A Child's Dropout and a Nursery's Secondary Adjustment

Linking Longitudinal, Organizational, and Institutional Ethnography in ECEC

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Preliminary Remarks: The Ethnographic Research Project[1]

Our paper is based on an ongoing research project that investigates a recently (in 2005) established type of childcare center in Luxembourg, the so called *Maison Relais pour Enfants* (MRE), which is characterized by extended opening hours and flexible enrolment periods for children. These novel institutions – in particular the MRE-*crèche* for 0 to 4 year-old children we are investigating – are a means of increasing both the number of childcare places and the opportunities for parents to make use of the services. At the same time, they are meant to provide a high pedagogical quality. With this array of tasks, practical difficulties seem likely to arise, e.g. in planning activities, synchronizing time schedules or fostering group life. Consequently, the initial research interest of the project was to find out how educational quality is practically accomplished under the highly deregulated organizational conditions. Moreover, since *Maisons Relais* are faced with different, sometimes contradictory interests (see Majerus 2009 for a detailed explanation of the official goals of the MRE), the basic question is how MRE deal with these various expectations of different stakeholders (parents, professionals, policy makers, children etc.). How are these external societal demands translated or transformed into institutional practices and routines? In other words, the organizational focus is widened by an institutionalist perspective. Accordingly, the ethnographic study doesn't merely focus on single children or interactions between adults and/or children, but puts the question of pedagogical quality in the organizational and institutional context of everyday practices.

Institutionalization in early childcare centers is a continuing process of enacting institutionalized values and principles in everyday practices (cf. Honig 2003). Of course, these processes are never completed; however, there may be periods when they are more pertinent and more obvious than during other periods. Particular temporal conditions which favor the observability of institutionalization processes are presumably 1) during the foundation and start of work, 2) at times of intensive contact with the institutional environment or the stakeholders, respectively, and 3) times of crisis and conflict situations.

All these conditions have been met during the course of our project. During a six-months pre-phase in 2009 we had the opportunity to accompany the establishment and initial designing of the day care center, including the planning process, the first decisions regarding the structuring of groups, space, timetables etc., the onset of the nursery's service and the initial negotiations with the institutional environment. At the same time, the institution was almost constantly in contact with external observers. Besides us, the researchers, these were above all the parents of the first enrolled children, who were present during the first weeks of their children's 'familiarization'. In the course of the first year, also the third motive for intensified institutionalization occurred. Especially this latter point will be the subject of a case study we would like to unfold below.

[1] The project is titled 'Betreuungswirklichkeit und Bildungswirklichkeit. Die Pädagogik der Maison Relais pour Enfants' (EDUQUA-MRE) and was designed and started at the University of Luxembourg by Michael-Sebastian Honig and Sascha Neumann in 2009. This paper is in large parts inspired by the ongoing work and discussion within the whole project team.

Before presenting and analyzing the case study, we will briefly introduce the ways in which organization and interaction have been related in research on ECEC and how our questions are situated within this context. Secondly, we will give a short overview of organization theory and the different but interconnected methodological approaches of longitudinal, organizational, and institutional ethnography. Then, after outlining our methods and positioning as researchers, we will proceed with the description of the case and the analytical abstractions drawn from it.

Organization and Interaction in ECEC

Early Childhood Education usually perceives its own organizational form as something separate from, even interfering with or inhibiting the educational practices and interactions between adults and children (Honig 2003, p. 120). This view has already been questioned by the sociology of childhood in that also the enabling and facilitating effects on children's collective learning and development were made visible. The organized care for a high number of children in a context governed by adult rules and pedagogical interventions provides the 'framework' for the development of a distinctive *peer culture*. This, in turn, enables learning and socialization insofar as the cultural and organizational environment is "interpretively (re)produced" (Corsaro) within the context of the peer culture, which thus actively contributes to social reproduction and change. The direction in which the relationship of organization and interaction is conceptualized thus moves from the organizational 'frame' to the children's practical activities.

Our concern, too, is with this basic question in current ethnographic research on ECEC, i.e. the question of the relationships, possibly the systematic linkage, between pedagogical institution and the everyday social experiences of children. However, it also takes into account the widely neglected question of how these relations are embedded in a wider environment of external expectations, educational and care policies, and societal demands. Although there are some elaborated research frames and programs in educational theory that see the educational organization as an intermediate to society and not merely as a given set of preconditions for children's learning (esp. Honig 2003; Honig/Neumann 2004), only a few studies, like the ethnography of Petra Jung (2009) on the duality of 'pedagogical order' and 'children's orders' in day care centers, have realized this approach empirically. We aim at contributing to this research field by shedding light on particular aspects of these relations, namely the processes through which the concrete social experiences of children, their embeddedness in specific social contexts, and their learning progresses are observed and interpreted, and finally lead to a (re)construction and change of institutional practices in the pedagogical organization. In other words, our paper follows the *reverse*, complementary direction compared to most research.

The question whether children might be involved in processes of change of the organization itself raises the related question where children can be located within the theoretical frameworks of organization research. In what sense do they belong to the organization, in what sense to the environment?[2] And if they belong to the environment, how do they come to be institutional actors? Answering these questions seems to be crucial in order to catch the *specificities* of organizations in Early Childhood Education and Care. But first, a brief chapter on basic issues in organizational theory will serve to prepare the ground for our argumentation.

[2] This is a general and by no means unusual type of question in organizational studies: "Are customers members of the organization, or are they part of the environment to which the organization must adapt?" Weick 1969, p. 27, refering on Barnard 1948.

Organization Theory: Change, Environment, and Legitimacy

Early theorizing on organizational behavior has been criticized for being ahistorical, acontextual, and a-processual (Pettigrew 1985), but this is no longer true since the last decades. The notion of organizations as stable entities has been revised by a huge amount of theoretical and empirical studies focusing on two interrelated issues: change and environment.

An overview of about twenty accounts of „Organizational Transformation“ has extracted a commonly used distinction, between “first-order change” and “second-order change” (Levy/Merry 1986) whereby the former stands for a “variation within a given system which itself remains unchanged”, as opposed to the latter which means “changing the system itself […] in the nature of a discontinuity or logical jump” (Watzlawick et al. 1974, cited ibid., p. 7). Another description speaks of “evolutionary change” on the one hand, meaning “modest adjustments”, and “revolutionary change” on the other hand, meaning “serious upheavals and abandonment of past management practices involving finding a new set of organizational practices” (Greiner 1972, cited Levy/Merry 1986, p. 6). It seems promising to apply this distinction as a sensitizing concept for investigations of developments in the field of ECEC-organizations. Do second-order changes occur here, and on what levels of social action?

Furthermore, organizational change is considered throughout in terms of “adaptation” to the environment. A literature review from as early as 1982 considers different perspectives on adaptation processes. The various approaches differ in questions like: What or who is adapted? Who and where are the agents of change? Do organizations merely accommodate to uncontrollable changes or do they rather adapt proactively? (Goodman 1982) It has also been asked whether organizations themselves are “cultural engines” that promote or change institutions in their environment (Zucker 1988; for a more detailed comparison of these positions see Jung 2009). The latter position seems to be a special variation of the general viewpoint, drawn from evolutionary theory (along with most of the terminology and thoughts), that “the organism creates its environment.” (Mead 1956, cited in Weick 1969, p. 26). This creation is supposed to be tied to processes of selection and attention.

Weick later contributed to more concrete models of the “*enactment*” of organizations and their environments. His notion of educational organizations as “*loosely coupled systems*” (Weick 1976) was elaborated by Meyer and Rowan (1977) who maintained that organizations adapt their *formal structure* to the institutionalized myths in their environment while their control over *activity structures* decreases. By achieving formal *isomorphism* with their environments, organizations gain legitimacy by symbolic means rather than by efficient attainment of goals.

The concepts of the ‘*new institutionalism*’ have greater potential to grasp the phenomenological variations and complexities of organizational change in a more subtle way than the simple alternative of first-order and second-order change. *Ethnography*, in turn, allows to tackle theoretical questions concerning the relationships between organization and environment, between daily practices and legitimacy and so on, through empirical investigation of actual processes.

Methodology: Ethnography and its Adjectives

Longitudinal Ethnography: Corsaro and Molinari (2000, p. 180) promote longitudinal ethnography by arguing that “the whole time children are developing individually, the collective processes that they are a part of are also changing.” Furthermore, they suggest to “document the nature of children’s membership

in these local cultures and their changing degrees or intensities of membership and participation over time and across social institutions."

In the context of research on schooling, these aims have already been moved toward questions of organization by Andrew Pollard. He conducted a twelve-year longitudinal ethnography on pupil careers and documented "the progression of organisation, activity structures and routine tasks in each class […] together with the responses of the children to such provision." (Pollard 2004, p. 291)

In terms of pure duration, our own study may not necessarily be more "longitudinal" than most ethnographies are, but with respect to the rapidly developing setting of the *Maison Relais* and the frequent changes in everyday routines, it probably offers as much opportunities for temporal comparisons as 'usual' longitudinal studies. (After all, 'longitude' in research should be a matter of social processes, not of total time. See also the thoughts on order and change in Strauss 1993, p. 250ff.)

Organizational Ethnography: We would like to build on and extend the above argument of Corsaro and Molinari by saying that local cultures and participatory networks in Early Childhood Education are embedded in organizational processes and routines that are also changing. The question then is how and to what extent these forms of social order are related to one another and in what way the processes of change are interdependent. More precisely, with the above mentioned concepts of institutional organization theory in mind (e.g., Meyer/Rowan), we would ask: How and to what extent is the long-term development of children's social memberships connected with changes in a) the formal structure and b) the structure of activities of the organization?

As indicated above, change is *the* central issue in contemporary organizational theory. Therefore, it is hardly surprising that longitudinal (in part ethnographical) methodologies, especially case studies, have been widely promoted in this context of research (Huber/Van de Ven 1995). Apart from stressing the temporal dimension, it is less clear, however, if approaches under the label of "organizational ethnography" are capable of meeting all of the current theoretical challenges, for instance regarding the relationships between an organization and its environment. Important volumes titled "Inside Organizations" (Jones/Moore/Snyder 1988 and also Gellner/Hirsch 2001) or „Ethnography in Organizations" (Schwartzman 1993) suggest rather fixed borders which ethnographers are meant to cross. Consequently, some approaches emphasize the *being there*-quality of ethnography. Much of the results reveal an *informal* realm of cultures, symbols, stories and the like (Jones/Moore/Snyder 1988) as opposed to the 'monolithic' image of organizations in earlier sociological theory. However, there are also other voices. Gellner and Hirsch themselves write: "Rather than working inside an organization, the anthropologist sometimes researches at the 'interface' between organizations and 'the people'" (p. 4). The question of "Inside or Outside" and the process of gaining access to organizations are being used to approach the very core questions of theory. We would agree with this standpoint and hold that (organizational) ethnographers, being natural outsiders or "professional strangers" respectively, should not try to "go native", but rather stay close to the boundaries or in those social areas where the boundaries are set, negotiated, protected, rearranged etc. A recent account of "Organizational Ethnography" (Ybema et al. 2009) goes one step further and draws on the discussion about "multi-sited" or even "un-sited" fields in ethnography where pre-given boundaries are dissolved altogether (see also Sascha Neumann's paper by for this colloquium).

Institutional Ethnography: The transgression of such boundaries and the movement of field research across the sites and levels of social reality is an essential feature of the so called "Institutional Ethnography" by Dorothy Smith and others. Her important monograph is subtitled "A sociology for people" (Smith

2005), thus its aim is to reveal "how people's doings in the everyday are articulated to and coordinated by extended social relations that are not visible from within any particular local setting and just how people are participating in those relations" (p. 36). It investigates – to give an example in the field of education – the experience of becoming a "single parent family" in interaction with public schools (Griffith 2006).

According to its protagonists, institutional ethnography deals with organizational and institutional phenomena *not* from the viewpoint of an organization and its development. However, this viewpoint seems to us an issue in its own right, also in research on Early Childhood Education and Care. Here, organizational and longitudinal ethnography could provide a complementary perspective in their efforts to track processes of change and long term developments of organizational structures and institutional practices. Vice versa, institutional ethnography could contribute to longitudinal studies on the everyday social life in daycare institutions, especially on children's activities, by heightening their sensitivity to organizational aspects like the respective roles and functions of children.

This brief discussion of ethnographic methodologies highlighted the large common ground rather than the differences. What all these approaches have more or less in common is their ambition to overcome the dichotomy of the micro- and macro-level of social reality.

Doing Ethnography: Field access and multi-method strategy

Our position as a research team in the MRE is somewhere *between* the organization and its environment – in a sense we are *created* by the staff as having this "intermediate" position. This can shortly be illustrated with respect to the permissions or refusals of access to different times and places. As accompanying research team we have, for example, received a key for the front door and even our own locker in the locker room. We were allowed to come and go beyond the official bringing-times of the parents. Nevertheless, there are times and places where we are not permitted access. Above all, these are the weekly meetings of the team in the office, but also parent-teacher-talks. Hence we also belong to the actor groups that constitute the 'audience' of the institution. This intermediary standpoint has, for example, the advantage that the practical *and* representational functions of "activities" can be gauged.

The following case study centers on two (complementary) kinds of methodical approaches which, at first glance, roughly relate to two sides of organizational processes. On the one side, we draw on our field notes that were generated on the base of our actual presence in the everyday practice, especially in the rooms of the two children's groups. On the other side, we use protocols of our conversations with the staff, particularly with the center's director, in which we jointly unfold the stories "behind" routines as entrenched solutions of practical problems.

The latter serve to evoke descriptions and narrative accounts of management practices, negotiations with actors in the environment and other aspects. Here, both the organizational development and the social and cultural life of children are disputed. These narratives are thus always linked to the observed practices in that these practices explicitly or implicitly act as a reference point – they form the subject that is talked about, recounted or explained. The stories that emanate from our conversations are multi-perspectival in the sense that they center on events that are observed from different sides and draw on the perspectives not only of researchers and staff but also refer to parents' and children's views and expressions.

What's wrong with Ian?

Ian is one of the first children enrolled in the daycare center when it first opens its doors in October 2009. At that time he is nearly two years old and is described in our early observation protocols as a 'communicative' and 'vivid' child, quite active in exploring his environments and initiating interactions. Yet, from the very beginning on, he doesn't seem to participate much in any peer activities. Instead, he interacts mostly with adults or plays on his own. This however doesn't pose much of a problem, especially as the initial weeks of the center's existence are characterized by an almost 'family-like' ambiance with sometimes more adults than children staying in the room. Educators, researchers, and parents who accompany their children throughout their first days in the center are willing partners of interaction and help Ian settling in. Apparently, Ian enjoys the attention paid to him by all these adults and he seems to do quite well in his new surroundings. He often babbles and vocalizes mostly incomprehensible sounds and syllables or just shouts loud and joyfully.

As the first months pass by, the center increasingly gets filled with more and more children and, consequently, with more and more noise. But, the louder his environment becomes, the more silent gets Ian himself. The 'language barrier' seems to make things particularly difficult for him, as he only rarely uses or repeats the (Luxembourgish, German or French) words directed at him by the adults. From time to time, we observe how the educators try to make sense of his still incomprehensible utterances. In this context they also discuss his plurilingual experiences at home and in the center.

> 29.3.2010
> Ian is at the focus of talk during lunchtime. As usual he utters some syllables or words. Maria, the director of the center, says to her colleagues (in Luxembourgish): "We should take a course in Bulgarian, then we would at least understand what he is talking about." I ask if that was Bulgarian he was speaking. She answers that it wouldn't really be *any* language. "Ian doesn't even *repeat* any words. When we say 'e guten Appetit' before eating, he *never* says it with us." She explains that his mother speaks German with him, his father French, and together they speak Bulgarian.
>
> I ask her if the parents said something about their wishes concerning language. She denies and states that the parents would above all be glad he had settled in so well here. He was in another nursery before, but always kept crying and wanted back home. "But we have to figure out how to proceed, because now he is already two." […]
>
> Ian whines along 'artificially' (he doesn't cry). He also stares vacantly into space, not taking up eye-contact. Carla moves her arm up and down in front of his face and clicks her fingers: "Hellooo? Everything alright?" He just keeps on whining "Eeehh!" (which sounds a bit like the French word „un") – so Carla says „Deux!" (as she has done at other times, too). Maria comments: "What could that possibly be supposed to mean?" I say: "But *this* is *not* Bulgarian!" Carla adds: "That's *international*." We laugh. After a short break Maria tries a serious translation: „I hope I can attract all of someone's attention just for myself." There is quiet approval.
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> […] As I write this down, Ian's mother is just coming to pick him up. As she takes him up on her arms she says: "Give the puppet [Puppeeee] to Stéphane… Mer-ciiii… And give him the caterpillar [Raupeeee] … Mer-ciiii…!"

As the number of children in the center gradually increases and day-to-day activities become more and more routinized, Ian often seems quite 'passive', just standing around or sitting somewhere, and he vocalizes less often than before. The educators, who were more permissive and responsive to his 'special' situation and needs in the beginning, now become ever more occupied with organizational routines and

management tasks. While other children adapt more or less easily to the institution's developing routines[3], Ian seems somehow to be 'left behind'. He doesn't actively participate in the center's routinized practices or in other children's activities and sometimes the educators' practical performances seem to be disturbed by Ian's 'maladaptive' (passive) behavior.

His activities which are documented throughout the whole year in numerous observation protocols can certainly be understood as cultural routines or as *interpretive reproduction* (like his playing with greeting formulas, giving and taking of objects, imitation of sounds etc.). These activities and forms of expression, however, are closely related to the cultural forms of adults, or, more precisely, to the adult ways of speaking and interacting with children. In contrast, he still only very rarely participates in peer activities. In this respect, his opportunities for participation decrease as the whole social setting is changing.

> 12.11.2010
> Ian is brought by his father in the morning. Alexander immediately approaches Ian to greet him and plays with him for a short while close to the entrance door. Meanwhile, the educators discuss (in Luxemburgish) that Ian had been quite difficult yesterday and that there seems to be no other child in the center talked about as much as about him. Ian now sits all alone on the ground in front of the door and appears a bit 'lost'. As he starts to cry, Julia sits down next to him and he calms down for a while.
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> Before breakfast time, Ian walks out of the bathroom with his pants down and stops to stand still in front of the door. The educators repeatedly call out to him: "Ian, pants up!" But he only passively looks down at his legs, and resumes staring into the air in front of him until someone comes to pull up his pants and leads him to the breakfast table.
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> During the morning, Ian stays sitting at the table – at first he does some painting with Carla, then he plays a game with wooden rings together with one of the childcare assistants. He seems more active and cheerful now, also verbalizing some incomprehensible sounds. However, from time to time he starts crying again. The assistant explains that he always does that when other children are crying or screaming.
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> Later at the lunch table, Christopher and Alexander repeatedly greet me with "Moien!" and Ian cheerfully joins in, saying "Moien Claudia!" As Rita hears this she is quite surprised and excitedly tells Carla about it. Ian is much more active now than in the morning or during lunchtime – he is laughing, verbalizing and singing. I can understand some Luxembourgish words like "bis moien", "äddi", "ech kommen" or names of other children. He repeats these expressions while still sitting at the table and also later in the bathroom.
>
> During bedtime, only very few children remain in the room while the others are sleeping next door. The educators comment that it would be pretty quiet now. Ian sits on the carpet alone, smiling and babbling along… He plays with a hat that is shaped like a birthday cake and sings "Happy birthday to you" and later also the French song "Alouette" (at least some words of it).

By the end of the year 2010, Ian appears as ever more absent-minded in our observation protocols, just staring into space, seemingly unaware of his surroundings. However, his behavior only turns into a serious problem as he breaks out of his apathetic attitude more often by crying out loudly with no apparent reason. The educators describe his behavior as "strange" or "weird" but cannot themselves define or explain it more precisely. By now he is becoming an "organizational problem" (Ben-Ari 1996, p. 153).

Ian's parents are quite worried about his wellbeing in the center. At this moment, the "familiarization-stage" (where the parents stay with their children in the room during their first days in the nursery

[3] By developing individual and collective strategies like, for example, playing with the dishes, makings noises, and imitating each other while waiting for their meals or until they are called to the bathroom after eating; playing with other children while the adults are occupied writing journals or preparing activities, etc.

in order to make it easier for them to settle in) is repeated after Ian has been enrolled in the center for more than a year. During a week or so, one of his parents always stays with him in the center for several hours each day, calming him down when he gets too excited, encouraging him to play (and to speak). One day we can observe Ian with his father. He keeps on crying very often but also lets himself being smoothed quite easily. However, he always stays in close proximity to his father and directs his attention almost exclusively at him, showing him toys or repeating his words.

As we learn in our conversations with the center's director, Ian's parents later complained that the children in the center were not learning social behavior and that there would not occur enough language promoting activities. Learning social behavior (like sharing and conflict resolution) and promoting Luxembourgish are two of the main wishes or expectations expressed by many parents in the information sheets they fill out upon their child's entry into the center (also by Ian's parents). His parents had even made a list with the actual words Ian could already speak in each language, to 'prove' to the director how few there were. In fact, they accused the center only to keep the children in care, and not to *educate* them.

> 23.11.2010
> Maria: „The father told me he had not known until now that we would work according to a situation-oriented approach. 'Laissez-faire' he says. I said it isn't the same as ‚laissez-faire'. He thinks our children were too aggressive. And we wouldn't encourage them to share with each other. I don't think this is true at all. I wanted to ask you if you had a feedback on that. How do you see it?"
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> Oliver: "I totally agree with you."
>
> Maria: "When the parents are in the group the whole day long, we are nervous and uneasy, because we are under observation, and this also affects the ambiance and the children. You observe, too, but it's a different kind of observation. The parents' observation is … also an evaluation."[4]

The quarrel with the family finally ends in Ian's being taken out of the center by his parents. As a response (at least in part) to the 'crisis' caused by Ian's dropout, we observed some dramatic changes in the center's daily routines such as, for instance, the introduction of a blackboard during 'morning conference' designed explicitly to further promote children's language learning. While the morning conference was initially considered as an opportunity to increase children's participation in everyday decision making processes, it now appears as quite an adult-centered activity that builds on a more school-like approach to learning (where the educators first pronounce the words in Luxembourgish – for example colors, numbers, weather – and the children shall then repeat them). Moreover, the creation of a developmental index (in spreadsheet format) for each child is given more priority now and organizational measures are taken to integrate this task more easily into the daily routine (like introducing special activities for the observation of specific developmental domains).

> Mid-January 2011
>
> Oliver: „What thoughts were connected with the blackboard? It was about language promotion, wasn't it? Was that the main idea?"

[4] One of our early and ever repeated claims in the strive for access and rapport was that we do not intend to evaluate or judge the pedagogical practice but describe it in its own terms, or rather in terms of how it deals with internal and external expectations and demands…

Maria: “Yes, one main idea. It’s for example about learning to draw connections, like between the letter ‘A’ and the word ‘apple’. We do this *anyway*. We do something and talk about it: Now we sit down, this is a chair, that’s a table, etc. Even when we do *motoric* activities: Language is *always* there. The conference [as it is now designed] was mainly about showing the parents that we *explicitly* do something about it. Because parents asked for it. […]

Oliver (commenting on the conflict with Ian’s parents): “How did this disruption come about? There was this day when the father went home again with Ian…”

Maria: “Yes, it was Tuesday. Wednesday, the mother should have come with him, but she didn’t show up. Then we called them, and they said they had taken the week off. They would call us back later. Then, on Monday there was this friendly e-mail: “Herewith we dis-enroll our child.”

Oliver: “Really friendly?”

Maria: “Yes, *very* friendly. Things like: We had a ‘waiting room concept’; we wouldn’t work with the children properly… That was really hard! A strong experience. Then you begin to think, did we do something wrong? How should we react?

Their reaction was to introduce and reinforce more ‘visible’ formats of learning and development, like the blackboard and the developmental indices. Thus, instead of using this first serious ‘crisis’ in the institution’s life circle as a chance to defend and to clarify their pedagogical approach, that was centered on a conceptualization of the child as an active learner (child-centered approach), the institution adapted to the (conceived) parental expectations which focused more on learning outcomes than processes. The professionals are well aware that the described measures primarily contribute to the *representation* of their pedagogical work in front of their clientele, that is, the parents, while the actual support of individual development and promotion of language learning occur ‘invisibly’ in everyday interactions. The aim is thus to increase the institution’s legitimacy.

Analytic abstractions from the case study

We want to approach the initial question, how organizational change can be related to children’s development and socialization, at first by seeing the latter through the lenses of organization sociological theory. The already mentioned stage of “familiarization”, a time of approximately three weeks provided for the child to get accustomed to its new institutional surroundings, is called *Adaptatioun* in Luxembourgish. This adaptation of children – framed as desirable and prearranged – does not proceed in a predictable or uniform way so that the underlying conceptions of the model are hardly identifiable in reality. Moreover, Jan’s story shows that a “familiarization”, in the truest sense of the word, that is as an adaptation to the institution’s requirements by way of establishing familial interactive patterns and intimate adult-child relations, is hardly realizable if, in the long run, everyday practice in the institution is marked by rather non-familial circumstances and interactions. Normally, further adaptations are necessary to succeed in the specific social setting of an organization with all its shortcomings and regulations. Because these are by no way total, but mediated by the idiosyncratic routines of a peer culture, these adaptations have been described by Corsaro (1985, p. 254ff.) with Goffman’s concept of “*secondary adjustments*”. By secondary adjustments a member or resident of an organization is “getting around the organization’s assumptions as to what he should do and get and hence what he should be”, that is “the indi-

vidual stands apart from the role and self that were taken for granted for him by the institution". (Goffman 1961, p. 189)

Ian's adjustment, however, just didn't occur. At least in a social and cultural sense he does not adjust to the institution (even when he personally "stands apart" in the sense that he temporarily withdraws his attention from his surroundings or just "mirrors" the overly demanding impressions). In fact, he developed behaviors that can (partly) be identified as *consequences of organized care,* while at the same time they seem *incompatible* with its practical and organizational requirements. With his behavioral and expressive responses the portrayed child calls the organizational form of education and care *as such* into question. At the same time, his responses seem to get in the way of the practical "flow" of organized care. However, this is not alone due to his lack of participation or insufficient social and verbal competencies (as there are other children in a comparable situation who do not pose such a problem). Only when he starts to give permanent signals that cannot be ignored (like his recurrent loud crying, often with no obvious reason, and his simultaneous withdrawal and refusal of contact) does he really challenge the everyday pedagogical practice.

Thus, Ian's story also demonstrates how, in reverse, the institution's success depends on the children's indirect adaptations (secondary adjustments) to the organization. If these adjustments are absent, children will sooner or later show "inappropriate" or "maladaptive" behaviors and/or forms of expression. This way they put the institution *itself* under the pressure to adapt to the children, a form of pressure that may be reinforced by the children's parents.

But the situation on the side of the institution is not that different: Adaptations cannot be made arbitrarily but have to comply with several requirements and external demands. On the level of the single daycare center the scope for substantial adjustments is quite limited. Thus, secondary adjustments of daycare centers seem to us to be characterized by pretending to implement second-order change (vis-à-vis their institutional environment), while settling for first-order changes in the everyday practice.

Nonetheless, the institution managed to use this critical incident to initiate and promote its own advancement. As the director told us, the plans to reorganize activities already existed for quite a while, but it was difficult to implement them with the whole team. Some have "slowed it down". The situation of heightened external pressure was a good opportunity for her to establish these new routines. Alongside, the institution seems to "learn" how to externalize failure in a more confident and self-assertive way and to avoid the attribution of some particular children's problems to the institution itself. If child care centres are adequately counted among those "Permanently Failing Organizations" (Meyer/Zucker 1989) that never accomplish their explicit goals but still continue to survive, then these observations should contribute to explain how they manage.

To further characterize this process for the institution the model of the *loosely coupled system* (see above) seems useful. However, it takes a closer look to specify in which way the coupled elements are linked in this case and how the couplings come to be *loose* or *tight*. How and why does the institution get under such a pressure that is comparable to the children's situation in that the institution has to develop routines for the purpose of "getting around", one could say, "the environment's assumptions as to what it should do and get and hence what it should be"? The answer may be found, with the case study in mind, in the specific constellation of observer positions and opportunities to articulate expectations, which in its extreme (though not necessarily unique) form is so characteristic for institutions in the realm of ECEC.

In the course of the repeated "familiarization" of their child, the parents simultaneously have to be permitted entry into the "interior" of the institution, i.e. in that spatio-temporal realm in which the staff members carry out their daily routines and activities. Only after that border-crossing does the parents' vehement critique set in. The institution reacts with the establishment or restructuring of activities (like the blackboard) and with measures to make activities more visible to external observers (like the developmental index), whereby also the latter heavily affect the performance of daily work with the children.

In general, an essential part of the theory of de-coupling between the formal-rational structure and the activities of an organization does not fit in Early Childhood settings: In their important publication that was largely based on schooling, Meyer and Rowan held: "In place of coordination, inspection, and evaluation, a logic of confidence and good faith is employed" (1977, p. 340). Exactly this logic permanently tends to be broke open and made impossible in nurseries. Consequently, de-coupling of formal structures and activity structures is possible only to a very small extent.

Thus, it seems to be a specific feature of Early Education organizations (if not a feature of pedagogical organizations in general) that 'institutionalized myths' are implemented *into* the activity structure in order to represent 'efficient' work processes. Ethnographic studies in the field of Early Education (e.g. Bollig 2004) have already shown that institutional everyday life is strongly determined by the pedagogical *presentation activities* (a term we derive from Goffman's concept of "self-presentation activities" in Goffman 1959).

All in all, it doesn't make much sense to locate daily educational activities and interactions in the 'internal' realm of the organization and representative formal structures in the 'external' realm. Accordingly, issues like language promotion are not naturally 'here' or 'there', but eventually migrate from the 'inner realm' to the 'outer borders' and back again.[5]

However, there is a kind of 'loose coupling' of these presentation activities, namely it is rather de-coupled regarding the *children*'s development and its observation and interpretation by the adults. In this sense, Meyer and Rowan's assumption suits well, that organizations "incorporate the practices and procedures defined by prevailing rationalized concepts of organizational work and institutionalized in society […] *independent of the immediate efficacy*". (1977, p. 340; emphasis added).

The tendency of de-coupling at this point of the organizational web becomes likely because the 'external' observers, particularly the parents, are not just the representatives of their children but may also be agents of highly institutionalized interpretive patterns, as in the case of Ian's parents. Our report should have made apparent the practically legitimizing use of instruments which draw on myths of scientific rationality, like the developmental index (used by the nursery) and the grammatically classified vocabulary (used by the parents), but also educational forms that are taken for granted in schooling, like the blackboard.

But still there is a *loose* coupling that remains important. The analyzed story should also have shown that children participate in social processes that constitute and can even lead to change on the organizational level. We would argue that in principal there are two different ways in that children eventually contribute to organizational practices and change:

[5] Besides, organizational change must also be understood in the context of *institutional* change. The demand for language promotion for example must be put in the context of the fundamental shift in education and care policies – an issue that cannot be covered in this short paper.

1. As audible *commentators* on the everyday pedagogical practice of the institution in that they, verbally or non-verbally (e.g., through the expression of emotions), potentially *point to* essential aspects of practices and routines

2. As *observed* participants in this everyday practice, since the observations made on them are communicated by different actors in the institutional field and can be used to pursue their respective interests

Therefore, it is essential that children – be they part of the "environment" or not – are constantly present in the day-to-day practice of the institution, as participants as well as observers. Hence, especially the *speaking* children can get potentially "difficult" or even "dangerous".[6] But also *screaming and crying* children, like the example of Ian has shown, pose special challenges in that they permanently articulate non-fulfilled needs and expectations.

This perspective on the role of children also helps to, empirically, cast a different light on another topic of childhood sociology – that is the *marginality* of children. They can be referred to as *outsiders* (Zeiher/ Büchner/Zinnecker 1996) also in an organization sociological perspective and, moreover, in a socio-epistemological (Neumann 2008) sense. Which multiple consequences arise from the fact that pedagogical institutions have to face children as observers of their practice and how the proceedings within the institution might become intelligible through this fact, are questions that so far have scarcely been in the focus of theoretical and empirical attention.

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[6] This topic and respective field notes are going to provide a further extension of the study and thoughts presented here.

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