Editorial

Nafsika Alexiadou & Linda Rönnberg, Editors

Every issue of Education Inquiry publishes peer-reviewed articles in one, two or three different sections. In the Open section, articles are sent in by authors as part of regular journal submissions and published after a blind review process. In the Thematic section, articles may reflect the theme of a conference or workshop and are published after a blind review process. The Invited section feature articles by researchers invited by Education Inquiry to shed light on a specific theme or for a specific purpose and they are also published after a review process. This issue of Education Inquiry contains a Thematic and an Open section.

Thematic section

The thematic section in this issue focuses on the physical environment of kindergartens and the ways in which children and teachers interact with it and make meaning through these interactions. In the Introductory Notes, Gunvor Løkken and Thomas Moser discuss in detail the concepts of ‘materiality’ and ‘space’ and present the ways in which they are used within a research project that has generated the rich data presented in the articles of the thematic section. Using a multitude of data collection techniques that draw on ethnographic approaches to researching kindergarten cultures, the authors explore various aspects of pedagogy and meaning-making modes through the use of materials and space, and the roles that actors (teachers and children) play within them.

In the first article, Solveig Nordtømme employs a socio-cultural theoretical approach to learning and understanding culture in her research of children’s play, participation and exploration. In considering children as active agents who construct their social space through interactions with the materials around them, she explores the processes of personal and social identity creation.

In an arts-based study, Biljana Fredriksen researches the role of teachers in developing curricula as lived materials that instigate children’s learning. In this article, materiality is approached through its relational quality and capacity to produce social relations and social knowledge through the constant negotiation of meaning.

Anne Lise Nordbø looks at space through performance and the democratic potential of educating very young children via the use of drama and the interactions involved in nonverbal communications between toddlers and performing adults. The ideas of embodiment and inter-subjectivity are used to illustrate the capacity of using performative events and drama pedagogy as effective and creative ways of enhancing learning through action.

In the next article, Astrid Granly and Eva Maagerø encourage us to think of the pedagogical potential of the multimodal text culture that exists in kindergartens in
Norway and beyond. Their research of three kindergartens uses video observations, photographs, field notes, documents and interviews with teachers and children, which are analysed through social semiotics and systemic functional linguistics. They argue for a new understanding of semiotic resources (building designs, language and visual images) as key pedagogic resources.

Finally, Nina Odegard gives a fresh perspective to our approach to ‘junk’ materials through her research on the use and of recycled or rejected items that kindergarten teachers use. Based on practitioner focus groups and text documentation, she argues that junk materials provide opportunities to young children for both material and discursive encounters that open up possibilities for creative action and empowerment. Drawing on the ideas of “heterotopia” and “lines of flight”, junk materials provide the space to children to name and define what they do, and frees them from the expectations of production that usually accompany more traditional construction play.

Open section

We have four papers in the open section. Anna-Lena Østern starts this section with an exploration of the potential of artistic supervision as a pedagogical and collaborative process. Drawing from micro ethnographic data that include video analysis, interviews and logs, she presents the creative capacity of co-production through improvisation as part of the supervision discourse and practice. Using multimodal theory, she stresses the potential of various modes of expression to be equally significant for meaning making and communication, and argues for such an approach to revitalise traditional ideas about supervision sessions.

Our second article in this section deals with a well-known problem of accessing research sites. Göran Widding starts with the assumption that access is not only an issue of communication strategy, but is also a problem conceptually embedded in the research design and practice. Thus, after reviewing the methodological literature on “access as communication”, he applies consensus and conflict perspectives on access through the work of Naomi Scheman and Jurgen Habermas. The discussion reveals the highly complex nature of ‘gaining access’ to research sites, and aims to provide a helpful guide that goes beyond the practical and obvious steps towards ensuring a successful entry to the research field.

Eva Skåréus deals with a similar issue in her article on “choices, resistance and consequences” during pilot studies. The author draws on her experiences of designing a ‘pre-study’ involving student-teachers in Art and Media, around the topic of gender and emotions in the “education practice of Art”. She reflects on the difficulties of obtaining willing participants for her research. The discussion around the researchers’ choices and the potential participant’s resistance is theorised through the application of power and gender perspectives, and within the framework of the cultural politics of emotions. The resulting discussion raises questions about the nature of the scientific knowledge that is produced, and the power potential that underpins it.
Finally, in her article on ‘therapeutic education in Finland’ Kristiina Brunila offers a sharp critique of the rising phenomenon of the use of therapeutic interventions as solutions to the problems faced by young adults on the margins of society. Using a Foucauldian approach and rich empirical data, Brunila describes the process of “subjectification” where the subjects of the discourse (in this case disadvantaged young people) end up adopting the discourses used by their ‘project workers’. The process – when deemed successful – results in young people attributing their problems to their own failure to engage with the system and take advantage of the opportunities offered. This internalisation of problems deflects from any critical engagement with ideas of social and economic problems having different roots and origins, and hence requiring more radical solutions than a re-working of the ‘self’.