktyce i retorycznym słuchaniu, analizujemy opisy procesów eksploracyjnych z dziećmi przedstawione przez nauczycieli przedszkolnych. Przykłady z dwóch faz projektu poświęconego tematowi wszechświata są omawiane w świetle pojęć *etos* i miejsca pobytu. Wyniki badań sugerują, że relacje bezpiecznej bazy w przedszkolach są ściśle powiązane z eksploracją, tworząc wielogłosowe i dynamiczne miejsce, które wiąże się z wyborem i ryzykiem. Wykazano, że ucieleśnione interakcje w znanych czynnościach wspierają relacje, a zmiana pozycji w zabawie jawi się jako korzystna strategia pedagogiczna wspierająca kulturę dzielenia się. Na koniec podkreślono znaczenie obywatelskiego pojęcia *etos* dla społeczności przedszkolnych.

Key words

secure-base relationships, ethos, habitual places, exploration, kindergarten
relacja bezpiecznej bazy, etos, miejsca pobytu, eksploracja, przedszkole

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With the kindergarten teacher in explorative processes

1 Introduction

Education should aim to develop children's personality, talents, and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential (United Nations 1989, article 29). In Norwegian kindergartens, which serve children from around one to five years of age, explorative play has traditionally been regarded as the primary context for such development (Eikset and Ødegaard 2020). However, the fact that some children assume a follower position in play while other children take leading positions, suggests that interactions in kindergartens may reproduce – or even reinforce – linguistic, social, and cultural differences (Karrebæk 2013; Zachrisen 2013). How emotions and relationships are shaped by experiences in early childhood is therefore crucial for the formation of social identity and later participation in society (Bundgaard and Olwig 2018).

In rhetoric, emotions, character, and habitual communication are interrelated aspects of how individuals influence one another in social practice (MacIntyre 2007; Sparrow and Hutchinson 2013). A rhetorical analysis of social practices in kindergarten can therefore offer valuable insights into how social identities are established and negotiated within institutional contexts (Hauser, 2022). Furthermore, the rhetorical tradition may inform the development of new theoretical perspectives by stimulating the construction and reflective analysis of examples (Rennie 2012).

One dominant theory concerning the quality of social interrelationships in early childhood is that of attachment theory (Ainsworth 1969; Bowlby 1997). According to this theory, secure-base relationships established in infancy support children as they form new social relationships and engage in exploration and learning. These primary and enduring bonds are often described metaphorically as a "secure base" from which further exploration can occur. Waters and Petters (2021) emphasise the centrality of this concept, preferring the term "secure-base relationships"

over secure base or attachment. As children develop from infancy, peers become increasingly important as ad hoc secure base figures (Waters and Cummings 2000). Fostering relationships through interactions characterised by sharing is essential for establishing a secure base (Paulus et al. 2016). Moreover, group-oriented caregiving in kindergarten has been associated with child–caregiver attachment security in childcare centres (Ahnert, Pinquart, and Lamb 2006; Ereky-Stevens et al. 2018). Nevertheless, few studies have examined the dynamic interplay between the secure-base metaphor and exploration as rhetorically constituted and mutually interrelated. A detailed description of explorative practices in kindergartens may therefore broaden our understanding of how secure-base relationships are established and maintained in social groups beyond the family.

2 Theory

The teacher is a central interpretive agent in the kindergarten setting. To investigate the relationship between a secure base and exploration in kindergarten groups, we adopted a practice-based approach (Van Beveren 2024). This approach involved a teacher exploring different ways of working with children, enabling us – through a practitioner's perspective – to observe and assess children's participation in interactions, their relationships, and their joint exploration. The process draws on the method of the hermeneutic circle, moving between whole and part to deepen understanding (Rennie 2012). A hermeneutic circle can also include a stage of actions intended to improve the current state. This dual aim of understanding and improvement was pursued through rhetorical listening (Ratcliffe 1999, 2005). Guided by discourse-sensitive self-reflexivity, this approach to the research process starts with open listening and proceeds into rhetorical action. Ratcliffe (1999) therefore characterises rhetorical listening as an *interpretive invention*. In the kindergarten context, this means that practitioners' experiences inform both the planning of actions and the interpretation of children's uptake and participation in these actions, thereby strengthening the validity of the research (Maxwell 1992).

Patterns of habitual communication have been described through the lens of positions in play (Zachrisen 2013, 2018). Drawing on Bourdieu (1991), Zachrisen distinguishes between leading, following, equal, and potential arena positions in play. A leading position typically involves a child exerting significant influence over the content and ideas of the play, while others tend to follow. Equal positions are understood as a dynamic back-and-forth movement, whereas a potential position involves being on the margins of the play arena. Although these positions are situational and temporary, Zachrisen observes that positions tend to persist across

play arenas. While positions in play are established by initiatives in interaction (Zachrisen 2013), the concept of secure-base relationships underlines the emotional aspects of the interaction (Waters and Cummings 2000). To understand the social landscape in which children engage, both theoretical frameworks employ topological metaphors, suggesting that the notion of *place* warrants further discussion.

In rhetorical theory, the concept of place has traditionally been associated with Aristotelian notions of *topos* and the invention of arguments (Garver 1994). However, scholars have also explored *place* in relation to character, habit and emotional states (Miller 1974; Plantin 2004). Miller reflects on the etymological interconnectedness among notions of character (*eethos*), habit (*ethos*) and accustomed places. According to Miller, the Aristotelian states of the soul (*hexis*), represent such accustomed places. The speaker's character is, Miller argues, best revealed by linking representations of character to repeatedly chosen actions. These actions can form desirable habits that, in turn, lead to an emotional state or disposition.

Place, habituation and sociality have also been examined in anthropological theory (Ingold 2022, 442). Ingold argues that the social landscape should not be understood as a set of fixed positions but rather as something continuously reshaped, even as we ourselves are shaped by change. This dual movement involves personally experienced representations of continuity (274), a process he refers to as *wayfinding*. Wayfinding and habituation are two parallel processes that together sustain a sense of place, and which is continuously maintained through experience and imagination (Janowski and Ingold 2012). However, habitual places within social landscapes are complex and dynamic. Cultural geographer Tim Cresswell describes places as polyvocal and changeable, where "the joy in invention, experimentation, and play often gets lost" (Cresswell 2014, 58). This resonates with Reynolds (1993) who emphasises movements between "gathering places" and suggests that *ethos* should be understood as a dynamic construct subject to negotiation.

Contributing to the literature on rhetoric and psychology, Załęska (2019, 239) shows how a nonstrategic mimetic *ethos* can be understood as a "re-*presentation* of the speaker that emerges during speech." In the kindergarten context, a teacher's interaction with a child can be oriented to an extradiscursive *ethos*, while the interpretations associated with the interaction may be seen as formulations of a mimetic *ethos*. Documentation and reflections on a child's positions, relationships, and emotions then constitute a form of discursive *ethos*, displaying character as part of the persuasive patterns of written or oral text.

3 Method

Nyrnes (2007) describes movements between extradiscursive and discursive aspects of the research process as a back-and-forth dynamic among three elements: (a) the material and field of work, (b) the organic, own language, and (c) the theory or systematic language. In our study, we considered the process of creating artefacts and conversational topics in the kindergarten as the field of work and the descriptions of this embodied practice – captured in practice-based narratives developed by the teacher – as the "own language." These practice-based narratives are, within the Norwegian context, a type of learning stories (Knauf 2020) that are used for assessing one's own practice and serve as a tool for professional development (Birkeland 2002). In our study, these narrative accounts of actions and interactions within groups of children, constitutes a collection of examples, presented in the results section of this article. The systematic and theoretical language – concerning how positions in play and relations between characters are depicted in the social landscape of a kindergarten – is addressed in the discussion section. According to Nyrnes, these three types of language and knowledge are interconnected. Theory informs the own language or the current artistic register, but also the creative work itself. Interpretations of the own language as seen in examples from practice, inform theory. By moving among these three sites of knowledge, we can reformulate theory since examples indirectly address more general patterns or a genre (Nyrnes 2007, 19).

4 Context and data collection

Within a university-kindergarten partnership, we aimed to investigate examples of secure-base relationships and exploration in a kindergarten's daily practice. The project was conducted from 2020 to 2022. Through previous quality development on inclusion, the kindergarten management had become aware that children were offered different opportunities in play. Self-assessments indicated that the staff functioned well as a secure base for all children but that there was room for improvement in supporting children during exploratory phases and in helping them challenge their roles and positions in play. Together, we sought ways to facilitate children's participation in conversations and play and to better understand how exploration could influence positions in such interactions.

After initial start-up meetings and literature studies, the kindergarten organised a project work on the universe for three departments, with approximately 18 children aged 3 to 5 years in each department, running from autumn 2020 to spring 2021. Pedagogical leaders in all three departments collaborated on this project, but the results presented in this article are drawn from one department. Child

and Youth Care Workers in that department participated from the outset, enabling a collaborative dialogue among the main actors who interacted with the children.

Several Norwegian studies on children's exploration and the role of staff were read and analysed at the start of the project (Holter and Hov 2017; Hov and Langholm 2019). Munkebye and Langholm (2017) refer to Åberg and Taguchi (2005) and the Reggio Emilia approach (Rinaldi 2021). This pedagogical tradition emphasises the importance of listening skills, developed by following and extending children's expressions and initiatives. Project work should be developed collaboratively with children and take their questions and ideas into account during planning. Based on these studies, the kindergarten teacher prepared guidelines with suggestions for how kindergarten staff could use open-ended questions to encourage children's exploration (Appendix). This notice was displayed in the department throughout the winter of the first year of the project.

To involve children from the outset, the kindergarten teacher collaboratively created a mind map on the theme of the universe. The staff then incorporated the children's ideas into the planning of the project.

The staff discussed and reflected upon their experiences in departmental meetings based on how the children engaged in the project work. Drafts of the narratives presented in this article were also discussed during these meetings. The narratives were later revised and supplemented with reflective sections by the second author. The combination of practice-based narratives and photo documentation provided the basis for written dialogue within the partnership. (Bergersen 2016). The descriptions of the kindergarten's work and the accompanying reflective texts were written by the second author, while the first author was responsible for the remaining parts of this article.

5 Findings from the first year

The initial findings from the project concern the staff's role in exploratory conversations (Skalstad and Munkebye 2021). One such conversation unfolded over two days and is presented below.

5.1 Story 1: Conversations based on the book *Little Frog in Space*

One morning, we read the book *Little Frog in Space* to five children (Strid 2017). We have read the book several times before, and the children know it well. During the reading, we pause to ask questions about certain words, events, and the characters' feelings. This time, the children are particularly interested in the robots in the book.

One of the children asks, “What is a robot?” I ask the children what they think. A child replied, “It has wires inside.” The children seem to be thinking; they grow quiet and look at each other. I ask, “What can a robot do?” A child says, “It can walk and talk.” Then, silence again. I say, “Can the robot think?” The children in unison respond, “No!” Everyone agrees. I then ask, “How do we think?” A child answers, “We think with our brain.”

The children talk together about what the brain is, where it is located, and what it looks like. One child remembers that we have a book about the body with a picture of the brain. We find it, study the illustrations, and read what it says about the brain.

I ask, “Can we think when we sleep?” The children respond, “Yes!” I follow up: “What do we do then?” “We dream,” several children reply.

The conversation then shifts to the children’s dreams, and they share some dreams they have had. The next day, I follow up on the conversation again and ask if they remember what we had talked about, and the children begin sharing their thoughts about dreams:

> Child 1: “Dreams are a thought that flies by.”
>
> Child 2: “I dreamed about a giant spider, as big as the cart; it crawled on me, was poisonous, had scissors on its bum, and pinched my finger. I died; it was good it was just a dream!”
>
> Child 3: “I had a cool dream about a superhero; I could shoot webs!”
>
> Child 4: “I also had that dream!”

The children continue to talk about their dreams. They talk about having different dreams, similar dreams, nice dreams, and scary dreams. We wonder whether it is possible to be together in dreams.

Reflection: I found this to be an exciting conversation that moved from each child wanting to tell their own dream to the children reflecting together on each other’s dreams. Although the starting point was the universe, I felt it was important to focus on what the children showed the most interest in. The conversations about robots and dreams brought out the children’s thoughts and made them reflect together. The conversation shifted from individual stories about their own dreams to discovering similarities — from a focus on individual children to a focus on the group.

The second practice-based narrative begins with a group of 3–4-year-old children who are curious about stars and telescopes.

5.2 Story 2: Creative processes and a telescope

Our department is working on the theme “The Universe,” and six children aged 3–4 years have shown interest in stars and telescopes. Each child makes their own

telescope, and I wanted to engage all of them in sharing what they see. I have previously experienced that some children talk and tell more than do others, and here, I wanted to ensure everyone participated. I asked the question: “What do you see in the telescope?”

Figure A Telescopes made by the children in the project

The children saw different things in their telescopes, such as planets, stars, the moon, and rockets. All of them wanted to tell about what they saw. One child, whom I wanted to bring forward in the group, eagerly talked about everything they saw in their telescopes. Unlike the others, this child talked more about what could be seen through the window: clouds in different colours and shapes, snow, lightning, and thunder. The next day, I chose to build on this child’s interest. We studied pictures and facts about different types of clouds, lightning, thunder, and snow. The other children became interested and participated eagerly in the conversation. As a follow-up, we organized a drawing activity about the weather. I asked if they could tell what they had drawn and wrote it down. The children talked about their own drawings but also showed great interest in each other’s drawings and stories. The story of the child I wanted to highlight is as follows:

> A flower bathing in the rain. Then, there was no rain. Then, the sun came. Another flower then grew. Which bathed in the bathtub. Then, it was my mom and me. We go for a walk. We go for a walk to the water park. Look – I can write “water park” (writes pretend letters). Then, it rained, and so, they had to go inside the house.

Reflection: Focusing on what the children contribute can help bring individual children into the community and thereby strengthen relationships among them.

The child who had shown the most interest in the weather through their telescope – and whom I wanted to bring into focus for the other children – eagerly talked about their own drawing during the follow-up activity.

A third practice story was developed by an assistant in the department. The reflection that follows, however, belongs to the second author of this article.

5.3 Story 3: Conversations between children towards the end of the first project period

The staff in the department carried out a similar process, involving making telescopes and asking the children to describe what they saw through them. One of the goals of these repeated project activities was to ensure that all the children had the opportunity to immerse themselves in the project theme on their own terms.

Figure B The children in the project make rainbow stars

A staff member observed the following conversation among the children:

Child 1: “I can see rainbow stars!”

Child 2 (suddenly and loudly): “There are no rainbow stars!”

Child 3 (looks at Child 2 and responds): “But if she believes there are, then she should be allowed to believe it.”

Child 2: “No! Because you cannot see rainbow stars when they do not exist in the sky!”

Child 3: “Yes, but if she wants to see it in her telescope, then she is allowed to pretend.”

Child 2: “Oh?”

Child 1: “Actually, we can believe different things.”

Reflection: I felt that the children became more aware of each other and learned to express differences in perspective during the project period. The differences expressed in this conversation were framed within a shared context, creating a common focus that helped bring the children closer together.

6 Interim reflections and findings from year two

The project spanned two years, and before the second project period, we paused to consider what we wanted to continue and what we could do differently. A preliminary conclusion was that the entire staff in the department had practiced listening to and engaging with children in exploratory processes—a skill we referred to as "listening strength" (Åberg and Taguchi 2005; Rinaldi 2021). We had worked for an extended period with the theme of the universe, and awareness had grown about the importance of spending time in such exploratory processes. At the beginning of the second project period, we agreed to also investigate the opportunities in shorter exploratory sequences related to the kindergarten's daily routines and spontaneous activities.

Observations in the spring of 2022 revealed a group of children who were generally positive and contributed ideas but did not significantly influence what the group did or talked about. We wanted to bring this group – children who rarely initiated strong play initiatives – more into the centre. These children therefore received more direct support from the kindergarten staff during the second project period. This resulted in a new practice story accompanied by reflection.

6.1 Story 4: From an individual child's impulse to the group's sense of community

We observed that the children remembered their own contributions. We therefore asked some of them what they found most exciting at the moment – whether there was something they were particularly interested in or thinking about often. One child replied: "I think it's so exciting to look at butterflies. I want to see more of what patterns they have on their wings." We decided to follow up on this child's fascination by learning and wondering about butterflies. This activity took place in a group of six children, and fortunately, everyone showed great interest in the topic. The staff informed the group that one child was particularly interested in the patterns on butterfly wings. This child immediately said: "I'm the one who said that!" The child seemed happy, and we had an exciting conversation about the butterfly wing patterns. In the following days, we continued working on the theme of butterflies through conversation, wonder, getting information from books, and creative activities. We wondered together: "What would it be like if I were a butterfly…"

Reflection: Our goal this time was to help quieter children, who were more inclined to follow others, experience that their interests could become the interests of the whole group. It turned out that we did not need to establish a large project to achieve this; the kindergarten day offers many opportunities to incorporate children's contributions and build on them.

7 Discussion: Interpreting and organising examples

In the preceding section, trials and experiences in the kindergarten were described using language aimed at depicting practice while listening to children's emotionally laden expressions. According to Nyrnes (2007), these interactions and processes in kindergarten have been conveyed through the practitioner's and the researcher's "own language". The research process at this stage is characterised by openness – similar to being in a workshop where an as-yet-unknown sculpture gradually emerges as the material is shaped. We now aim to systematise the patterns we see regarding children's positions and relations in exploratory group processes, moving toward what Nyrnes frames as insights embedded within a set of examples.

7.1 Practical activities in the "Workshop"

Children involved in a thematic project on the universe formed the starting point for the exploratory process. However, the themes and activities were not unfamiliar to them; the children engaged in concrete, familiar tasks with a low threshold for participation (Tabors 2008). An important first step in facilitating exploratory processes is to consider what children can do physically – with their hands and feet – and gradually familiarise them with these practical activities. We found that it was easier for the children to share their thoughts when they were asked a question while they were engaged in another activity. In exploring the theme of the universe, these children made rockets out of cardboard boxes, astronauts and telescopes out of toilet paper rolls, and rainbow stars from crepe paper. Drawing and painting, construction work, and time spent reading books provided concrete starting points for conversations in this project. Furthermore, we found it important that these practical, creative activities were introduced to children before the project began. A repertoire of such activities helps children explore themes such as the universe, as it is easier to venture into unknown territory from a familiar starting point. The rich sensorimotor experiences shared by the group became a foundation for emotional bonds or relationships among the children. Therefore, creating something together can be seen as accustoming a place – or, in rhetorical terms, as establishing an intersection of character and habit within a concrete context (Miller 1974).

Another aspect that seemed to support more equal distribution of positions in exploratory processes was finding a balance between creating something together and individually. In the project, we alternated between making joint objects – such as a picture of the moon – and various individual objects, such as telescopes. All the children made telescopes, but each child created their own version. These individual creations provided a basis for sharing ideas. While jointly created objects required negotiation about what to make as a group, the child's own objects encouraged conversations about uniqueness. Both forms of creation can strengthen the experience of being one among others in a group. A broader insight here is that identity is formed through encounters with others and that the development of strong relationships among children is fostered by consciously alternating between what is unique and what is shared (Paulus et al. 2016). Out of consideration for an individual child, we might listen particularly to what that child has to say, but it is only when we take it further – invite other children in and create engagement around one another's ideas – that it impacts the child's self-esteem and the relationships within the group. Group relationships are strengthened by valuing each child's world of thought as unique.

Figure C The moon created collectively by the children in the project

The interplay between collectively created objects with a shared focus and individually crafted items facilitates exploration of different paths within a theme. In the universe project, some children showed interest in stars, planets, the moon, and the sun, while others were drawn to rockets and astronauts. The underlying principle was that every child should feel they had something valuable to contribute to the group.

7.2 Conversations in the "Workshop"

In addition to what the children did in the project, we consider the way kindergarten staff responded to children's contributions in conversations to be crucial. Children's verbal initiative can arise abruptly and may be challenging to understand and follow up on in ways that resonate with the child. The examples described above illustrate some patterns in the kindergarten's conversational practices that are important to consider.

The first point to note is that a theme such as the universe may appear abstract and distant from the children's own world of experience. However, it fosters conversations related to the fundamental experience of being human in the world. The universe cannot be experienced directly as a delimited entity, but it can be made concrete by thematising what it contains. Moving outdoors into the landscape and feeling the weather and wind on the body gives children impressions and experiences that engage the whole person. These experiences can be verbalised in conversations that address individual elements such as light from celestial bodies, the movement of air masses, and the water cycle. Another argument for choosing the universe as a theme is that its very unbounded nature can inspire children's imagination and spur storytelling and exploratory conversations. For these reasons, one can argue that a theme such as the universe is less culture-specific than other, more concrete and bounded natural phenomena can be (Zachrisen 2018).

Nevertheless, some children may have more knowledge about certain natural phenomena than others, and these children may also possess the Norwegian words needed to express their thoughts. Children's diverse linguistic backgrounds can affect their opportunities to participate (Bundgaard and Olwig 2018). Based on our experiences in the project, we found that using concrete artefacts worked particularly well for children who seemed quiet and tended to take a following position, as these objects provided support for verbal exchanges. Furthermore, the shared thematic focus and frequent conversations about the objects the children had made themselves contributed to a collective knowledge base from which all children could benefit.

The collection of examples also illustrates how the staff sometimes managed to ask questions that connected to the children's imaginative world. In Story 2, for instance, the staff asked: "What do you see in your telescope?" As a next step, they wondered together with the children about the fact that everyone saw and talked about different things. The clouds, rain, lightning, and thunder that one child imagined were taken further, and the process ended in a drawing activity accompanied by stories about the drawings. Each child created their own story, while also showing interest in others' stories. We argue that the reasons we were able to highlight the contributions of the child in focus were, first, that the answer

to the open question was grounded in the child's imaginative world and in a theme initiated by the child (Rinaldi 2021). Second, the shared experiences of making telescopes – and the fact that other children also formulated their thoughts about what they saw – supported the children's articulation of their own ideas. This verbal modeling among children, based on shared experiences, illustrates how habituation occurs in a kindergarten and underscores the important role of the group in helping a child realise their potential (Ereky-Stevens et al. 2018).

Another important feature of conversations involving the whole group was persistence in questioning. In Story 1, we see an example of how sustained questioning and waiting long enough for children to respond eventually allowed the conversation to develop further. The second author first asked an open question about what a robot is, but the children became quiet and thoughtful. The question may have been challenging for them. The kindergarten teacher then posed a more concrete follow-up question about what a robot can do. Even though the teacher again allowed the children time to formulate their thoughts, the group remained quiet. It seems that questions that connect to children's own experiences facilitate more active participation in conversation. The teacher first asked whether robots can think and, when the children answered negatively, followed up by asking how we think and whether we think when we sleep. The conversation then shifted to the children's dreams – a topic that was revisited the next day. Creating such shifts in conversation, until the children connect with their own thoughts and experiences, places considerable demands on the kindergarten staff, who must maintain the overall theme while simultaneously improvising and finding new approaches. This requires treating the project theme as a complex construct, consisting of an archipelago of possible sub-themes rather than a linear movement toward a predetermined goal. Additionally, we observed that participation increased when we moved from familiar topics to unfamiliar. Thus, conversational topics can be viewed as places child groups can be invited to inhabit, revisiting them repeatably (Miller 1974).

8 Theoretical discussion – secure-base relationships and exploration

Using the systematised patterns identified in the examples and drawing on theory concerning secure-base relationships and positions in play, we now aim to formulate a description of the social landscape in kindergartens.

Paulus et al. (2016) demonstrate that actions involving giving to others correlate with children's attachment, suggesting that positive relationships among children can be fostered by establishing a culture of sharing in the kindergarten. The examples from the project indicate that kindergarten staff can model such a culture by treating

children's thoughts, imaginations, and creative expressions as valuable, unique, and relevant to others. The creation of artefacts and the embodied, material aspects of familiar group activities sustain this culture of sharing and anchor conversations about imagined topics in tangible, hands-on exploration.

In anthropological theory, bodily engagement with materiality and its possible forms is considered a way of accessing the physical and social world (Ingold 2022). Artefacts are seen as expressions of our imaginative and formative capacities. This merging of impressions and expressions into something practical is what Ingold calls "inhabiting a place" (2022, 48, 517). In our project, the children created objects used in their own play, laying the foundation for social, cultural, and linguistic practices (Ingold 2022, 521). Ingold further argues that when sharing activities are characterised by reciprocity, such actions help strengthen relationships and bonds within a group (2022, 53).

The project results indicate that the process of establishing secure-base relationships and engaging in exploration in kindergarten activities are intertwined movements characterised by habituation and wayfinding (Ingold 2022). The social cohesion provided by habituation cannot be understood without the principled openness and distance that exploration – or wayfinding – entails. The collective and individual movements of children's groups into an unknown landscape enable dialogues and interactions across differences and distances. As Drake et al. (2019) note, there are no sharp boundaries between attachment relationships and social relationships. This suggests that formulations of kindergarten interactions can enrich our understanding of secure-base relationships. The examples have shown that through active facilitation by the kindergarten teacher, exploratory movements characterised by shared experiences can, metaphorically speaking, establish a habitual gathering place. This place is embodied and material, characterised by reciprocity and cohesion, but still an intermediate place. The explorative character of the processes involved reflects the transitory nature of secure-base relationships in kindergarten, indicating that this social base is not stable; it can be lost or transformed into something else. The places that define children's communities are, therefore, not unequivocally "secure." They are better understood as complex and polyvocal, containing potential mechanisms of power and exclusion (Cresswell 2014). Such a polyvocal view of the kindergartens' secure-base relationships is supported by the descriptions in the examples; by taking their point of departure in children's own imagination, the children created something to share with the rest of the group and could move together into new conversational and social territory.

9 Concluding remarks

Aristotle's rhetoric is subordinated to politics rather than ethics (Halloran 1982), and his discussion of *ethos* focuses on how credibility can be established when addressing civic and political questions. In early childhood education, discourses on developing children's potential have been dominated by themes of care and learning (Knauf 2020). However, kindergarten is also a space for civic questions, such as how emotions and relationships are negotiated in communities (Ree and Emilson 2020). In his *Politics*, Aristotle formulates the ideal of living well and living together as two distinct but interrelated ends (Garver 2011). This contingent view of character in relation to civic participation aligns with this article's conception of *ethos* as polyvocal, habitual gathering place characterised by sharing. The constructions of *ethos* as manifested in a teacher's account of social practice aims to connect to an extradiscursive *ethos* (Załęska 2019). Yet Aristotles offers no clear guidance on how communal life should be organised. We argue that when kindergarten staff ensure that children can take on varied positions in conversations and play—and when children's thoughts and contributions are received, valued, and passed on to others – the kindergarten can function as an intermediate secure base from which exploration and learning can take place. If the kindergarten supports 'secure-enough' social relationships, shared exploration can form a foundation for living well and living together within a kindergarten community.

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Appendix: Notice in Kindergarten with Suggested Types of Questions

Questions That Encourage and Expand Conversations

- What do you think?
- I wonder what would happen if…?
- I wonder why?
- What happened when…?
- Can you tell me more about it?
- What else do you know about…?
- How come you know that?
- How can we find it out?
- Do you remember that we have experienced something similar before?

Open Questions:

- What do you think this is?
- Can you say a little more about…?
- What happens if…?
- Can you think about other ways of doing this?

Questions That Invite Children to Observe Carefully:

- Can you see…?
- How does it smell?
- How does it feel?
- What do you think it resembles?
- What is the difference between all these?