

Is There an “I” in “We?” – Children as Individuals or Group Subjects in School-Age Educare Staff’s Collegial Conversations

Sanna Hedrén

University West, Sweden

Lina Lago

Linköping University, Sweden

ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to gain knowledge of how School-Age EduCare (SAEC) staff in and through collegial conversations construe a child/children. Collegial conversations with two SAEC staff teams were analyzed using the theoretical concepts from the fields of discourse analysis and systemic functional grammar. The results show that children were repeatedly construed as a group subject by the staff and more rarely as individual subjects. The SAEC staff construed the children as group subjects in four different ways: as general groups, as pre-determined groups, as quantity-related groups, and as behavior-related groups. The children who were construed as individual subjects were mainly the ones who diverged from the group, often in negative ways.

Keywords: *School-Age EduCare; extended education; collegial conversation; discursive formations; children’s agency*

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Introduction and research questions

The aim of this study is to gain knowledge of how School-Age EduCare (SAEC) staff in and through collegial conversations construe a child/children. In this article, Swedish SAEC, specifically the SAEC staff’s speech is scrutinized with a focus on discursive constructions of “the child.” How “the child” is construed needs to be understood, not only in relation to the children themselves, but also in relation to how teachers and staff understand and interpret their professional task, and to SAEC’s conditions and traditions.

Correspondance: Sanna Hedrén, e-mail: sanna.hedren@hv.se

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Although children’s agency has been highlighted both in national and international research in recent decades, it is increasingly emphasized that children’s agency needs to be understood as dependent on context, structure, and power (e.g., Bergnehr, 2019; Balagopalan, 2019). This study is grounded in the notion that it matters how and what images of the child are construed in specific settings. This is assumed to be important for children’s opportunities for action in practice. The staff’s constructions of the child are assumed to influence children’s roles, agency, and space for action in SAEC. Knowledge of such constructions is important to better understand the conditions for children’s agency in different educational settings.

The aim of the study is to gain knowledge of how SAEC staff in and through collegial conversations construe discursive formations of the child/children. The research question is: What different constructions of the child can be identified in the collegial conversations of SAEC staff?

The institutional setting

A starting point for the study is that discursive formations are made by staff in speech as well as in actions (Holmberg & Karlsson, 2006). How the staff talk relates to the context in which the acts of speech take place. For this reason, it is also important to say something about the SAEC setting. Swedish SAEC is a non-mandatory part of the Swedish school system. Most Swedish children aged 6–9 attend SAEC before and after school and during school holidays (82% in 2020/21, Skolverket, 2022b). Children’s perspectives and participation are more clearly stated for the work done in SAEC than in other types of schooling (Skolverket, 2022a). SAEC also has a strong tradition of child-centered teaching (Elvstrand et al., 2022). When the historical development of Swedish SAEC practice is described, socialization is mentioned as the core of SAEC aims and purposes (Dahl, 2014). Dahl (2020) states that children’s expected socialization in SAEC consists of qualities and abilities such as consensus, tolerance, responsibility, and adaptability. Also, aspects such as feeling secure and confident, trust, and reciprocity are mentioned as important. This socialization is currently being challenged by the discourse of learning (Holmberg, 2018). This is visible, for example, in the Education Act (SFS 2010:800), where teaching has also included SAEC since 2010, or in the curriculum, where changes have been made to clarify SAEC’s teaching tasks (Skolverket, 2022a).

Since the 1990s the economic conditions have changed, and SAEC practices must take into account large groups of children, a low percentage of teachers with degrees, and inadequate premises, etc. (Official Swedish Report, 2020). This causes local differences in relation to how SAEC is organized, and the types of SAEC activities that children encounter, which can be described as unequal. These conditions (Andishmand, 2017), and also the varying understanding of teachers in relation to their own role (Hedrén, 2022), affect the SAEC practices that the children encounter. These conditions are often mentioned in research, but further knowledge of what they entail in practice is needed. This study adds to this knowledge with its

perspective on how SAEC teachers' language use contributes to the materialization of SAEC practices, focusing on how the child is construed in and through SAEC staff's speech.

Speech and language use are discursively construed images of the staff's perceptions, expectations, and assessments of the child and its actions in the everyday practices of SAEC. This study assumes that collegial conversations are discursive practices, providing possibilities for meaning-making in SAEC practice. However, collegial conversations create both positive and negative images of children when discussing pedagogical dilemmas (Suh, 2020). Teachers tend to construe children discursively in terms of being good or poor in classrooms. Suh (2020) argues that the negative constructions created in teachers' collegial conversations affect the instructional practice in classrooms when positioning children as high or low achievers. Hence, discursive constructions made in collegial conversations must be considered not only as words, but as collegial actions construing local collective norms on how to relate to children in instructional practice.

Review of the literature

Children's agency and approaches to children in SAEC

In research, there are theoretical discussions about children and childhood, as well as empirical studies of child–adult relations and children's agency. The literature selected mainly consists of Swedish studies on adults' views of children in various institutional contexts. In addition, a number of studies that focus on the relationship between children and adults in Swedish SAEC and, where applicable, international equivalents to SAEC have been selected.

How adults view and discursively construe children and childhoods, and how this affects children's possibilities to act within a given setting, is an issue that lies at the heart of the field of child and childhood studies (cf. James et al., 1998). Scholars have written about and problematized different constructions of how children in different educational settings are expected to behave. Månsson (2008) shows how normative notions of "the competent child" within a Swedish preschool setting sometimes exclude opportunities for lack of competence or vulnerability. Ljusberg (2022) show how SAEC teachers' views of children affect how they take children's interests in consideration in SAEC activities. When teachers plan SAEC activities, children are either positioned as co-actors, objects, or absent from the planning process. She shows how SAEC activities are planned with, for or without the children's perspective in mind. Therefore, ideas about children and childhood are factors influencing children's lives through the expectations and limitations they impose on children. Närvänen and Elvstrand (2015) show how SAEC staff interpret children's participation based on assumptions of maturity. The adult's understanding of the child and its ability is thus important for children's opportunities for action. Hurst (2020), in his study on Australian School Age Care, argues that adult ideas of children's maturity

and development as important also links to children’s own understandings of being a child.

In the SAEC mission and tradition, the child is placed within a group-oriented idea of learning and activities, something that has received attention in Swedish SAEC research. Jonsson (2021) shows that social learning is considered as both an overall purpose and as a basis for SAEC teaching. Learning together is often a focus, as SAEC is not intended to assess individual children’s achievements. Relationships between children and between children and adults are of importance. Dahl (2014) shows that SAEC teachers hold several normative assumptions about children’s relationships. Adults often support relationships that are characterized by consensus, respect, and security. In Dahl’s study, teachers tend to assess children’s individual relational skills rather than interpersonal abilities. Although the group is often seen as the basis for work in SAEC, this can be challenged by an individualized view of the child and its abilities. This can be linked to the staff’s own interpretations of their task to give influence to each child (Elvstrand & Lago, 2020; Jonsson, 2021), or to framework conditions such as large groups of children (Jonsson, 2021).

Holmberg (2018) argues that the child who is educated in SAEC is fostered at the intersection between democratic values and governance, which creates the idea of a “learning democrat.” Such a child construed in SAEC settings includes both acting as a democrat and constantly generating new knowledge. She argues that freedom of choice and self-determination within the SAEC context are construed as compelling ideals, towards which children must orientate themselves.

Lager (2021) has studied children’s perspectives on space for action in SAEC settings. The children emphasize that when teachers take responsibility, are present, create mutual relationships, and redistribute power, they have more space and are provided with better conditions to have new experiences. The SAEC teachers and how they relate to children are thus an important aspect of children’s agency in SAEC.

SAEC staff’s collegial conversations and language use

Another line of research of relevance to this study focuses on SAEC staff’s collegial conversations and language use. Andersson (2013) states that a lack of organized collegial conversation in SAEC forces the staff to have collegial and spontaneous talks in front of the children. It has been stated by many scholars that there is a need for more collegial conversation spaces in SAEC (Andersson, 2013; Dahl, 2020; Haglund, 2018). In preschool settings, collegial conversations have been studied from the perspective of collegial learning, showing the importance of collegial and mutual understandings and negotiations (Alnervik, 2013; Larsson, 2018).

Previous research on SAEC teachers’ language use argues for the need of a professional language to express their knowledge of children’s relations and social development (Dahl, 2020, p. 212). Research on teachers’ language use also concludes that teachers lack a common professional language. At the same time, they have the

need for a professional and theoretically grounded way of assessing and discussing children's development (Colnerud & Granström, 2015). The language used by teachers in collegial conversations is an unexplored field (Cooren et al, 2014).

Theoretical approach

This study takes its ontological stance from the field of discourse analysis (Foucault, 2011) and systemic functional grammar (Holmberg & Karlsson, 2006). Everyday social life in SAEC is described through discursive formations (Foucault, 2011).

The concept of discourse is two-dimensional. Discourse is (a) conversation and language use, and (b) a frame of reference or ways of understanding conversations and language use (Foucault, 2011). Foucault uses the concept *discursive formation* to separate the actual physical object and the discursive object. The discursive formation is construed of a web of utterances and many different texts emerging as the social construction of the object. In this paper, discursive formations of the child in SAEC staff's speech are studied.

The theoretical perspective includes speech acts as a core element in collegial conversation (van Langenhove & Harré, 1999). Saying something is an action taking place; speakers make promises, state things, ask questions, give answers, and so on. In this study, the act of interpretation is the center of attention. Interpretation is closely connected to the act of noticing, which van Es and Sherin (2002) argue is one of a teacher's most important abilities in collegial conversations. Only that which is first noticed can be discussed. The action of noticing and distinguishing what is important or desirable and what is not is part of educational practice. What is noticed and discussed can also be changed in physical practice. What is not noticed is often taken for granted and is more difficult to change. In this study, analysis of constructions of the child through staff's conversations brings to light knowledge on what aspects of children's doings in SAEC practice are noticed and construed as desirable or not.

In the analysis of the SAEC staff's collegial conversations, we used inspiration from systematic functional grammar (SFG) as a methodological approach to capture the agentic aspect of language use (Holmberg & Karlsson, 2006).

Methods

The data consist of collegial conversations in an SAEC setting, designed and conducted in a larger research project (Hedrén, 2022) as a combination of the research method of video-stimulated reflection (Cutrim Schmid, 2011) and the method of pedagogical documentation primarily applied in preschool settings (Elfström, 2013). The larger project focused on staff's meaning-making in collegial conversations, including positioning analysis of teachers' interactions. This study focuses on the constructions of the child in collegial conversations. Two SAEC teams participated in the study. The criterion for selection was that the staff wanted to participate in a

developmental research project. A request for participation was sent out to SAEC centers by email. One SAEC center responded. A letter of information and consent form was then forwarded to and signed by the participants, and was also sent later to the guardians of the children in the SAEC setting.

One team worked with the youngest children, the 6–7 year olds. This team, referred to here as F-1, consisted of four colleagues with various educational degrees and experience. The other team, referred to here as 2–3, worked with the oldest children in SAEC, the 8–9 year olds. The 2–3 team consisted of five colleagues who also had varied levels of teaching qualifications and experience of working in SAEC practice. This variation in degrees is the reason that we have chosen to use the term “staff” rather than “teachers.” The variation in degrees among the staff is representative for Swedish SAEC practice. On a national level, less than 40% of SAEC staff have a university degree in education (Skolverket, 2022b). The term “teacher” is used when referring to SAEC practice in general.

The two teams reflected and discussed a chosen activity, and met together with Hedrén at their regular planning meeting on five occasions each. Before the research project started, each work team was able to choose one activity: a problem or dilemma that they wanted to focus on. Both teams chose the snack-time routine. Constructions of the child emerging in analysis are therefore limited to collegial conversations about a problematic activity in the staff’s daily work. The form of collegial conversation that was applied in the participating teams was not an established routine in the SAEC setting. As a stimulus for collegial conversations, filmed sequences from the practice (the snack-time routine) were used.

The teams themselves were responsible for filming and bringing videos to the collegial conversations; the content of the videos was open, to enable staff to focus on what they thought was important. The work teams interpreted the assignment differently. Team F-1 chose to film a new sequence each week, while team 2–3 chose to film on one occasion. The children were verbally informed of the study and were given the opportunity to decline being filmed. The SAEC centers used video recordings in their everyday practice (e.g., for social media accounts or to inform guardians). Since filming in the project was conducted by the staff, this can be assumed to be perceived as an integral part of the SAEC centers. The videos are not part of the data in the project, they are only used as a basis for the work teams’ reflections. In the collegial conversations, the teachers discussed different aspects of the snack-time routine and how to improve this activity. Hedrén attended the conversations and guided the discussions. The initial task was to “describe what happens in the video.” After that, the intention was that the staff should “own” the discussions and be able to talk about what they felt was important. When the discussions subsided, staff were asked to look at the videos once again and try to discover new things not seen last time. The conversations lasted between 30 and 80 minutes, and took place every second week for a period of four months. In total, the data consists of 460 minutes of recorded conversations. Hedrén was responsible for data collection

and the initial analysis. In the analytic process we used the conceptions of subject, process, and agentivity (cf. Holmberg & Karlsson, 2006) to analyze discursive formations (Foucault, 2011) of the child in the SAEC staff's speech. The subject is the active element in a sentence: the one who is doing something. Processes describe what is being done. Holmberg and Karlsson (2006) divide processes into occurrences and actions. Occurrences are not caused by the subject in a sentence: "The ball is rolling." It is a non-agentive occurrence, where no one is construed as being responsible for what happened. A process is an action in which a subject is made responsible: "Mike rolled the ball." That is an agentive action, where Mike is construed as being responsible for what happened.

When transcribing the recorded conversations, we annotated the subjects used when talking about the child/children and a distinction emerged between the individual and the group perspective in the staff's speech. This analysis made visible distinct ways of construing the child/children. These distinct ways were then subjected to an in-depth analysis by both authors. Within the child/children constructions, there were variations within each discourse; for example, different discursive groups emerged when talking about the children. We also noted which processes were attributed to the different subjects and groups. When separating the individual and the group subjects and the attributed processes, differences in how the individual and the group were construed emerged.

Results

SAEC staff conversations analyzed using SFG analytical concepts showed that children were construed as both individuals and as part of a group. In this section, we will highlight the important findings and visualize them using empirical examples.

Children as a group subject

SAEC staff's discursive formations of the children are presented in four categories: (a) *general groups*; (b) *pre-determined groups* (school or SAEC-related); (c) *quantity-related groups*; (d) *behavior-related groups*.

SAEC staff repeatedly use the anonymous pronoun "them" when they talk about the filmed sequences of the snack-time routine. This construes children as one subject, which is talked about mainly as an activity in which staff are expected to move from one location to another or ensure that the children eat their snacks calmly and quietly. But most of all, the group is expected to be *one group*. All children are expected to act alike and to maintain the group. The *general groups* are referred to by using pronouns such as "they," "them," "all," "we," "you," "children," "pupils," or "people." These are the subjects used when talking about the snack-time routine as a general activity and when expressing what is expected of the children during the activity. When using these general subjects, the staff construe the children as one actor and the individuals within the group are interchangeable.

Example 1 shows how children are construed as one anonymous subject and what processes are attributed to the group:

Example 1

Irma: Here we are on our way in. First you get in line and then you go in. And now you kind of go straight ahead and grab your [...] snack. And then you take your seat. If we do it like that, we avoid having to get rid of washing hands here in the canteen ... or avoid having to stand in line to wash your hands.

(F-1, conversation 2)

Irma describes the children entering the canteen. This anonymous pronoun is used to describe the routine, construing the event of entry as a sequence of events, performed as a group. Processes noticed and described by Irma are: get in line, pick up the snack, and sit down. These are the processes that are expected to take place in this specific situation. Thereby, Irma is expressing what she is expecting to see, leaving out any possible deviant action. The group is construed as participating in the event in one unified movement in the canteen. The *pre-determined* groups can be either school-related (first graders, preschool class pupils, etc.) or SAEC-related (blue/green group). The school-related groups are construed using the pronoun “them.” Repeated use of the pronoun “them” when talking about school-related groups construes a discursive distance between the staff and the children, separating “us” (staff) and “them” (children). Different groups of children can also be construed as “we” or “them” depending on the affiliation of the staff. The school-related groups are used as subjects when, for example, talking about the transition between school hours and SAEC hours:

Example 2

Viktor: But I keep thinking. What are the third graders doing there? They are not supposed to be there.

Emelie: They are in the way (laughs).

Viktor: No, they are not supposed to be there. They finish school at one fifty and we leave for snack time at two. But they are in here and just standing there. [...]

Emelie: They take their jackets off, just to put them back on again.

Viktor: In ten minutes, we are leaving for snack time and after that we’ll stay outside.

Emelie: And here there are not even ten minutes left. Maybe it’s like five.

Viktor: I just feel, no they are not supposed to be in there, they are just in the way. For themselves and for the others.

(2–3, conversation 1)

In Example 2, the school-related groups – “third graders” – are used when describing the transition between school hours and SAEC hours, when children are on their way to the canteen, passing the entry hall. “Third graders” as a group is based on how

the school organizes children by age. School-related groups are therefore not determined by the SAEC staff. Example 2 shows how the school-related group is used to mark that these children are coming from the school context and are now entering the SAEC center. Again, individuals within the group are subordinate to the collective. Unlike general groups, these groups are specific within the school organization. When entering the entry hall, they transform into an *SAEC-related group*. The SAEC-related groups are formed according to the staff's aims and for the purpose of making it easier to deal with the large number of children by dividing them up. In general, the SAEC-related groups are more often referred to as part of a collective "us" or "we" than the school-related groups.

The *quantity-related groups* are used when the staff talk about the snack-time routine. These groups function as a divider of children ("one half," "three," "a quarter," and so on). The number of children is the focus, not the individuals included. Example 3 shows how the quantity-related subject "a quarter" is used when the staff is talking about how to organize the snack-time routine:

Example 3

Viktor: We don't do it the same way as before. The third graders are walking straight to the canteen.

Nina: So that they don't collide in the doorway.

Viktor: And the second graders can walk out the door without bumping into the third graders.

Annelie: Yeah, that's right.

Viktor: Now the third graders walk straight to the canteen and the second graders get there too. And now we divide the children in groups and a quarter of them aren't eating in the canteen, leaving us with fewer children there.

(2-3:3)

When talking about how to organize snack time, it is construed as important to divide the whole group of children to manage both the group as a whole and the situation, i.e., spread the children out to establish peace and quiet during the activity. Therefore, children are often reduced to a number or a quantity, as shown in Example 3 when Viktor is talking about "getting rid of a quarter." Even though the quantity-related groups can be rather small, the focus is not on the individuals. It is on how many children are in the foreground rather than which children.

The last group construed in the staff's speech is the *behavior-related group*. These groups are based on common attributes such as "the ones who disrupt," "the ones who do well," "the ones who talk a lot," etc. Holmberg and Karlsson (2006) refer to groups based on common attributes as nominal groups. The nominal groups are almost all related to a form of behavior, mostly to a negative form. The behavior functions as a way of labelling smaller groups of children and positioning them as easy or difficult in relation to the demands on the staff's resources and attention. Example 4 shows this:

Example 4

Gunilla: But I’m thinking that’s the difficult part because the children who move around a lot are the ones who’re having trouble sorting out their impressions. So, it’s like, they are disrupting and are being disturbed by their moving around.

Irma: And they are the ones who are usually being disturbed.

Gunilla: Yes.

Irma: The ones who disrupt the most are the ones who are most disturbed by others.

(F-1:5)

In Example 4, Gunilla and Irma are talking about the ones “who move around a lot” and the ones “who are disturbed and who disrupt.” This way of pointing out groups of children with deviant behavior in the studied conversations shows how the staff notice behavior rather than individuals. Staff talk about the behavior, not the child performing the problematic actions. Problematic behaviors are put in the foreground, leading to less focus on the individuals and their specific needs or reasons for acting a certain way. In this way, children are being noticed for their ability to fit in with the whole group and the local norms. The analysis shows that constructions of groups with positive behavior such as “the ones who behave” also occur, but only occasionally.

Children as individual subjects

The results of the analysis of the SAEC staff’s collegial conversations show that the children are construed as individuals when they deviate from the group perspective. The children mentioned and referred to by name, or by another pronoun like “he” or “she,” are the ones who diverge from the group, often in a negative way.

Staff separate individual children from the group by naming or pinpointing specific children as performers of problematic behavior.

Example 5

Lisa: Things are happening there: he hit me, he cut in line, she did that, that one is screaming.

Gunilla: How should you put it, they also got pushed, so to speak ... it doesn’t need to be a conscious push, it can be X who pushed me and then I pushed her and then I heard that I was the one who was pushing someone.

(F-1:1)

Children are construed as deviants through physical and observable actions. Children are named and pinpointed as needing extra supervision or other attention from the staff. Specific behaviors – in the example, hitting someone, screaming, and making noises or cutting in line – are connected to specific individuals – him, her, they – who are held accountable for disruptions of daily routines and thus need to be addressed. Analysis shows how SAEC staff construe discursive formations of the individual

child only as deviant from group behavior. Pinpointing individual children means defining and articulating problematic and unwanted behavior. Example 6 shows how confusion arises when one colleague separates the “wrong” child from the group:

Example 6

Viktor: I mean that X is running [inside the canteen] like.

Emelie: But I just got so surprised.

Viktor: I mean we are quite used to that. I almost would have been surprised if she wasn't running.

Emelie: Do you know which X we are talking about?

Erik: Now it was X in second grade.

Viktor: Oh!

Nina: (laughs)

Emelie: Yeah, I was like, hello! (laughs).

Viktor: X in second grade ...

Emelie: Then you understand?

Viktor: Because X in third grade ...

Emelie: (laughs) Yeah, now I don't know who you are talking about.

Viktor: I thought it was strange because I didn't see any X and then I saw X in third grade running and perhaps I did, but I thought, this was strange.

(2–3:5)

The example shows a misunderstanding between the colleagues in which children are being talked about by name and thereby made divergent from the group. Two girls in the setting share the same name and when one of them is positioned as a deviant by running in the canteen, this turns out to be the one least expected to do so. That shows an example of individualizing by naming children that is connected to separating them from the group subject. It also shows that some children are expected to be deviant and some are not. This short dialogue showcases how some children's deviance is construed as an assumption among the staff, and when challenging that assumption, confusion arises.

Discussion – Is there an “I” in “we?”

In this section, the results of analysis are discussed in relation to previous research. The staff's constructions of the child/children presented in this study must be seen in relation to the challenging conditions (cf. Official Swedish Report, 2020). SAEC staff need to manage large numbers of children in inadequate premises, added to the tight time schedule for the different SAEC groups to visit the canteen. “The group” is not a static concept; who is included in “the group” changes in relation to the staff's need to divide the group for different purposes and activities. The function of these groups can thus be said to be to “manage the unmanageable,” meaning that feeding over 60 children in the canteen and expecting it to be a calm, social activity is a “mission impossible.” To group and divide the children in activities and in discussions in collegial conversations is a way for the SAEC staff to maintain control over the situation.

By sorting the children, they can be said to bring order. A consequence of managing the situation is that the child is individualized only when deviant from the group. Previously, constructions of “the competent child” in preschool settings have been problematized for excluding possibilities to be lack of competence or different from the norm (Månsson, 2008). Discourses of the deviant child show the risk of the opposite, that is, the exclusion or invisibility of competent or well-behaved children. To be able to keep the group intact, “the child” is expected to adapt and be submissive to other members of the group. However, these constructions make it difficult for children to be noticed and to identify themselves as something other than a divergent behavior.

As shown in previous research (e.g., Ljusberg, 2022; Månsson, 2008), the normative assumptions that exist in a specific context enable certain positions for children and makes other positions less accessible. The results of this study show that it is important to reflect on which child positions are offered to children in SAEC and what this entails for children (cf. Hurst, 2020; Lager, 2021). Such reflection includes what it means for children to be individualized only as deviant from the group, as they are in this study where teachers’ discursive formations of the child seem to limit children’s possibilities to express and fulfil their own initiatives. This problematizes social learning as the basis of teaching in Swedish SAEC (cf. Jonsson, 2021), as the results show that the social learning that becomes possible in these SAEC centers is connected to “the child” being construed as either (an invisible) part of a group, or an individual that exhibits unwanted behaviors. The child is thus not construed as having the ability to function as an individual with agency while also being a member of the group.

The results also show how these constructions are carried out through joint negotiations, where the staff largely confirm common interpretations of “the child.” These speech acts can thus be seen as joint rather than individual, as we rarely see that individuals challenge this common creation of meaning (cf. Hedrén, 2022). This contributes to the narrowing down of the constructions of “the child,” as the staff are focused on consensus rather than diversity. Previous research shows that there is a lack of organized collegial conversation in SAEC (Andersson, 2013; Dahl, 2020; Haglund, 2018). The results of this study highlight the importance of not only creating space for such conversations but also of reflecting on how these conversations are carried out.

Limitations of the study

This study is based on conversations with SAEC staff in two teams at one school, and cannot be generalized since local conditions vary. At the same time, the study contributes important knowledge about the processes through which SAEC staff’s meaning-making take place and of how “the child” can be construed in relation to SAEC practice. The constructions of the child/children are assumed to be limited by the focus of the collegial conversations: the problematic snack-time routine. It is likely that a different focus in conversations would reveal other discursive formations of the child. This makes it important to further study constructions of children in

different national and international professional contexts, to better understand how children are given space to act within SAEC and other educational settings.

Author biographies

Sanna Hedrén is PhD in Education with specialization in work-integrated learning at the Department of Social and Behavioural Studies at University West, Sweden. Her research interests are discourses and children's and teacher's meaning-making in school-age educare.

Lina Lago is an associate professor at the Department of Thematic Studies, Child Studies, at Linköping University, Sweden. Her main research interests are transitions in the early school years and children's social interactions in school-age educare.

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