

Armchair pedagogy: Embodying caring values in a preschool context

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Abstract: Drawing on a Nordic action research project on values education, this chapter describes a developmental process in one Finnish preschool. The educators worked two years with researchers in order to promote the realisation of caring values and ended up with a practice called “armchair pedagogy”. Armchair pedagogy offers concrete means that enable embodying caring values, such as calming down and engaging in communicating with children, bodily closeness, genuine listening, reciprocity, and prioritising.

Prologue

This is a free play situation in a Finnish preschool. Liisa (a female educator) sits on the floor, helping children to build with Legos. Minni (a girl who is three years, ten months old) comes with toys for doctor play.

Liisa: Do you need a patient?

Minni: You can be my patient.

Liisa: I promised to help with these Legos but you can do some examinations for me.

Minni goes near Liisa. Sanni (a girl who is 3 years, ten months old) sits on a bench and follows their play. Minni strokes Liisa’s arm as if she spreads some cream on Liisa’s skin.

Liisa: Sanni is there waiting for her turn. Do I have some rash?

Minni: You’d put some sun cream by accident.

Liisa: Sun cream by accident! But of course it’s good to have sun cream if the sun shines very much. (Minni begins to use toy scissors.) And is there a need for an operation? Thank you very much! This will certainly recover. But does the doctor notice that there’s a patient waiting for her turn?

Minni goes to Sanni but Sanni does not join the play. Minni continues playing with Liisa.

Liisa: Ahaa, I’ll again get some examinations. It’s very good care in this hospital. (Minni examines Liisa’s back.) Is everything ok with my back? Thank you (stroking Minni’s back)! I wonder whether Sanni would also want to play a doctor. Is it your turn to be a patient?

Minni brings a doll and sits on Liisa’s lap. Sanni takes the doctor’s bag and sits nearby Liisa.

Liisa: Now there are many patients. It seems to be a time for child health care. (Video observation, autumn 2013)

Introduction

The prologue invites the reader to participate in a journey across the diverse landscapes of daily lives in a Finnish preschool. The journey will take the reader to peaceful situations where educators sit on the floor or in an armchair, holding children in their laps, and listening to and communicating with children. The reader will also be brought to situations where the main atmosphere appears as

hurried and stressful: there are many children with few adults, cramped rooms, and restlessness spreading everywhere. The journey is about how educators in one Finnish preschool balanced two different ways of approaching their work. It is a journey about how these educators developed their everyday practices in line with caring values and how they ended up with a practice called “armchair pedagogy”.

This chapter is a multi-voiced narrative about the journey. Space will be given to the educators to tell about their developmental journey. As Bakhtin (1986) notes, voices are seldom individual constructions; rather, all narratives are infiltrated by the cultures of groups and institutions in which individual narrators participate. Thus, there is not only a polyphony of voices from the preschool but also echoes from the early childhood education cultures in Finland. Moreover, researchers’ voices are present in this narrative: the educators’ journey might be different if the researchers’ journeys had not intersected those of educators. We researchers are responsible for re-telling this narrative as a written chapter; we have read and interpreted the research material co-constructed during the journey; and we have chosen the excerpts from the research material. The educators have contributed to this chapter by reading and commenting on the text.

In addition to the educators and researchers, the chapter contains voices from previous research on caring values and early childhood education. The developmental journey will be reflected on in the light of two theoretical and philosophical starting points – Nel Nodding’s ideas on caring ethics and Martin Buber’s philosophy of dialogue. These voices connect the educators’ developmental journey to fundamental questions of education and human life: how to engage in dialogical relations with young children? How to work as a caring educator in daily educational practices? How to embody caring values?

Introducing the context and co-travellers

Raisa: I remember when I first heard about this project. There was a meeting at the university when Anna-Maija told about the project. We remained listening and thought that this is a good project.

Liisa: We asked if the others are interested in the project in our preschool. And we decided that yes, we will participate. (Discussion 2.5.2013)

An action research project on values education in Nordic preschools provided a broad frame for the journey described in this chapter. The project was based on notions that values form a crucial though largely neglected area in early childhood education research and practice (Emilsson & Johansson, 2009). As typical for action research studies, the aim of the project was twofold: to generate knowledge about values education in preschools and to support and challenge educators’ work with values (Kemmis, 2009).

This chapter provides insights into the developmental journey in one Finnish preschool. The whole staff participated in the project, even though one group served as a research group. In practice, two female educators of the research group (pseudonyms Liisa and Raisa) functioned as promoters of the project in the preschool community. The director (pseudonym Maria) had a crucial role in

organizing the collaboration between staff and researchers.¹ The group of researchers consisted of four researchers from the University of Oulu; Anna-Maija, Eila, Jaana, and Elina. Anna-Maija was the researcher who mostly accompanied the educators of this preschool during their developmental journey. However, there was a tight collaboration within the research group and all researchers met educators from all the four preschools that participated in the ValuEd project.

The educators and researchers engaged in an intensive, collaborative two-year process between 2013 and 2015. Inspired by the ideas of participatory action research, we attempted to create collaboration that went beyond the dichotomous juxtaposing between researchers' theoretical and educators' practical expertise (Kemmis 2009; Madsen 2013; Pascal & Bertram 2012). Rather than using a hierarchical top-down research design, special attention was given to building mutual trust and equality between the educators and the researchers (Madsen, 2013). The following excerpt from the beginning of the journey reveals how the roles and tasks of both parties were clarified.

Liisa: All staff members believe that this [values education] is an important theme. Still we all wonder what kinds of expectations you researchers have towards us. Are we able to meet your expectations?

Anna-Maija: I'd like to say that we don't expect anything special. Or let's say, we expect that you will participate in the project, and that it's you who develop your own work. We'll have common discussions and that's the way we researchers can peep into your daily lives. (. . .) We hope that the project will be useful for you and it will become our common issue. (Discussion 2.5.2013)

The educators were responsible for deciding the direction of the journey, that is, the value field or the topic they wanted to focus on in the action research process. The researchers' task was to support and challenge the educators work by maintaining the discussion in the preschool community and giving food for thought with brief presentations and exercises.

As noted by Kemmis (2009), collaboration between researchers and educators requires opening a communicative space where they can transform the social world together. In our case, narratives were employed as a means of opening the mutual communicative space (Caine, Estefan & Clandinin, 2013). We consciously created "stopping points" during the journey where the educators were encouraged to tell stories about their daily lives, to listen to others' stories, and to perform stories (see Madsen 2013; Stuart 2012). They were also challenged to create counter stories: what could be done differently in the daily pedagogical practices? How to take further steps in the developmental journey? We gathered materials throughout the journey by tape-recording discussions, video-taping daily situations, and writing diaries. All this material has been utilized in this re-told narrative about the journey.

Caring values as a direction and a theoretical ground of the journey

At the beginning, the educators had a task to choose the direction of the journey, that is, to choose a value field or a theme that they felt important to explore and further develop. The following excerpt

¹ Other participants than Maria, Liisa and Raisa, are referred to as "an Educator".

from Anna-Maija's research diary illustrates how "*encountering, co-presence, and listening*" was identified as the developmental theme in the second meeting of the educators and researchers.

(...) We moved on to talk about the developmental theme of this preschool. We reminisced what was talked about in the first common meeting. The educators had a chance to chat for a while in small groups about what they viewed as an important theme to develop. These ideas were shared all together and included: encountering children in a positive and friendly way, preventing bullying and exclusion, empathy, sensitivity, listening to children, and behaving as a role model for children. Someone suggested that the theme should be positive in spirit. We suggested that the common theme could be "encountering, co-presence, and listening". Moreover, we proposed that each group could approach this theme from their own angle; for instance, from the perspective of preventing bullying or listening to children. The educators accepted this suggestion. (Research diary 17.9.2013)

Even though the educators did not explicitly mention *caring values*, the chosen theme had a similar ethos to what has been written about caring values in the previous research literature. Caring as a value field has been connected with attributes, such as attentiveness to children's needs, concern for others' needs and well-being, responsiveness, empathy, emotionality, listening, and love towards others (Noddings, 2010, 2012; also Broström, 2006; Emilson and Johansson, 2009; Estola, 2003; Goodman, 2008; Shin, 2014; Taggart, 2011; 2016).

Many researchers and educators have been inspired by Noddings' ideas of caring ethics. Noddings, in turn, draws from Buber's philosophy on dialogue. Both Buber's and Noddings' basic assumption is *relationality* as a fundamental condition of human life. For Buber, there is no "I" as such but human existence occurs in the realm between two or more persons through relations (Buber 1923/1984; 1947/2002). Noddings (2012) puts the relational starting point as follows: "Every human life starts in relation, and it is through relations that a human individual emerges" (p. 771). As the excerpt from the research diary earlier shows, the educators took the initiative to develop their educational practices from the viewpoint of human relations.

Noddings' and Buber's ideas provide a fertile ground for understanding the values that were in the forefront during the journey. The basic idea in Buber's (1923/1984; 1947/2002) philosophy is that there are two primary attitudes for human beings to encounter the world: monological *I-It* and dialogical *I-You* relations. In *I-It* relations, one encounters another one as an object, and the communication between human beings is impersonal or non-personal; the other is not treated as an equal person. *I-You*, in contrast, is a dialogical relation of two persons, characterized by openness, immediacy, connection, mutuality, and co-presence. In dialogical relations, there is no intention to control or influence each other; rather, the basis of dialogue is co-presence, turning towards the other with a body and "with the soul" (Buber, 1947/2002, p. 25). This contains an attempt to understand the reality from the other's viewpoint.

Caring ethics focuses on caring relations that are created in encounters between *a carer* and *a cared-for* (Noddings, 2012). As with Buber, Noddings emphasizes that dialogue is fundamental for building caring relations. What is then dialogue? It is worth nothing that dialogue in the Buberian

sense does not necessarily require words – it can occur in a silence. Respectively, all conversations do not meet Buber’s idea of dialogue; there are monologues disguised as dialogues, “in which two or more men², meeting in space, speak each with himself” (Buber 1947/2002, p. 22). While Buber seldom explicitly addresses listening, Noddings (2012) highlights listening as a crucial part of caring relations (see Gordon, 2011). The challenge for an educator is to listen to the children and engage in dialogue with them. As Noddings (2012) puts it: “We must listen, not just ‘tell’, assuming that we know what the other needs” (p. 773).

Noddings’ and Buber’s ideas challenge us to look at the power relations between children and adult educators. They both view the child-educator relation as an equal one but avoid falling into extreme child-centeredness. Noddings (2012) recognises that adult educators can do things that cannot be expected from children. Nevertheless, there is reciprocity; both parties contribute to creating and maintaining caring relations. A child’s response to an educator’s caring behavior is of significance; “He may simply pursue an agreed-upon project with renewed energy, ask further questions, or smile or nod” (p. 772). As Noddings (2012) notes, educators sometimes forget how dependent they are on children’s responses.

Also Buber (1947/2002) criticizes both the “new” and the “old” principles of education, the former referring to progressive, child-centered ideas based on freedom, and the latter to adult-centered ideas based on compulsion and power over children. If the emphasis is on educators’ side, there is a tendency to slip into I–It relations; educators provide facts and information to children but do not support their creativity. On the other hand, emphasising too much children’s side makes I–You relations difficult to establish, since children are left alone, lacking proper guidance from the educators. Buber suggests that dialogue provides an approach that contains an appropriate weight on both children’s and educators’ side. In a dialogical relation, an educator’s task is to create and maintain genuine contact and mutual trust, to experience the other side, and help children to realise what it means to be a human being. (Buber, 1947/2002; see Morgan & Guilherme, 2012.)

Travelling in-between two cultural narratives

During the journey, the educators attempted to put dialogical, caring relations into practice; to make encountering, co-presence, and listening into the daily practices of life. This was more easily said than done. After choosing the developmental theme, the educators’ task was to develop their practices in line with their theme, that is, to search for concrete means to engage in dialogical relations. Moreover, the researchers asked the educators to document their experiences during the process. As the following excerpts reveal, there was both enthusiasm and resistance among the educators.

We researchers suggested the educators to document their everyday practices in each group of children. Some educators seemed eager to follow our suggestion, others not. One educator said: “I feel anxious because of the tasks related to this project. We are extremely busy. We don’t have time for extra tasks before the next meeting.”
(Research diary 17.9.2013)

² Buber uses the term “man” when referring to human beings of both genders.

Raisa: In our group, we were really keen for the project. We tried to say to the others that, please, come along, this is a great affair! And there was probably a little bit of resistance. (Discussion 12.11.2014)

From the very beginning of the journey, we researchers had a feeling that the educators had two different ways to narrate the everyday life in the preschool. Beside narratives that echoed honest willingness to promote dialogical relations, we heard narratives about deep tiredness. Both types of narratives were cultural in a sense that they were intertwined in common discussions rather than provided by individual educators. As highlighted in the previous research literature, culture provides a shared meaning-system for individual narrators – a system that reflects the cultural themes and beliefs of the community (Heikkinen, Huttunen, Syrjälä, 2007; Tuval-Mashiach, 2014). Usually individual narrators are not conscious of how cultural narratives influence their narrating; cultural narratives are to be identified from the bottom-up by listening to, reading, and interpreting many different narratives told in the cultural community (Tuval-Mashiach, 2014). This was also the case on our journey. By reading and interpreting the material produced during the journey, we researchers identified two kinds of cultural narratives that penetrated the discussions in the preschool.

On the one hand, there were narratives in which the ethos was in accord with Buberian dialogue and Nodding's ideas on caring relations. In line with Buber (1947/2002), the educators highlighted co-presence and creating reciprocal relations between adults and children. Similar to Noddings (2010; 2012) they referred to attentiveness and receptiveness to the children's needs and interests as a core of their professional values. The following excerpts provide examples of these types of narratives.

Liisa: I try to be interested in children's issues. There's nothing more than "What kind of ballon do you have", "Have you really had soft drinks at home?", or "Did your grandmom bake unpalatable buns? My goodness, didn't she have fine sugar?" (laughing). I try to be involved. (Discussion 2.5.2013)

Raisa: Genuine listening to children, being really at the same level and listening to what the child wants and needs. Responding to the children's needs, it's truly our work. (Discussion 2.5.2013)

On the other hand, there were counter-narratives about hurry, tiredness, and increasing pressures of the work in preschools. The educators experienced demands of the organisation that made it difficult for them to embody caring relations in their everyday practice. In line with some previous studies, the educators experienced their working conditions as challenging (e.g., Alvestad, Bergem, Eide et al., 2014; Baker & Dever, 2005; Puroila, 2002). As the following excerpts show, the educators struggled with big groups of children, lack of time and resources, as well as increasing paperwork put on their shoulders by the organisation.

Educator: Undone tasks bother and cause anxiety, and one cannot concentrate on anything. All kinds of papers must be filled in. In addition, there are different networks, working with partners, and this project. We are away from the group of children around 40 percent of our working time. (Discussion 11.3.2014)

Liisa: *Sometimes I become angry because I think that these children are crammed like sardines in a pot. We have big groups, unpractical spaces, we must work without substitutes, and it's challenging to have many children with special needs. Sometimes I feel that the child's voice and respecting childhood is not so important [for the decision makers]. (Discussion 2.5.2013)*

The journey proceeded with small steps in between two cultural narratives. After collaborating for one year, there was a turning point on the journey. The following excerpt is from a stopping point where the significance of an *armchair* came out for the first time.

Liisa: *There's a tendency that we adults determine what should be done. We've tried to listen to what the children want. For instance, how they'd like to build a hut, but not into the corner, which would be the best place from the adults' perspectives.*

Raisa: *This requires understanding that we must sit on the floor. Then we've the armchair, which is our best friend nowadays. We've permission to sit on the arm chair and listen to the children. (Discussion 11.3.2014)*

Anna-Maija captured “the armchair” from the fleeting discussion and suggested that “*armchair pedagogy*” could cover the practices and values around which the journey was whirling. From this event on, armchair pedagogy was in the forefront in the common meetings of the educators and the researchers.

Armchair pedagogy: discoveries from the journey

Only sitting?

A critical point on the journey was when the educators discovered that they are not lazy if they sit down. Rather they found that armchair pedagogy – calming down and engaging in listening and communicating with children – is crucial for their professional values. In line with previous studies, the educators experienced a tension between different values in their daily work (Alvestad et al., 2014; Puroila & Haho, 2017). On the one hand, there were implicit values highlighting effectiveness as a criterion of a good educator. An effective educator was considered as one who is moving all the time, monitoring, and controlling what the children are doing. On the other hand, the educators attempted to develop their work towards encountering, co-presence, and listening to children, which was contrasted with the values of effectiveness (Buber, 1923/1984; 1947/2002; Noddings, 2012). Hence, the educators struggled between two ethical positions referred to as the monological I–It relations and dialogical I–You relations in Buber's philosophy (Gordon, 2011). The following excerpt shows the tension between the two ethical positions.

Raisa: *I've felt guilty when sitting on the floor and doing what I really should do, what I have been educated for, where the core of this all is. And then the door opens, someone enters the room, and I have a feeling as if I was pointed an accusing finger that I look lazy. That I am **only** [emphasizing the word] sitting there. “Hey, please go to help another group!” Of course, we must help other groups but could the others also calm down and sit on the floor? (Discussion 12.11.2014)*

During the journey, the educators became aware of the implicit values, such as effectiveness, that prevented them from engaging in dialogical relations with children. The educators openly discussed the guilt and bad conscience they had experienced when "only" sitting. They dared to change their ways of thinking and working. The project also seemed to be of importance; when committing to the project the educators had "official" permission to transform their practices: to think differently, to act differently, and to relate to each other differently (see Kemmis, 2009).

Bodily closeness

First, the educators allowed themselves to *sit down*, which required breaking down both one's own and mutual ways of working in the preschool. Reducing rushing and sitting down enabled the educators to encounter the children face-to-face, get eye contact, and create *bodily closeness*, which all have been considered important prerequisites for dialogical relations (Broström, 2006; Einarsdóttir, 2011; Hännikäinen, 2015; Puroila, 2002). As Buber (1947/2002) argues, the basis of dialogue is co-presence, turning towards the other physically and mentally. A recent study shows several significant functions connected with an educator's lap, such as promoting children's safety and emotional well-being, creating affective bonds, enhancing reciprocal interaction, and promoting the development of children's self-confidence and their academic learning (Hännikäinen, 2015). The following excerpt shows that the educators in this preschool viewed the bodily closeness as an important aspect in child-educator relations.

Liisa: We hold the children in the lap almost always, depending on the situation, of course. Holding in the lap and touching, helping and saying that you're a nice chum in passing.

Raisa: When sitting on a sofa with a child, smoothing a little in this way (shows), the child may take the hand and say "smooth again"! (Discussion 21.5.2014)

Similar to previous research, the educators highlighted the embodied nature of child-adult relations; touching, smoothing, hugging, and holding children in their laps (Hännikäinen, 2015). They were against a view of an educator who remains distantly in the corner of the room and only monitors and controls children (see Alvestad et al., 2014). Even though the educators highlighted the bodily closeness, they also acknowledged the pedagogical tactfulness required when touching children (Broström, 2006). They wanted to respect every child's privacy and be sensitive to how each child experienced touching.

Raisa: The children, even our big boys, these biker-mice who pretend to be so macho and clap their braces, they're the ones who mellow when we smooth them. They really like it, but of course not all of them. Someone may say that you don't need to smooth when we're going to have our naps. We ask because this is so private an issue, do you want me to smooth. You don't need. We must respect everyone's boundaries. (Discussion 21.5.2014)

Genuine listening - the need for big ears

In principle, the bodily closeness provides opportunities for encountering and listening to children. As noted in interactional studies, encounters require conditions where the interlocutors are in a

visual and aural range of each other (Puroila, Estola, Syrjälä, 2012). Being physically too far apart does not enable educators to encounter and listen to children. However, the journey revealed that creating beneficial conditions for listening does not go far enough. In dialogical relations, listening goes beyond mere hearing what one says (Buber, 1947/2002). Gordon (2011) argues that genuine listening requires listening to the meanings behind the words and remaining open to being influenced by the other. Moreover, genuine listening is not restricted to the others' words but also to what faces and bodies are conveying. "In fact, a glance, a look, or a gaze that meets the eyes of another person is sometimes enough for dialogue to emerge" (Gordon, 2011, p. 214).

Genuine listening was what the educators attempted to attain. In a meeting where the educators were asked to reflect on and visualize their experiences on encountering, being present, and listening to children, the educators of the research group drew a figure of a human face with extremely big ears (Figure 1).

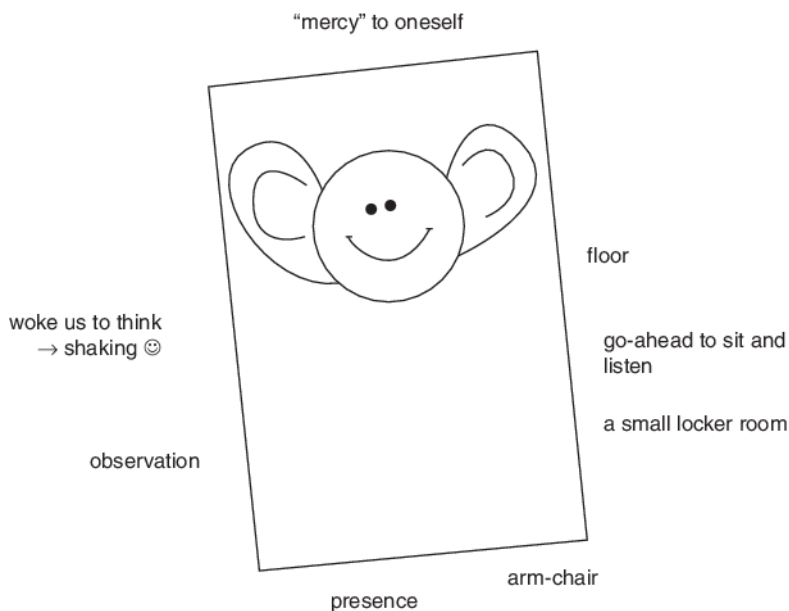


Figure 1. The need for big ears.

When introducing this figure, the educators said that they need extremely big ears. "Big ears" was a metaphor referring to the challenges of listening; listening to many individuals in a group of children, listening to the meanings behind the words, and listening both verbal and non-verbal modes of communication (Kinnunen & Einarsdóttir, 2013; Puroila, Estola, & Syrjälä, 2012). As Rinaldi (2008) remarks, we do not listen just with our ears, but with all senses; sight, touch, smell, and with our body. Noddings (2012) highlights that in caring relations listening to children involves emotions; sympathy, empathy, responsiveness, and sensitiveness are considered as moral emotions that need to be cultivated (see Held, 2006).

When reflecting on their listening to children in practice, the educators found themselves often interrupting children and being impatient in listening to what the children were expressing. The educators made an important point that, as adult educators, they tend to speak a lot. This is also the

role traditionally typecast for educators; the educator-child relations have long been viewed as one-sided educator-child knowledge transferring (Palmgren-Neuvonen & Korkeamäki, 2015). The educators noted this tendency and discovered that they need to *speak less* in order to listen to children.

Raisa: Genuine listening is my priority. That I'm not dominating with my speech, I'd like to learn from issues told by others. This is what I consider very important. (Discussion 2.5.2013)

Along with speaking less, the educators attempted to give more space to children and *respect their initiatives*. The episode presented in the prologue provides an example of how the educators engaged in dialogue with the children. In the free play situation, the bond between Liisa and the children was maintained through bodily closeness, co-presence, verbal interaction, and joint activities. Liisa seemed to be engrossed and receptive to the children's interests, which has been considered important for dialogical and caring relations (Buber 1923/1984; 1947/2002; Noddings, 2010; 2012). She *listened to the children with many senses*: she reacted positively to Minni's verbal suggestion to join the doctor play, but she also paid attention to Sanni who was sitting quietly on a bench. There was emotionality in the listening, empathy, and an attempt to understand the situation from the children's point of view.

Later on, the educators were offered an opportunity to look at the video-taped situation and talk about it. When looking at the video, the educators recalled and reflected on how encountering, co-presence, and listening were realized in that situation.

Liisa: There were Minni and Sanni. I noticed that Sanni is a little bit timid, that she maybe didn't want to be a patient but a doctor. I don't remember exactly but I guess I assumed that Sanni would now be a doctor (...)

Raisa: I think that Liisa was fully involved in that situation (...) You were present. (...) Listening to children is obvious (...) I'd like to have been a child in that situation when someone is sitting near. (...) There is no need to say anything, there is this kind of smoothing (shows). I know that Minni felt that Liisa likes her. (Discussion 21.5.2015)

The previous excerpt shows that Liisa had some pedagogical purposes in the situation. Her aim was to support Sanni's engagement in common play. This notion highlights that not only the formal, pre-planned, adult-directed activities are pedagogical by nature, but also informal encounters between educators and children can serve similar purposes (cf. Alvestad et al., 2014). While engaging in dialogical relations, Liisa was able to proceed in line with the educational goals set by the curriculum (see Noddings, 2012).

Reciprocity - I listen to you and you listen to me

As highlighted by Buber (1947/2002) and Noddings (2012), engaging in dialogical relations does not mean giving way to children's every wish nor diminishing adults' significance and educational responsibility. Rather, dialogical relations require balancing children's and adults' parts in the

encounters. Even though the educators of this study mainly addressed how they listened to children, they also drew attention to how the *children listened to the adults and each other*. As the following excerpt reveals, they trusted that the children would follow the adults' example in the patterns of interaction.

Liisa: The children have learned that they are listened to, and they also learn to listen. If they are not listened to, we can't require that they should be able to listen. (Discussion 2.5.2013)

The educators emphasized that the children need to learn to wait for their turn in a group of children. They also noted that the children progressed in listening during the year. Moreover, the educators saw that the children had adopted a caring attitude towards other children. The following excerpt shows the joy and satisfaction adults experienced when children showed empathy and helpfulness towards each other.

Raisa: We had a weather that required specific clothes because of the mud, and it was difficult for the youngest children to get dressed. We said to the older ones 'who could help us', and it was great that the older went to help the smaller ones, even put their shoes on. It was so endearing moment! (...) It's taking care of one another. (Discussion 20.5.2014)

Although there were several successful examples of listening during our joint journey, the challenge for genuine listening seemed to be always present in the educators' daily work. The following episode, told by Raisa, provides an example.

Raisa: I remember one girl who tried to draw an adult's attention. The adult didn't respond fast enough. The girl snorted: "You've always said that listen to me and then you don't listen to me yourself." (Discussion 23.2.2016)

Prioritizing – what is important?

The journey challenged the educators to go to the basics of the educational work. Identifying two cultural narratives – narratives about unhurried presence and narratives about hurry – enabled the educators to recognize their preferred values and see how the current working conditions confronted their values. Along the journey, some educators begun to *question what makes the hurry*.

Raisa: What makes the hurry? It's up to ourselves whether we want to change the issues and think over what to do and when. Could we do other tasks in particular days and be with children all the other time, instead of everything being outspread all the time? The negative atmosphere reaches the colleagues and the children. (Discussion 12.11.2014)

The educators discovered that their sense of hurriedness was not only due to the lack of time and resources but also produced by the adults themselves. This notion is in line with Puroila's (2002) study that discussed different ways to relate to resources; to consider resources as an absolute, unquestionable set of limiting factors, or to turn the gaze to how the available resources are used. As the previous excerpt reveals, some educators were able to move from complaining how busy

they are to critically explore the adults' role in making them hurry. Stepping back to think about the origins of their being hurried helped the educators to find out solutions for diminishing the sense of hurriedness.

Raisa: It's the adults who make the hurry. It's easy to explain hurry with the several tasks to be done; the phone is ringing off the hook, there is so much paper work, there is lack of staff, the group sizes are so big, and different deadlines coming. This list could be run forever. We began to think about these tasks together. We concluded that none of the tasks could prevent us from being present for the children. We pondered together how to take time to these other tasks and after all, it was not difficult. It just requires organising and prioritising; discussing honestly. We took seriously the tasks that prevented us from co-presence and found time for completing them. (...) It should be remembered for what and whom we are working in the preschool. We always concluded with the same answer: We are for the children. (A text written by Raisa, spring 2016)

The educators recognised that they can influence the way they work, even though the circumstances are to some extent imposed on them (Puroila & Haho, 2017). As Raisa highlights in the excerpt above, they can prioritize and organise their work in order to be able to concentrate better on their work with children. For instance, the educators *distributed tasks and responsibilities* and they *centralised the paper work and networking* onto some specific days. In this way, they could settle down with the tasks that they felt the most important.

Putting the discoveries together

The ideas about armchair pedagogy developed between the educators and the researchers during the journey. The sprouts of the armchair pedagogy were present even in our first meetings. What happened on the journey was that the educators became more conscious about their values, and they experienced the empowerment to live by their values.

Raisa: This [armchair pedagogy] isn't a new idea for us. There have been no big aha-moments. But this has shaken us, invoked our thinking, and probably those ideas that we already had, they have gained strength. (Discussion 11.3.2014)

The educators appreciated the researchers' part in the collaboration. The researchers' role in the journey was to move between the practical and conceptual spheres and to help the educators to verbalise their tacit knowledge. Researchers were like critical friends who prompted, made questions, and supported the educators. The journey re-told in chapter taught us that when transforming education, there are times when it is hard to know where to go or what there will be at the end of the journey (Elbaz-Luwisch, 2005). It is also obvious that there is no end to the journey, only stopping points. On this journey, researchers at their best can walk along the educators. By travelling a joint journey, we could outline the following picture that gathers together the core elements of armchair pedagogy (Figure 2).

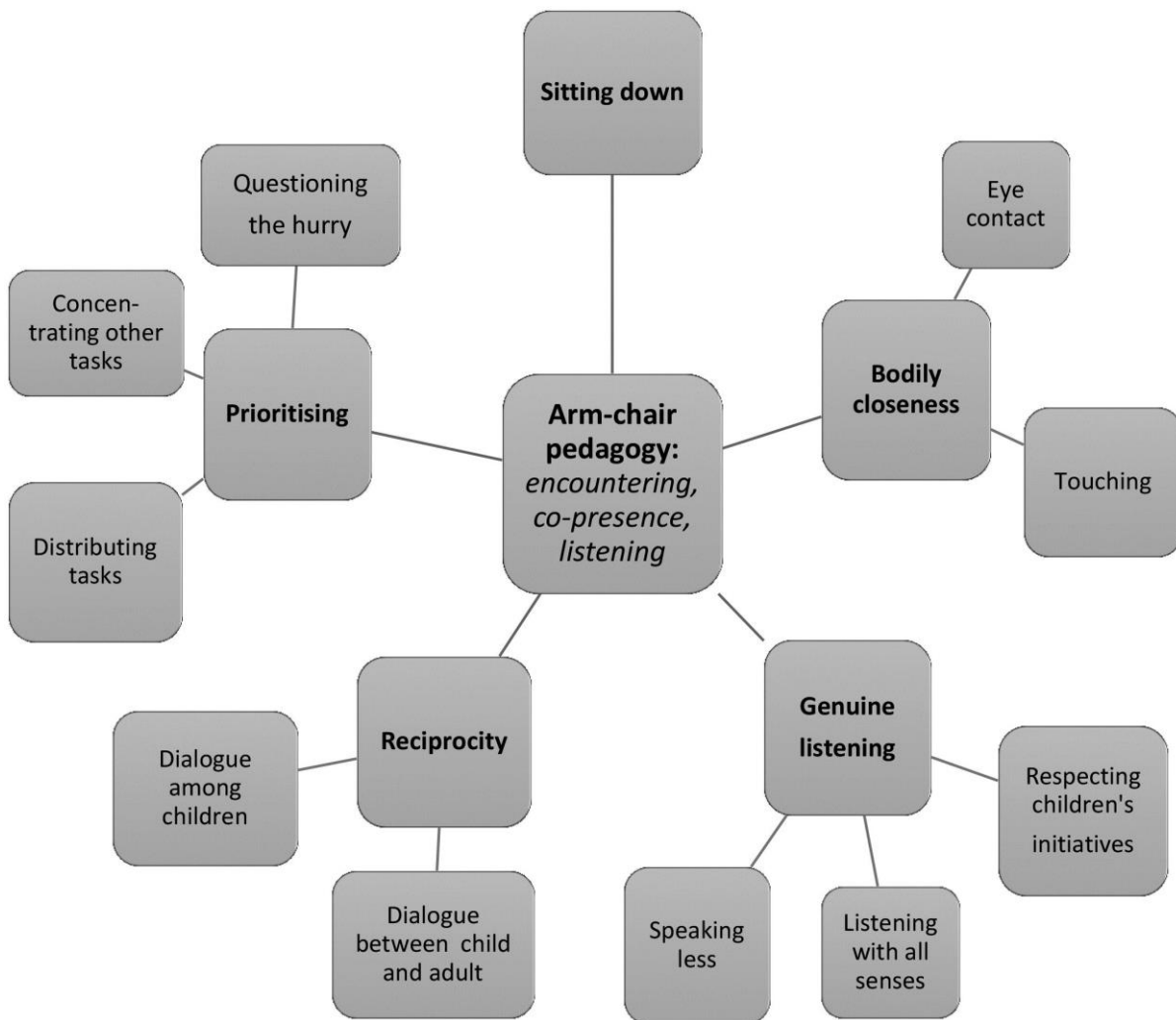


Figure 2. Embodying caring values through armchair pedagogy

Concluding remarks

"Care is both value and practice" (Held, 2006, p. 9).

This chapter has offered a narrative about a developmental journey in one Finnish preschool. Neither the educators nor we researchers argue that this journey is directly transferrable to other contexts. However, we suggest that the discoveries from the journey can give inspiration to educators and researchers beyond the research context. The topics and values that were in the forefront, such as encountering, co-presence, listening, hurry, and the pressures of work, are relevant throughout the world. The caring values and care-related themes are discussed by researchers in many countries (Bath 2013; Broström 2006; Emilson and Johansson, 2009; Estola, 2003; Harwood, Klopper, Osanyin & Vanderlee, 2012; Löfdahl & Folke-Fichtelius, 2015; Shin, 2014; Taggart, 2011; 2016; Van Laere, Peeters, & Vandenbroeck, 2012).

In early childhood education literature, care and caring appear as confusing and contradicting concepts. We suggest that one reason for the confusion is that the terms involve many different meanings. First, care sometimes refers to the *function of early childhood education* at the system level (Einarsdóttir et al., 2015). Care in this meaning addresses the question for what purposes the early childhood education services are: to allow the children's parents to participate in the work force of the society (care), or to provide children opportunities to get professional guidance in their growth, development, and learning (education). The division between care and education is especially clear in societies where the early childhood education system represents a split model – the child care for younger children and education for older ones are provided separately (e.g., Harwood et al., 2013). The integrated *educare* models as such, however, seem not to solve the tensions between care and education. For instance, Niikko (2006) argues that the Finnish version of *educare* “has been more about separating education and care than about unifying them” (p. 155). The basic function of early childhood services involves many politically and professionally tricky questions, such as qualifications of staff, the scope of the early childhood work, and the status of early childhood education (Broström, 2006; Onnismaa & Kalliala, 2010).

Second, the concept of care is used to refer to educators' *concrete activities*, often called basic care. For instance, Broström (2006) notes that care is associated with practical actions that aim to promote children's security and well-being by protecting children and meeting children's needs for food, rest, and human interaction. A recent Nordic study reveals that the national curriculum guidelines of early childhood education employ the meaning of care as fulfilling children's basic needs regarding taking care of their health, nutrition, movement, and rest (Einarsdóttir et al., 2015).

In this study, however, our primary interest has been neither on care as a function of early childhood education system nor on basic care activities. Rather, we have approached caring as a *value field*. Informed by the theoretical ideas of Buber's dialogue and Noddings' caring ethics, we have been interested in how caring values are realised in child-educator relations in the daily practices of preschools. In our view, the scope of caring values is much broader than basic care routines. Caring as a value may be present in all kinds of situations and activities. On the contrary, taking care of children's needs or basic care routines do not guarantee the realisation of caring values. The crucial question is what kind of relationship emerges between a child and an educator. Is there a monological relation where the child is “observed, classified, measured, or analysed as an object, not encountered as a whole person” (Johannesen, 2000, p. 153)? Or is there dialogue that occurs “between persons who accept and affirm one another's unique otherness” (Morgan & Guilherme, 2012, p. 9)?

Previous research has shown that values form a challenging area in educational work. On the one hand, it is difficult for the educators to identify values that are communicated in the pedagogical practices (Puroila, Johansson, Estola, Broström, & Emilson, 2016; Thornberg, 2008). On the other hand, educators' ability to articulate values at an abstract and conceptual level does not guarantee that these values are realized in the pedagogical practices. Van Manen (2000), among others, argues that discourses of education tend to be “overly rationalistic, scientific, corporatist, managerial, and narrowly result-based” (p. 315). He argues that the conceptual models and professional discourses are not always the best possible means to support educators' attempts to develop their daily

practices. He calls for ethics-sensitive language; language that is sensitive to the way pedagogical relationships are lived and experienced. (Van Manen, 2000.) On our journey, care and caring have not been abstract principles that are far from education at grass roots level; rather, armchair pedagogy provides a concrete example of embodying caring values in the daily practices of preschools. Armchair pedagogy is based on the lived and experienced relationships in a preschool context. This chapter has provided space for educators to tell about their lived life in their own language. Thus, this chapter responds to the challenge raised by Van Manen (2000).

The ideas of armchair pedagogy crystallized in between two different types of narratives regarding time. On the first hand, there were narratives about hurry that echo *the lack of time*. On the other hand, *having enough time* – an unhurried presence – was considered a basis for realising the caring values. Hence, time emerged as a crucial but tension-filled aspect of the journey. Doubtless, there were increasing demands directed to the educators from inside and outside the preschool community. At the same time, it was obvious that the question was not only about declined working conditions but also how the educators reacted towards these conditions. Even though the objective amount of time (24 hours in a day) was equal for all educators, some educators' subjective sense of time affluence increased when applying the ideas of armchair pedagogy.

One of the main lessons of the journey was that unhurried presence is not unattainable: the educators could find means to re-organise their tasks in accordance with caring values. Another significant lesson was acknowledging the meanings of materiality when considering lived values in early childhood education. As a physical item, the armchair possessed both concrete and symbolic meanings. The armchair invited the educators to sit down, not rush around, and remain close to children. Moreover, the armchair served as a reminder of what is valuable in early childhood education: encountering, co-presence, and listening to children.

Epilogue

Anna-Maija visited the preschool to discuss what is going on one year after the joint journey. She was told that Raisa and Liisa are working in different groups of children. According to Raisa, armchair pedagogy has remained seed to smoulder and grow in the preschool community. Raisa and Liisa are convinced of the benefits of armchair pedagogy. Armchair pedagogy has touched their colleagues more or less. The narratives about hurry have not disappeared from the preschool community. However, many colleagues are interested in armchair pedagogy in the preschool and beyond. The director, Maria, also supports armchair pedagogy and aims to encourage the personnel to apply the ideas more systematically in every group. A concrete indication of that is that armchairs have been purchased for every group of children in the preschool.

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