

Traditional work on child development is often based on notions of an individual and decontextualized child. *Children, Childhoods, and Everyday Life: Children's Perspectives, Second Edition* involves a contribution to the rethinking of development: it presents a number of situated studies where children's perspectives are documented through their interaction with others in situated practices, in family life and school and across social contexts.

This volume offers a *toolkit* for analyzing children's perspectives and participation over time. In prior work, the interview has often been seen as the cardinal method—or the only method—for studying children's perspectives. This anthology includes vignettes and case studies, with descriptions of children's actions in situated activity settings as well as illustrative transcripts from video-recorded social interaction. It opens up toward a broader view of "development" in that it documents how children's and youths' perspectives and agency can be studied through their ways of interacting (or not interacting) in everyday life. One aspect of this is their verbal and nonverbal *participation* in family life and the social landscape of schools. Another feature is that it involves several chapters that problematize "impaired practices" and dilemmas in the teaching of children with dysfunctions. *Children, Childhoods, and Everyday Life* as a whole is rich in empirical ethnographic examples that highlight life trajectories in and across social contexts.

Moreover, it features interview data and narratives that include children's and youths' own reflections on their lives and experiences of the social demands of family and school. This includes their own thoughts on *being* or *becoming* members of local communities.

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Karin Aronsson, Mariane Hedegaard, Charlotte Højholt, and Oddbjørg Skjær Utvik

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CHAPTER 1

RETHINKING DEVELOPMENT

Situated Studies of Children's
Perspectives

Karin Aronsson
Mariane Hedegaard
Charlotte Højholt
Oddbjørg Skjær Ulvik

TOWARD SITUATED STUDIES OF CHILDREN'S
DEVELOPMENT

Children live their lives, learn, and develop through participation in the social communities of, for instance, families, peer groups, classrooms, and day care institutions. They thus live their lives across quite different social settings, including homes, schools, and other institutions. Yet, developmental psychology has at large presented decontextualized models of child development, featuring an ahistorical and decontextualized child (for a critique of such an approach, see Burman, 2017; James, Jenks, & Prout, 1997; Prout, 2005; Walkerdine, 1993). In anthropology, there are some seminal texts that illuminate ways in which childhood is shaped in different ways in different communities, including detailed micro-genetic descriptions of

- Tomasello, M. (1992). The social bases of language acquisition. *Social Development*, 1, 67–87.
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CHAPTER 10

RESIDENTIAL CARE AND CHILDREN'S DEVELOPMENT OF AGENCY IN EVERYDAY LIFE

Ida Schwartz

Children in out-of-home care face difficult living conditions. Many professionals are concerned about how to support the development of their capability to manage their lives in the present as well as in the future. Generally, growing up is filled with dilemmas and in the Western world it seems to be a central issue to develop personal ways of taking part in a complex and ever-changing social world (Andersen & Mørch, 2005). Children growing up with a lack of adequate care and support often experience social exclusion and stigmatization in ways that restrict their possibilities to take part in societal contexts. This chapter discusses how to understand children's development of agency, especially in relation to children living in out-of-home care.

In Nordic countries, children live their everyday lives across family homes and various societal contexts such as daycare, school, leisure time activities, and so forth (Dreier, 2009). Seen from this perspective, it then

becomes an important task for parents to support their children's trajectories of participation in different communities in everyday life (Andersen, 2011a; Højholt, Juhl, & Kousholt, 2018). When it comes to children living outside their homes, they are supported by a complex network of different professionals (Edwards, 2011; Schwartz, 2014; Schwartz, 2017). The Child Welfare System, in cooperation with parents, has the overall responsibility for supervising the well-being of these children and this task is handled by a caseworker. Furthermore, this societal arrangement of care also includes cooperation with professionals in daycare, school, leisure activities, and in the residential care. It is a complex constellation of persons, professions, and institutions that collectively deal with those difficult conflicts and problems that are part of the life situation of these children.

In the history of developmental psychology, growing up is often conceptualized as a movement from the deeply dependent infant to the increasingly independent and self-responsible adult, as if growing up is "a solo project for a single individual" (Højholt, in this volume). Building on a German tradition of critical psychology, I argue along with others, that children develop personal responsibility, autonomy, and relational belongings by taking part in a collectively arranged social world (Højholt & Kousholt, 2017). Children and youngsters are generally challenged in their everyday life to find personal ways of handling ambiguous priorities, different social expectations, and choices between multiple possibilities of engagements, tasks, and social relations across social contexts. As Burman (1994) puts it, growing up is a messy affair and far from the orderly development towards the increasingly mature autonomy that developmental psychology historically has tended to portray. In the case of children living in out-of-home care, we need to understand more about how a rather complicated, conflictual, and complex life situation influences their development of agency in relation to growing up in an ever-changing social world with shifting demands, conditions, and possibilities.

This chapter starts by presenting the critical psychological concept of the *conduct of everyday life* and relating it to children's development of agency in general and specially to children in out-of-home care. A methodological approach to gaining an insight into children's conditions of living is to focus on their everyday life, viewed from their perspective (see, e.g., Fleer & Hedegaard, 2010). This chapter presents the 11-year-old girl Laura, living in residential care, and describes how professionals express their concerns about seeing her as a too independent and irresponsible child.

The analyses are focused on theoretical conceptualizations of agency in relation to child development, including contributions from sociological studies of childhood, feminist approaches, and critical psychology. These discussions lead to a conceptualizing of agency as dealing with dualities in personal development, such as learning to conduct one's own life and take

part in a social world, must be understood as two interrelated aspects of agency. The development concept of *relative autonomy* (Holzkamp, 2016) points to an understanding that children develop personal agency through participation in relational mutuality embedded in concrete societal practices in childhood.

This theoretical perspective is used to analyze agency, as seen from an 11-year-old girl's perspective: "How do children in out-of-home care relate to parents, professional caregivers, and peers in different contexts?" "How do they move across different places and integrate engagements and relations in a personal conduct of everyday life?" and "How do parents and professionals work together to support these children to develop agency in a difficult life situation?" The main purpose is to discuss the theoretical reasoning behind a move from a focus on "a troublesome child" as an individual, to inter-professional cooperation about changing and expanding children's possibilities of social participation in difficult life situations.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The theoretical notion that human beings learn and develop agency through their participation in social practices constitutes the basic assumption of this chapter (Chaiklin, Hedegaard, & Jensen, 1999; Dreier, 2008a; Lave, 2008). According to a social practice perspective, child development is regarded as linked to children's participation in everyday life in and across various societal contexts and to their engagement in play and educational activities in communities with other children (Højholt, 2008). For children in general, these activities in childhood are regarded as important ways of achieving knowledge about how to get access and take part in social practices in society.

The critical psychological concept of the *conduct of everyday life* developed by Holzkamp (2016) helps to explain how subjects collectively develop possibilities of action in relation to specific historical and societal conditions, and how they do so by handling practical and concrete dilemmas and issues in everyday life (Schraube & Osterkamp, 2013). The concept of *conduct* highlights how subjects actively coordinate and arrange their participation across contexts into more or less integrated ways of living (Dreier, 2008b; Dreier, 2011; Schraube & Osterkamp, 2013). Focusing on adults and children's collective conduct of everyday life makes it possible to grasp that agency constitutes a central part of living (Højholt et al., 2018). Subjects try to make their lifework by arranging and coordinating practical tasks, activities, and personal engagements in cooperation with others and in relation to their life conditions. In this way, they try to influence matters of

personal importance and these personal engagements are embedded in a social life with others and must be understood as filled with dilemmas, ambiguous choices, contradictory expectations, and potential conflicts according to the diversity of different interests and perspectives in different communities.

Moreover, this chapter draws on the concept, conduct of everyday life, in order to highlight that children also take action in, and contribute to activities of substantial issues within and across contexts in their daily lives. This points to how the daily life of children is structured—not only by adults—but also by the children themselves in collective interplay in the societal contexts in which they take part (Dreier, 2009; Hedegaard & Fleer, 2013; Højholt, 2008). Children simultaneously contribute to the reconstruction of social structures and, at the same time, try to change them according to matters of personal and common concerns. Children are engaged in activities together with other children and adults in communities and they thereby contribute to the arrangement of a common social life. The opportunity to influence and change certain matters is then seen as central aspects of the development of agency and children get a sense of these aspects of a collective living in their interplay and common engagements (Dreier, 2009; Højholt & Kousholt, 2017). As Juhl (2015) has shown, already as toddlers children try to exert influence on and contribute to their possibilities of participation in everyday life.

According to this perspective, a placement in out-of-home care constitutes conditions of living that children in care relate to, try to understand, and actively handle in personal ways embedded in their social life with others. In order to support them, we need more knowledge about how they develop their conduct of everyday life under such difficult circumstances.

Research Into Out-of-Home Care in Denmark

This chapter draws on an empirical study conducted in a residential care, where children were placed because of social problems (Schwartz, 2014). In Denmark, children in out-of-home care are placed either in foster care, residential care, or social-pedagogical private homes. The percentage of children in care has been quite stable over the last 100 years, where 1% of children between 0–17 years have been placed in out-of-home care (Bryderup, 2005). In recent years, we have seen a small decline in institutional placements in favor of foster care and social-pedagogical private homes, due to a shift in political preferences from placements in institutions to foster care (Lausten, 2015).

A medical model of individual pathology has been dominant in special education and especially in residential care in the Western world since the

middle of the last decade (Egelund & Jakobsen, 2009; Schwartz, 2014). Categories that designate the “troubled” and “traumatized child” have been widely used in residential care, indicating that problems are to be understood as inherent in the individual child (e.g., Whittaker, Fernandez del Valle, & Holmes, 2015). Building on a critical psychological perspective (Dreier, 2008b; Højholt & Kousholt, 2017; Schraube & Osterkamp, 2013), I argue that we must understand the personal experience of problems and suffering as connected to difficult, problematic, and unequal conditions of life (Schwartz, 2017).

Research has shown, for example, that children and young people in care often leave primary school with lower school qualifications than other children, and this is considered to reduce their life expectancy as adults (Berlin, Vinnerljung, & Hjern, 2011; Bryderup & Trentel, 2012; Cameron, Connelly, & Jackson, 2015; Egelund, Christensen, Jacobsen, Jensen, & Olsen, 2009). There is a high risk that these children and youngsters will experience problems, conflicts, and personal failure in school and leisure life, that gives them the experience that education is not for them. This research often points to the children’s social background as a causal explanation but what I want to focus on is how we can understand personal problems as situated and connected to concrete and unequal conditions of participation (Højholt, 2016). Not the least for children and young people living in residential care, school and leisure time constitute important developmental contexts, where they have the opportunity to learn how to participate in and make use of educational opportunities and resources in society (Schwartz, 2017). Such a perspective indicates that personal suffering also must be understood as related to social practices in welfare institutions and their inherent unequal conditions of childhood (Højholt, 2016). This makes social inclusion a crucial matter in child welfare.

THE STUDY

The institution in which the study took place was located in a suburban area, where most of the families it served were living quite nearby. This made it possible for most of the children to remain in their ordinary school or daycare when placed in out-of-home care. The parents were encouraged to visit their children as often as they wished, and to take part in the daily care of the children, which was a rather unusual practice in Denmark. Over a period of 2 years, I followed the everyday lives of nine children, both in the context of the residential institution as well as in day care, school, leisure time activities, and during the time that they spent together with their family in the institution. I interviewed professionals, children, and parents

and studied confidential files compiled by the institution. This chapter focuses on an 11-year-old girl, Laura, and her first year in the institution.

The purpose of the research project was to explore professional approaches and practices from a decentered perspective, that is, from the perspectives of children in their everyday lives across social contexts (Dreier, 2008b). Multiple professionals in different practices and communities jointly organize conditions for these children's lives and the main question was how these arrangements of care paved the way for children's social participation.

The research was conducted in a practice research approach (Højholt & Kousholt, 2012), which means exploring participants' different perspectives, actions, and engagements as situated and connected in common matters of social practices. Researchers combine particular insights and partial knowledge *together with* the participants drawing on their knowledge in different situated locations in order to obtain a more coherent understanding. The point is to gain more knowledge by exploring questions and dilemmas over a period of time by combining observations with information from interviews with different persons in different positions and locations, including the children themselves. This means that the questions and problems that initially seem rather separated and particular can, through a deeper exploration in collaboration with the participants, be understood in a complex way as rooted in children's and adults' engagements in common matters in everyday life across contexts. In the following analysis, I present Laura as an example of a child whose parents and caregivers have very different and conflictual perspectives on her daily life and need of care. An exploration of the involved persons' different perspectives including Laura's and their reasons to act like they do gives an opportunity that allows us to see how they engage in the same common cause: how Laura can find a good way of taking part in her everyday communities in a troubled life situation.

Professional Concerns

The analysis takes its starting point from the perspectives of the social pedagogues in the residential institution. Seen from their perspectives, Laura's life is quite harsh and difficult. Laura is an 11-year-old girl, living in residential care together with her two younger siblings, Victor (9) and Camilla (5). According to documents in the residential institution, they were referred to social services and then placed in residential care because of their parents' combative marriage, acrimonious divorce, alcohol abuse, and periodical lack of care. In the official papers, Laura is defined as a child with special needs for supportive care and trusting relationships. The

purpose of the stay is to prepare the whole family for a long-term placement of the siblings in a foster care home.

Very soon after Laura's arrival at the institution, problems appeared in her daily life. Laura did not want to clean her room, do her school homework, and she skipped her after-school center. The professionals were worried about problems associated with making appointments with Laura. At meetings, they talked about how Laura would say in the morning that she intended to go to the after-school center, but in the afternoon, it turned out that she had been visiting a mall with an old school friend. She promised to do her homework, but after a while it became clear that she had only done half of her tasks.

At a meeting, the professionals discuss how the father is dissatisfied with the upbringing of his daughter in the institution. The professionals should, in his opinion, insist on his daughter performing her tasks. In the cooperation between the father and the professionals, the problem becomes an issue of discipline: how to make Laura get up in the morning, attend school, go to the after-school center without getting "lost" in the mall, return home to the institution, do her homework, and go to bed at an appropriate time in order to be ready for the next day. In other words, the father and some of the professionals agree that the solution to the problems associated with the upbringing of his daughter are related to the need for Laura to develop more discipline and responsibility. Seen from this professional perspective, the problems require a strict schedule in her everyday life and closer monitoring of her movements. Other professionals argue that Laura is traumatized and unhappy and therefore unable to take responsibility for her everyday life. Instead, they think there is a need for more care and less demands.

These different opinions about whether Laura is to be understood as being too independent and out of control or very helpless and dependent on care, leads to quite abstract discussions about the correct upbringing and care. This again raises conflicts between the professionals and also with her parents, especially the father. Regardless of their different perspectives on how to support Laura, they all seem to agree that Laura needs close adult supervision, because she is considered to be unable to take responsibility for actions in her life. In general, discussion about child development and the tendency to see children as vulnerable and immature has often been criticized (Esser, Baader, Betz, & Hungerland, 2016a), but as we are going to see below, this is still often the case when it comes to children in child welfare systems.

Conceptualizing Children's Agency

Across psychological, anthropological, and sociological fields of research, there is an ongoing discussion about how to conceptualize children

as agents in their lives (Esser et al., 2016a). In the so called New Paradigm in Childhood Studies, represented by inter alia James & Prout (1997), a strong request has been expressed to view children not as passive objects dependent on adult care and education, but as actors in the construction of their own social lives. It is argued that we need to conceptualize children and childhood not only in relation to children's future development, but as *beings* in the present, who already actively possess perspectives on their own lives. In research and policy, "giving voice to children's voices" has been a strong request in this perspective (see Esser et al., 2016a), in proposals to recognize children as an overlooked minority group in society with few possibilities to speak for themselves.

This tendency to conceptualize children's agency as suppressed in a generational power order has been criticized for preventing the concept to be developed sufficiently further (Esser, Baader, Betz, & Hungerland, 2016b). Esser et al. (2016a) raise questions about how this perspective on children as an independent group of active agents overshadows a theoretical understanding of their development as embedded in historically created societal conditions of childhood. This criticism raises further questions about how children's agency can be understood and conceptualized in relation to their living in a shared social world, where social conditions such as generational care and institutional education constitute an important prerequisite for their development. Secondly, the view of children as a minority group raises questions about the extent to which children can be understood as belonging to the same homogeneous social group. At worst, this view may disguise how children live under very different and unequal social circumstances.

The last important question I want to mention here is the criticism of the New Paradigm in Childhood Studies for taking a Western concept of agency as their starting point, namely the ideal of an *autonomous acting subject* (Esser et al., 2016b, p. 8). As argued by Mackenzie & Stoljar (2000), in a feminist's perspective the Western ideal of agency envisages the autonomous self-sufficient, self-reliant, and independent (White) man, which represents a tendency to connect agency strongly to individualism. Instead, Mackenzie and Stoljar (2000), from a feminist perspective, suggest the expression "relational autonomy" (p. 9) to conceptualize subjects as socially embedded and constantly engaged in the building of inter-subjectivity, sustainable relationships, and mutual care, thereby perceiving development of autonomy as anchored in social communities.

Seen from a critical psychological perspective on child development, children's personal ways of developing agency are connected to their conditions for participation in communities. The theoretical effort at stake here is to understand children developing agency and certain societal structures of practice in a coherent theoretical understanding (Højholt, 2008). Context is not understood as fixed or abstract societal structures, but as

concrete conditions situated in practices that impact on, but do not determine, children's lives:

... emphasizing that human beings are acting together, situated, and in relation to particular historical objects and means. It is important for the understanding that the structures are not "given," static or unambiguous since the participants are exactly acting with these and ascribing them different personal meanings. (Højholt, 2008, p. 2)

This theoretical notion leads to the point that we need to understand more about how children develop agency in relation to the social world in which they take part and to explore how autonomy and interdependence can be analyzed as interrelated which the critical psychological concept of relative autonomy points to (Holzkamp, 2016). Children develop their agency together with other children and through their engagements in communities of activities in different societal contexts of childhood. The concept of participation indicates that children's agency is structured by concrete conditions of childhood, but at the same time it recognizes that agency must be understood as *taking part*, which means that children also collectively contribute to the structuring of their social communities and conditions.

Children's prerequisites for taking part, their possibilities to exert influence and develop their agency, are not equal due to their social background and past experiences, but what I want to emphasize here is a theoretical attention to how their experiences gain importance and can be developed in relation to their present possibilities of participation. As investigated in this chapter, children in out-of-home-care are part of common conditions of childhood in Danish society and, at the same time, they are positioned in a special and unequal social situation. How these different and contradictory childhood conditions interact is connected to the ways in which professionals organize their interventions, both in residential care and across the contexts in which children participate. How children in residential care develop agency in their everyday life must then be explored and understood as situated (Højholt, 2016). In this perspective, dualities in personal development such as learning to take responsibility for one's own life and social participation must be understood as two interrelated aspects of agency situated in social practice. We now turn to a more detailed discussion of the development of agency, seen from the perspective of an 11-year-old girl placed in residential care.

Living in Residential Care

The analysis of Laura's perspective takes its point of departure in an interview conducted a few months after she moved to the institution. Laura

tells me that she likes staying in the institution, because "no one argues there," but she misses her parents:

Laura: I miss my dad most because I have lived with him since I was three. He is the one that I love the most. [Ex. 1]

Laura says that she often reflects upon how her parents are doing together and separately. The family history is characterized by the parents' frequent divorces and relocations. When I ask her if she has any advice for other children attending out-of-home care, she says:

Laura: Keep in contact with your parents and your family. Don't argue with grown-ups and so on. Not with your parents either! Not with your parents either? Does that make things worse?

Laura: Yes, it hurts so much that you feel like screaming and you can't handle it. Sometimes you cannot cope very well (in a whispering voice). [Ex. 2]

Longing for her family and a family life plays a major role in Laura's everyday life. She seems to accept living separately from her parents, but at the same time, she must deal with a strong feeling of longing. This illustrates how these children often live with ambiguous emotions and perspectives on their life. Previously, arguments and conflicts filled much of Laura's life and she likes to stay at the institution, because "there are no arguments there." But Laura has to cope with different expectations from different adults in different places, which gives rise to new conflicts. Her father has a rather strict approach to her upbringing, while the social pedagogues in the institution adopt a more child-centered attitude in accordance with her complicated life situation. But despite her wishes, conflicts are also increasing in the institution. Living outside her home makes her life better and more difficult at the same time. It seems as if she is trying to avoid conflicts that are unavoidable.

School

In the same interview, Laura explains that she is often absentminded in school because her head is so "full of thoughts" that she cannot concentrate. Although she doesn't like schoolwork very much, she is rather popular, having a lot of fun with her classmates during breaks and leisure time after school. She has attended the same school throughout her childhood and she knows her classmates very well. In a way, it could be said that they constitute the most continuously stable aspect in her life.

One girl in particular has been Laura's best friend from early childhood, but in the year before, they experienced a break in their daily contact while the class was split up into two new classes. When Laura thinks about it, it makes her feel sad, she says. The girlfriend often asks Laura if they should go to the after-school center together, but Laura does not want to go there. It makes her miss her parents even more, because they live in the same neighborhood. Instead Laura and her old girlfriend sometimes spend time in the mall together.

The Residential Institution

Usually, Laura likes to go straight home after school, because she has got a lot of new friends at the residential care and in the neighborhood. I ask whether she sometimes misses her old friends at the after-school center, but she replies "not at all." She spends time with them when she visits her parents at home on weekends, because they all live in her parent's neighborhood. I respond that she seems to have a lot of relationships to take care of and she answers:

Laura: YES [very definite], I THINK so. And sometimes I get a little confused over where to go. But then I just sit down in a corner and think about where I am going now ... [home, residential institution, school, after-school center, friends or ...]. Sometimes they have to pick me up [staff in the residential institution], because I have forgotten my bus card. [Ex. 3]

Laura constantly has to think about where she is and where to go. It is a chore for her to arrange her daily life in order to participate in different communities and activities in different, unconnected places. One could say that Laura's life is filled with relationships and yearnings and in her new complicated life situation, she tries to sustain certain relationships by connecting to them and, at the same time, keeping them separate. Her life is divided into distinct parts and she seems to keep some of them separate on purpose in order to withstand emotional challenges in her closest relationships. The point here is to recognize that she actively tries to cope with a complicated life situation by taking certain responsibilities and making distinct choices herself in order to preserve important relationships in her life.

Taking Responsibility and Developing Agency in Complex Life Circumstances

First, we get the opportunity to recognize that children in care do not move out of one environment and into another when they are placed

outside their home. They live in and across several and very different life contexts. Sometimes, we get the impression that they are getting a whole new life, but on the contrary, like children in divorced families, they have their contexts of lives doubled up. Parents are important to children in care. Even though conflicts, problems, and neglect at home can be very distressing, their families still play an emotional and practical part of their life, which can be both a benefit and a complication.

Old and new relationships are mixed up, and from the perspective of a child, there may be many different significant relationships during their life. Moving from one context to another can change practical circumstances in relationships, but it does not necessarily change their personal meaning (Andenæs, 2011b). Even an old classmate must be taken care of in a difficult life situation. Going to the mall appears to be a reasonable compromise between troublesome possibilities, but at the same time it brings her into conflict with her father and the professionals. There are a lot of expectations at home, at the institution, in school, in the after-school center, and in the various communities of friends. Laura has lots of friends and she enjoys having fun with them in different places, although she sometimes loses the sense of where she is and where to go at a certain time. One could wonder whether forgetting her bus card gives her a possibility to call for help to orientate herself.

Laura expresses how she wants to avoid conflicts with her different caregivers and stay in contact with her parents. At the same time, her personal difficulties about fulfilling different expectations seem to increase. She tries even harder to manage certain and separated parts of her life on her own by keeping adults at a distance. In an individualistic psychological perspective, conflicts are seen to be caused by something hidden, such as traumas in earlier childhood or in pathological personal traits that cause the person to create conflicts. Seeing Laura's life situation from her perspective gives us an opportunity to understand that her behavior has personal reasons and perhaps she thinks that she has to handle a complicated life situation all alone. This independent lifestyle easily gives adults the impression that she is becoming out of control regarding her educational and personal life.

Seen from the perspective of the professionals at the residential home, Laura seems to live a chaotic life, which from her perspective, could be understood as arranged in respect to her engagements and relationships. Her avoidance of cleaning her room, doing her homework, and keeping her agreements constitute general areas of conflicts in childhood, but at the home they are summed up as a sign of one thing which is ascribed a certain meaning, her being irresponsible and not accepting guidance. In meetings, staff at the children's home talk about Laura as traumatized, and she is attributed an inner chaotic psyche and a personal need to be in opposition. In general, seen from a contextual psychological perspective, children's

behavior can be understood as connected to their effort to handle profound conditions of life: to navigate and orientate themselves in multiple relationships in and across divided contexts with different and conflicting expectations. To these general conditions of childhood, there can in the case of Laura be added the circumstance that her concrete reasons for doing or not doing what is expected of her, are also rooted in a very complicated life situation. A girl in Laura's situation does not seem to get much adult attention and support to help her handle and combine relationships, activities, and engagements in an even more complicated life situation.

Professionals Working in Isolation

The professionals at the residential home say in interviews that they think Laura is taking too much responsibility for her own life and at the same time, they talk about her as irresponsible. It is an example of how these children's behavior at the same time easily is assessed both too much and too little. As mentioned in the beginning of this article, Laura follows her own independent ways and there are times when her primary caregiver at the residential care feels that Laura does not accept the care she offers:

She receives [advice and care] in the periods we are in dialogue. In other periods, it's, "Fuck you!", where she wants to do everything on her own. She tries to take responsibility for her own life, and in some characteristic ways, she has done so. But I have to say, she is only 11 and I cannot accept her running around in the streets. That's difficult and we have had some severe arguments. Sometimes I feel hurt and it can be difficult to come to work. She makes alliances with the other kids if I say "no" to something. That is difficult and I have sometimes felt a sense of being all on my own. [Ex. 4]

The primary caregiver feels that she carries a major responsibility on her own, as if she herself has to handle the task of guiding Laura and she does not feel she gets support from her colleagues. One example of conflicts between the professionals at the home is related to Laura's homework. Laura does not want to do it or she *forgets* what tasks she has received. The group of professionals work in different shifts covering all days and nights, and they attach different importance to the issue of homework. Some professionals forget to ask until just before bedtime and others place demands on the kids to do homework before leisure time. Laura's primary caregiver tries to construct a common practice, where all kids in the afternoon are expected to do their homework under supervision and in a nice environment with soda and candlelight. But it does not succeed. The professionals assign different priorities to the task of supporting homework and they are

shifting between making demands and giving up when they feel Laura has enough struggles to think about in her life.

In an interview with Laura's primary teacher at the school, I hear almost the same story. The teacher expresses how she cares for Laura but feels lonely with a major responsibility of feeling insecure about how to handle Laura's periodic lack of concentration and neglected homework. In addition, colleagues report to her that Laura shows challenging behavior in their lessons. The teacher designs special tasks for Laura's homework encouraging her to perform small tasks but to do them well.

In the first year of Laura's stay at the home, which is the focus of this paper, there is not much collaboration between Laura's father, the school, and the staff in the residential care. It seems as if the many different adults involved in Laura's care are all working in isolation, with more or less private solutions, all shifting between demands and dropping their plans in a mixture of determination and compassionate resignation. The professionals seem to have different perceptions of Laura's problems and different expectations for what constitutes good behavior, and they are making isolated and abstract demands, rather than finding concrete solutions in collaboration. Laura's behavior is assessed, unconnected to any insights into her difficult life situation, as seen from her own perspective and it is thereby not understood in terms of reasonable agency.

CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

In educational theory and developmental psychology, growing up is often understood as a departure from total dependence to the management of an independent and autonomic lifestyle. Inspired by Haavind (2001), a contextual perspective on children's development could be construed as the development of participation in increasingly complex societal practices and embodied in multiple relationships and activities across locations. To grow up could then mean to develop possibilities of actions in social communities and to learn how to handle personal relationships in different and interconnected social structures of practices. In this perspective, to become able to manage your life in a modern society does not mean being independent and self-reliant, but rather to be engaged in ever more intertwined and complex private, occupational, and educational social practices in different contexts with all their inherent conflicts about common matters. It means coping with contradictory expectations, demands, and possibilities in different interrelated contexts of life.

Inspired by Vinnerljung (2011), one could ask how society fulfills the responsibility that parents usually take (Andenas, 2011a; Kousholt, 2011; Schwartz, 2014), namely to support children's development of social

participation in and across places in everyday life when they live out-of-home. All adults involved in the care of Laura act on a partial and limited basis of knowledge, understanding little about what is at stake for her in her different contexts of life, and how she is trying to orientate herself in and across these multiple contexts. She herself takes a huge responsibility for the handling of a complicated life situation. From each professional's perspective, it seems difficult to support her participation in these intertwined and complex relationships and practices.

In order to develop better support, we need to explore children's social life situation seen from their perspectives in order to understand how they develop personal reasons to act like they do in distressing, conflictual, and complicated conditions of life. The ways in which these children and young people are able to take part in societal opportunities, are closely linked to the ways their caregivers work together and deal with their distressing conditions of life.

The children's trajectories of life in out-of-home care are often characterized by breakdowns in relationships due to movements between places (Bryderup & Trentel, 2013; Egelund et al., 2009). It is therefore a major challenge for professionals to both support pre-established relationships and pave the ways for their participation in new communities. The children are dealing with both general and specific emotional, relational, and practical daily difficulties and they are doing so without close parental care across contexts. They must display a high degree of personal responsibility (often more than their peers), while at the same time they are living under more restricted and monitored conditions. Children's possibilities to contribute to and arrange their participation in engagements of communities, and thereby develop agency in everyday life, can be considered as a general part of growing up, which seems to be underestimated when children live in out-of-home care.

The professionals observe Laura's practical attempts to handle a difficult life situation alone with concerns and skepticism. Since they primarily focus on her shifting and entangled handling of opposing and conflicting demands, Laura just seems capricious or vulnerable. Her obvious need for support can easily lead to a professional focus on how to structure and narrow down her daily complex conditions in order to create a fixed schedule instead of focusing on how to support her vital engagements and activities in social communities in her everyday life. There is a need of organizing inter-professional cooperation that focuses on how to support Laura in her attempt to integrate activities, relations, and engagements in a coherent way of everyday living seen from her perspective. Otherwise children in out-of-home care may give up involving caregivers and try to keep them at a distance in order to avoid conflicts. This way of keeping caregivers at a distance seems to turn against Laura and to create a new basis for an escalation

of conflicts in her already complicated life situation. For children in out-of-home care, we need to understand more about how professionals collectively work with conflicts, dilemmas, and problematic matters embedded in children's difficult life situations in ways that support and expand their possibilities of agency.

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SECTION III

CHILDREN'S OWN REFLECTIONS ON SOCIAL LIFE AND DEVELOPMENT
