Háskólinn á Akureyri

Hug- og félagsvísindasvið

Kennaradeild

Leikskólabraut

2012

Píla í sveitinni

Robyn Elizabeth Vilhjálmsson

Lokaverkefni

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Leiðsögukennari: Rósa Kristín Júlíusdóttir

Lokaverkefni til 180 eininga B.Ed.-prófs í kennaradeild

a) Ég lýsi því með yfir að ég ein er höfundur þessa verkefnis og að það er ágóði eigin rannsókn.

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(undirskrift höfundar)

b) Það staðfestist hér með að lokaverkefni þetta fullnægir að mínum dómi kröfum til B.Ed.-prófs í kennaradeild.

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(undirskrift leiðsögukennara)

a) *Píla í sveitinni* er barnabók ætluð þriggja til sex ára leikskólabörnum. Aðalpersóna í bókinni er fjárhundur, Píla að nafni. Hún kemst í kynni við kindur, hesta, kýr og hreindýr og í gegnum hana er lært um dýrin, húsakynni og lífshætti þeirra. Fjallað er um sögu barnabóka á Íslandi og hvernig *Píla* passar inn í þessa sögu. Hvaða hlutverk dýr hefur í bókum og hvaða sýn ung börn hafa raunverulega á náttúru og dýrum. Leitast er við til að kenna börnum um umhverfi og sjálfbærni, eins og í *Aðalnámskrá leikskóla*, 2011 og spurningin er barnabók miðillin til þess. Kenningar um vitsmunaþroska ungra barna eru skoðaðir og sýnt er að ung börn yfirleitt sækast eftir því sem þau kannast við, svæðisbundið og heimilislegt heldur en ókunnugt, vilt eða framandi. Félagsleg samskipti barns og dýra er skoða með sérstaklegu tilliti til umhyggju. Spurðu ef umhyggja á milli dýrs og barns er hægt að stækka til taka inn umhyggju um umhverfi og náttúruna. Sumar hugmyndir í bókinni *Píla í sveitinni* um umhverfis meðvitund og sjálfbærni eru utan við þann skilningi sem ung börn hafa á heiminum. Hlutverk leikskólakennarans er mikilvægt til að túlka og útfæra hugmyndir um stærri heim til minni umgjörð hugsunar barns. Barnabókin er einungis ein leið fyrir börnin að upplifa náttúra vegna þess beinlínis snerting og umgengni við náttúruna er leiðin sem ung börn læra mest af. Samt sem áður, barnabækur geta leika lykill hlutverki í að fræðast, vera kveikjan fyrir leiki og skapa aðstæður fyrir umræður. Í gegnum slíka, málörvun og félagslegan þroska barna geta fara að stað. Rannsóknin sem notuð þátttökuathugun aðferð sýnir að leikskólabörn í tveimur leikskólum á austurlandi vita miklu minna en fræðilega rannsókn erlendis frá segir til um.

b) *Píla í sveitinni* is a children´s book intended for a three- to six-year old audience. The main character is a sheep-dog named Píla. She meets sheep, horses, cows and reindeer, learns about them, where they live and how they spend their lives. This essay discusses the book and fits it into the history of Icelandic children´s literature. Animals play an important role in children´s literature but it is also it is asked how children see real animals and nature. *The Playschool Curriculum*, 2011 is examined in relation to its emphasis on the concepts of the environment and sustainability, and whether the children´s book as a medium can teach these concepts. Various theories of children´s cognitive development are examined to show that young children actively seek after the familiar, local and domestic rather than the exotic, regional and unfamiliar. The social interaction between children and animals is discussed with special emphasis on caring as a theme. It is questioned whether the concept of caring can be extended to the wider environment and if this is an appropriate method for teaching preschoolers about the environment and sustainability. Some of the environmental ideas in *Píla í sveitinni* may seem advanced cognitively for preschool children to grasp and so it is the role of the playschool teacher to interpret them in an age-appropriate manner. Although preschoolers learn mostly through direct experiences of nature, the children´s book can be a catalyst for play and an arena for discussion. Vocabulary skills and social development are benefits if the book is read in an interactive manner. Participatory research in Iceland, of a limited nature, shows preschoolers know little about animals. This was contrary to theory-based expectations.

My thanks are extended to the Cultural committee of *The Samvinnufélag Útgerðarmanna Neskaupstað (SÚN)* for a 50,000 kr. grant in December of 2011. I also wish to thank the committee of *Ungmennafélagið Egill rauði* in Norðfjörður for giving me a 50,000 kr. grant with the condition I take part in their Cultural evening in October 2012. My appreciation goes to *HéraðsPrent* in Egilsstaðir, especially to Ingunn, for her work with the printing of *Píla í sveitinni.*

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1. Introduction

This essay aims, through two research questions, to determine the value of a children´s book I have written about animals, *Píla í sveitinni*. Historically and culturally, books play an important role in Icelandic daily life and they have traditionally been vehicles for educational and pedagogical practises. *Píla* is an effort in this tradition, albeit a modest one designed to teach preschool children about sheep, horses, cows and reindeer seen through the eyes of Píla, an Icelandic sheep-dog. Set on the east coast of Iceland, the book´s chapters follow Píla with various animals throughout their annual cycles.

The two research questions are; Can a children´s book like *Píla í sveitinni* contribute to growing concerns like environmental awareness and sustainability, as emphasized in the new Curriculum for Playschools? And, is such a book developmentally appropriate for preschool children?

To answer these questions, a short history of children´s literature is first explained with emphasis on books using animals as spokespersons. The social relationship between children and animals is explored, especially when this relationship occurs in a natural setting. Its implications for environmental awareness are questioned and whether caring between animals and children could be a catalyst to a wider caring relationship with the environment. Various developmental theories are examined, although primarily the theories of Richard Louv, Stephen Kellert, Jean Piaget, Lev Vygotsky, John Dewey and Nel Noddings are used to understand how preschoolers view their environment and their relationships with others. Preschoolers in two eastern fjord playschools were asked what they know about farm animals using a participatory research method. Both types of knowledge, theoretical grounding and research data, were compared and the research questions answered.

2. Theoretical grounding

The theoretical groundings of this essay cover a wide range of specialities, including children´s literature, environmental studies, psychology and child development, history and even modern political science. It is hoped by drawing upon these various fields of knowledge a comprehensive and combined solution can be found to the above mentioned research questions.

2.1 Preschoolers and playschool

It may be necessary to begin this essay with a clarification. Throughout the essay the terms *preschool* and *playschool* are used equally refer to the Icelandic *leikskóli* institution. Although not a formal educational requirement, the vast majority of young Icelanders, from the ages of about one- year to six-years old attend these playschools. The children are from four to nine hours, usually five days a week, with large groups of other equal-aged children (Jón Torfi Jónasson, 2006, p. 22-23).The direct translation from Icelandic to English is playschool although this term is not used in English-language literature which uses variously kindergarten, preschool or child-care centre. I refer to the children as preschoolers who attend these playschools. The *National Curriculum for Playschools* (*Aðalnámskrá leikskóla*, 2011) contains the term playschool. I use the term preschool and playschool interchangeably although playschool emphasizes *play*, which is the main role, mode of learning and desired activity of young children as defined by the Curriculum (2011, p. 21).

2.2 The National Curriculum for Playschools

The National Curriculum for playschools is quite new, given out by in Department of Education and Culture in 2011. This new Curriculum emphasizes six basic factors which should be interwoven into everyday playschool life. They are literacy and communication, health and welfare, sustainability and science, creativity and culture (*Aðalnámskrá leikskóla*, 2011, p. 28).

Literacy taken in a broader sense of the word, is more than reading and writing, and includes *reading* one´s community, culture and one´s relationship with the environment and

nature. This is related to environmental awareness. The Curriculum states that in the past literacy was connected with the ability to read and write. Research has shown, however, literacy is also connected to how an individual speaks, uses language and how that language is used in the wider language community. Therefore, literacy is essentially community-based in its nature; it depends upon tradition and society, a system of symbols and communication which occurs in a cultural medium (*Aðalnámskrá leikskóla,* 2011, p.11).

Reading is also literacy and should not be limited to books as the medium. The Curriculum emphasizes the importance of children having access to a computer. Not only should the computer be used as a reading and mathematical tool but as one for art, website use and for communication. Students of the future will be using computers in all of these fields and so here lies an opportunity to allow the students to learn about communication in the spirit of democracy (*Aðalnámskrá leikskóla,* 2011, p.12). The Curriculum states that "playschool should have the environment which encourages and gives children the opportunity to use different methods, different technical tools and to approach information and distribute ideas" (*Aðalnámskrá leikskóla,* 2011, p. 29).

Children´s books play an important historical role. The National Curriculum recognises this and in its description of how the daily life of a playschool should operate, emphasizes that children should be given the opportunity "to express themselves, listen to narratives, stories, poems and adventure stories" (*Aðalnámskrá leikskóla*, 2011, p 24). Playschool should create the environment, physically and in terms of how the curriculum is structured, so children have the opportunity to "...enjoy listening to and creating their own stories, poems, jingles, nursery rhythms, and adventure tales... obtain understanding in written language and that written language is formed from symbols" (*Aðalnámskrá leikskóla,* 2011, p.29)

However, recently the website, *Skólavefurinn* reported students in ninth grade at a Reykjavik school, Vogaskóli, receiving Kindle electronic-book readers as part of their Icelandic language course studies. The school wishes to increase students' interest in reading and understanding written material. A research project is in place to measure whether an electronic book can replace ordinary course books and help students with reading difficulties (Ingólfur Kristjánsson, 2012).

The new National Curriculum for Playschools clearly supports this process whereby children´s literature in book form will be less visible in the near future; although it would appear the book as a cultural device will not entirely disappear. These cultural traditions,

along with creativity, are one of the six basic factors upon which playschools are grounded in. Preschoolers should be given the opportunity to get to know "book culture, jingles and nursery rhymes, songs and adventure stories" (*Aðalnámskrá leikskóla*, 2011, p. 30).

2.3 An historical overview of children´s literature

The role of literature, whether it be for adults or children, whether it be imaginative, critical, scientific or reporting, is of a "tool of thought "(Vygotsky, 1986 in Burke, Copenshaver and Carpenter, 2004, p. 206). As a tool, literature serves different purposes but the functions seemed to have remained consistent through time, both for adults and children" (Burke, et al, 2004, p. 206). These functions include the need to make sense of our lives and the world, for literature provides a device for grouping, organizing and places events within a structured pattern. Our understandings, knowledge and social beliefs are preserved with literature for it allows us to remember and preserve our decisions.

Literature lets us re-examine thoughts, converse with others and lets us help make adjustments to our understanding by generating questions and new life decisions. These can then be placed in a story context which has the potential to generate solutions, gain distance and transcend life threats for a story is less threatening, frightening or debilitating. Literature lets us savour and reflect upon experience, simplify and clarify a life experience and formulate plans to act on the world. Literature provides a momentary escape from the current situation (Burke, et al, 2004. p.206-207).

The genre of children´s literature focuses on some factors more than others. Many stories revolve around making sense of the world. Other children´s stories endeavour to put threatening or life changing experiences into context. Most importantly, children´s literature is used to transfer knowledge, entertain and explain moral dilemmas. This is done in a cultural medium.

Cultural movements have influenced literature. For instance, the Enlightenment, the 18th century movement of thought emphasized reason, information and individualism over tradition. Coming from Europe, it had a strong influence upon Icelandic society, not at least in the field of printing and publishing books. Various individuals during the Enlightenment believed in the future of mankind, not through economic development necessarily, but rather through the importance of education (Ingi Sigurðsson, 2006, p. 27, 29). One of these men, Magnús Stephansen, became a leader in the field of cultural and educational printed works.

He established the Hrappeyjar printing works in 1773, and until 1830, produced many printed works. This is important because the early printing industry enabled Iceland to produce books for the populace, including children´s books.

The upbringing and education of child was in the hands of the community (Sigurborg Hilmarsdóttir, 2004, p. 344). Books played an important role in the self-sustaining farming communities of the 19th century. Specifically, children were taught Christian theology and reading instruction, generally under the auspices of the child´s family but with the overview of a priest. In the royal decree of 1790 it was recommended that children first be taught to read before they learn their theology (Sigurborg Hilmarsdóttir, 2004, p. 344). The tradition of house-reading in the evenings in the larger country houses until the nineteenth century is important because although it was not a formal arranged event, family members could listen to a variety of subjects (Kristján Eirikson and Sigurborg Hilmarsdóttir, 1999, p. 94).

Often one family member would read whatever was available while other family members sat with whatever handiwork needed doing. The subject matter was to inform but entertainment value was also prized. Icelandic sagas, stories from older times and long complicated rhyming poems were also read aloud (Sigurborg Hilmarsdóttir, 2004, p. 344-345; Kristján Eirikson and Sigurborg Hilmarsdóttir, 1999, p. 94). These were not only written for children, though of course children probably had their own favourite stories (Silja Aðalsteinsdóttir, 1981, p.18-19).

Early books of an adventure or moralistic variety were specifically aimed at children. The later were published in England and France in the17th century. The most popular author at this time in France was Jean de la Fontaine who translated the moralistic tales of the ancient Greek writer Aesop to poetry. La Fontaine dedicated these tales to the son of Louis 14th and thought the child would learn all he needed, with ease and pleasure, by reading its moralistic poems (Silja Aðalsteinsdóttir, 2005, p. 10).

Both the influence of the later 19th century Romantic philosophy and the earlier 18th century Enlightenment philosophy can be found in children´s literature (Silja Aðalsteinsdóttir, 1981, p. 25). Romantic thinking had an influence upon nationalist tendencies (Ingi Sigurðsson, 2006, p. 37, 68). Romanticism as a philosophy can be defined as a reaction to the Enlightenment. The Romantic era emphasized emotion, passion, the sense of mystery in life and the creative spirit (Hawkins, 1986, p. 715).

The first published Icelandic book for children, published in 1780, is a poetry book entitled *Barna ljóð*. These poems were written by the priest Vigfús Jónsson specifically for

children, but more specifically for one child, his daughter. The influence of the Enlightenment can be seen clearly in the book´s value judgment about education being important and that a rational mind is worth striving for. Its tone is optimistic, its pedagogy is child-centred and it sets the tone for future Icelandic children´s books (Silja Aðalsteinsdóttir, 2005, p. 9-10).

The next book for children came out in 1795 but it was a translation from German to Icelandic via Danish. Entitled *Sumargjöf handa börnum* by Guðmund Jónsson it shows the influence of the Enlightenment on Icelandic intellectuals. Magnús Stephansen, in the book´s foreword, emphasizes the importance of information, especially in the upbringing of children (Magnús Stephansen, 1795 in Ingi Sigurðsson, 2006, p. 34). Children are made aware, through the stories, of the differences between good and evil. There are rules and children are gravely warned of the dangers of breaking them (Silja Aðalsteinsdóttir, 2005, p. 11).

The first original Icelandic children´s book, according to Silja Aðalsteinsdóttir came out in 1907. Previously, children´s books were translations, adoptions of older material or intended also for an adult audience. Entitled *Bernskan* by Sigurbjörn Sveinsson (1878-1950) it is Sigurbjörn´s own recall of his childhood. His book is more appropriate for children with its sincerity, humour and endearing story line. Childhood memories since that time have become an enduring theme in Icelandic children´s literature (Silja Aðalsteinsdóttir, 2005, p. 12-13).

From the 1980s children´s books have taken on social issues. Once thought to be inappropriate as subject matter for children´s books, even political issues like the fishing quota system in *Marsibil* (Helgi Guðmundsson, 2001) and genetic engineering in *Bíóbörn* (Yrsa Sigurðardóttir, 2003) can be found (Brynhildur Þórarinsdóttir, 2007, p 50). Admittedly, these children´s books are meant for the 9-12 year old audience but they aim to involve children in a social discourse previously thought only to be in the province of adults (Brynhildur Þórarinsdóttir, 2007, p 56). This may indicate how environmental issues can be introduced into children´s literature.

The natural landscape, especially the differences between life in the country and the city, has become a recent enduring theme. *Flowers on the Roof (Blómin á þakinu, 1985)* by Ingibjörg Sigurðardóttir, illustrated by Brian Pilkington, is about a grandmother moving to Reykjavik who is not happy until her top floor apartment flat resembles her country farmhouse (McMillan, 2007, p. 42). Guðrún Helgadóttir captures the strangeness of the Icelandic landscape in her tale of *Flumbra or A Giant Love Story* (*Ástarsaga úr fjöllunum*, 1981) “a charming story that leaves readers looking closely at the shapes of the rocks the next time they go hiking in the mountains” (McMillan, 2007, p. 43). Author Bruce McMillan says

about the book, and also about children´s books in general, that they are a reflection of the culture, and "the centre of the country´s population is fast-growing Reykjavik, with country farms left behind" (2007, p. 42).

McMillan seems to capture something more than reality in his books which are illustrated by the Icelandic artist Gunnella. *The Problem with Chickens* (*Hænur eru hermakrákur),* 2005, and *How the Ladies Stopped the Wind* (*Hvernig konurnar stöðvuðu blásturinn*), 2007 are McMillan books which give the readers' Icelandic reality touched with fantasy but recognisable as Iceland all the same.

> If you look at the children´s literature of Iceland, you will see Iceland. You will see what interests Icelanders. You will discover the culture of this unique island nation in the North Atlantic (McMillan, 2007, p. 49).

2.4 Classifications

Besides an historical perspective, another way of classifying children´s literature is by analyzing the book itself in terms of the pictorial and written content.

Margrét Tryggvadóttir uses a four-category system developed by Torben Gregersen for classifying illustrated children´s literature. Books in the first category are the so called books-for-pointing- at, aimed at the youngest children and often without a story-line or even a text. In the second category are picture books which do tell a story, though with or without a text. In the third category are story books which are profusely illustrated, and though there may be a text, it is dependent upon the illustrations to get the story across. In the final and fourth category are illustrated children´s books where the text has the upper hand, and where the illustrations do not tell the story if they were to stand alone (Margrét Tryggvadóttir, 1999, p.101). Generally speaking, books for older children have fewer illustrations and these are used to hold the attention of the reader, rather than tell the story itself.

In the middle of last century, the Danish literary scholar, Jens Sigsgaard divided children´s literature into two categories by how the book was read. The first group are those read for children by adults; *sitting-in-a-lap books*. Secondly are those where the children read them themselves; *lying-on-the-floor books* (Margrét Tryggvadóttir, 1999, p.102).

Illustrated children´s books, especially of categories one to three, have an audience of not only the child to whom the story is being read but also the adult who is reading aloud. The

dual audience means that children´s literature is often defined more by its audience than its content (Howard, 2009, p. 641).

The voice of the narrator can convey information but it is not what is said rather than how it is said which is of interest. Barbara Wall writes about the narrator´s voice. She divides books into two categories by whether the narrator is addressing the children and adults who are listening or reading the story or by whether the narrator speaks only to the child as an audience (in Silja Aðalsteinsdóttir, 2005, p. 82).

In another sense, the voice of illustrated children´s books is dual, for the illustrations tell one story whereas the text another. However, there is usually some delay or differences between the text and illustrations, though these may not be too large to upset the younger listeners. Therefore it is of importance to place illustrations close to their related text especially for the youngest listeners.

Píla í sveitinni, in terms of Margrét's classification, is in the third category where the text is dependent upon the illustrations to convey the message. *Píla* is both in-the-lap book as well as being a book which older children can read by themselves. The narrator´s voice is heard in *Píla* but we also hear Píla´s thoughts. Usually Píla addresses the child audience but various asides, like the reindeer finding the Kárahnjúkur area flooded are directed at an adult audience and are the voice of the narrator.

2.5 Animals and children's literature

Another way of classifying children´s literature is by looking at the use of animals as a literary device.

2.5.1 An historical review. Looking at children´s literature from the 19th and early 20th centuries, it would appear animals, especially farm animals are prevalent. Most children´s books about animals come from old moralistic tales written in either poetic or non-poetic form. Children are expected to learn how to criticize and approach greater self-understanding through hearing and reading clear examples of how to behave in a given situation (in Silja Aðalsteinsdóttir, 1981, p. 85).

Kindness to animals is thought to be learnt through reading about them in children´s literature and this kindness is thought to be desirable. John Locke (1632-1704), the English philosopher wrote mainly about political rights and the nature of understanding. However what he says about cruelty to animals is relevant to understanding much about children´s

literature. He decides it is wrong, not only because of how the animals may suffer, but because it inevitably harms the human being.

> ...cruelty by the hand of man hardens their minds even towards Men; and they who delight in the suffering and destruction of inferior Creatures, will not be apt to be very Compassionate or benign to those of their own kind" (Howard, 2009, p. 649).

By appealing to children and wanting to shape them, early children´s literature used animals as though they were human. In an educational sense, these stories are moralistic tales told to help child to become less animal-like and more like a rational human. John Locke in *Some thoughts concerning Education* (1693), says that "the child figures as the site of an opposition between nature and reason in which nature is the more powerful" (Howard, 2009, p. 647). Locke´s goal of education remains "the distinction of the human from the animal through the cultivation of rationality and a capacity for self-denial" (Howard, 2009, p. 648). Through stories as moral examples, children learn to move away from this animal-like state. The animal is a symbol for a state of development and a state of potentiality.

A type of animal story common in Iceland, historically speaking, is a story involving an animal well-known to the audience. Often a farm animal, a horse for instance, possesses unusually human characteristics like wisdom, loyalty and goodness both in its relationship with other animals and with men. Not only do these animals possess human qualities, or anthropomorphism as this is defined, but have the ability to decide and draw conclusions on evidence. The story´s viewpoint is not necessary from that of the animal but rather it is the author´s voice that tells the story. As listeners we hear what the animal is thinking (Silja Aðalsteinsdóttir, 1981, p.93).

There is often hierarchy among the animals too, and different animals often stand for different social classes. The story´s message is often about being kind to animals which can be "condescending and a superficial gesture of subversion" which in turn, serves only to reinforce the hierarchy (Howard, 2009, p. 646). This kindness to animals has its own limitations, for it is feared children would become too attached to animals.

> [A] line of distinction should be carefully drawn, lest the best affections of the heart being called forth at an early age to inferior objects, should rest there, and be eventually withheld from those who have a higher claim to them (Howard, 2009, p. 644).

Early literature also makes the distinction between animals; those the author felt were desirable for the child to identify with and those which the author did not. Quarrelsome

animals such as bears, lions, and dogs were thought of as less desirable than the passive lamb (Howard, 2009, p. 650).

2.5.2 Animals in modern children´s literature. Today, animals still are useful as a "site of access to the multiple meanings of children´s literature" (Howard, 2009, p. 643). These meanings are diverse. They include educational, pedagogical, ethical, political, anti-racist and the latest environmental meanings.

An Icelandic sheep-dog is chosen as a spokesperson in *Píla í sveitinni.* Píla is a character which children, I think, will find interesting, acceptable and familiar. She is used in a similar way as the dog in the Depill books (for instance, *Depill fer í leikskóla,* Hill, 1984). It is through Píla´s journeys far and wide, and her meeting with other animals that their activities are explained. She is loyal, wise and funny (I think) and carries on the tradition of anthropomorphic animals found in children´s literature. Hierarchical tones are avoided in the book and instead the animals are a community of friends, sometimes needing advice, care and attention but also providing entertainment.

One defining feature of children books, as opposed to books meant for an adult audience, is whether the animals speak or not. This generalization is not entirely true as attested by adult-intended books such as *Gulliver´s travels* (Dixon and Chalker, 2011) or *Animal Farm* (Orwell, 2000). As a literary device, this generalization is not as defining as previously thought (Morgenstern, 2000, p. 110).

Often the language content of the talking animal is qualitatively different than an ordinary adult. Morgenstern questions whether this is simply an "stylistic principle" or whether it is done because if the animal speaker were to have complicated language, evocative of reasoning and presumably logic, the adult reader would feel threatened and may be "bothered" by this. "Animals are 'delightful' because they do not have language, do not trouble you 'with the baffling enigma of reason in an inhuman form" (Morgenstern, 2000, 113). However examining recent children´s literature shows animal characters which are often witty, show irony and engage the adult reader, although the child listener will not always understand the joke. *The Cat in the Hat comes Back* is an example (Geisel, 2003).

Children´s books designed for the youngest of listeners use a language not unlike *parentese* or child-directed speech. Morgenstern does not draw this conclusion; instead he talks about rational speech versus simplistic speech. However, parentese, though simplistic or rather simplified is not necessarily irrational. It is often repetitive, with exaggerated intonation and rhythm, and imitates the way an adult speaks to a child. It has "the important function of

capturing the infant´s attention and maintaining communication ...Even 4-year-olds speak in simpler ways to 2-year-olds than to their 4-year-old friends" (Santrock, 2008, p. 198). Child-directed speech is not dissimilar to the text of *Píla* with its repetition of words, short sentences, descriptive phrasing and attention-drawing devices in the speech of Píla, the other animals and the farmer.

Burke, 2004, mentions how animals in children´s stories are used to create an emotional distance for the reader/speaker/writer when the story message is very powerful, personal, and painful. "Having animals do the acting and mistake-making allows the face-saving emotional distance often needed to be able to join the conversation" (Burke, et al, 2004, p. 211).

Myers in 2003 reports that since living animals do not speak, this reflected in how young children´s behaviour is accommodated to this. He says that often children do not speak to animals, and if they do, their language is "simplistic... acknowledging their awareness of the limitations of human language" (Myers, 2003, p. 55-56). However, both humans, adult and children alike, do converse with their animals, often supplying their answers themselves. Often these conversations are like human conversations but are often simplistic in tone, almost in parentese, the language of parents and their children.

2.6 Conclusion

The National Curriculum for Playschools supports the cultural and educational role of books in Icelandic playschools. Books are historically and culturally important in Iceland although this importance may be under threat from electronic media. Children´s literature, being based in the cultural domain, has in the past been under the influence of various movements of thought, including the Enlightenment and the Romantic. The advent of the Hrafneyjar printing press, the tradition of house-reading and a cultural inclination towards literature are of historical importance. Early children´s literature with moral tales expected children to learn by listening and example. Entertainment value was later valued. Since the 1980s, children´s literature has tackled real social issues. Using the children´s book in a similar fashion to early literature, as a teaching and guiding device, may supply a means of approaching environmental issues as outlined in the Curriculum. In this sense, modern environmental thought has an influence upon children´s literature comparable to that of the earlier Enlightenment and Romantic movements. Because children´s literature can be variously defined, it can continue to be open to discussions from the wider social sphere. By using

traditional literary devices such as the use of animals, especially speaking animals, environmental concerns may find a voice which is age-appropriate for preschoolers. *Píla í sveitinni* is a modest attempt in this vein.

3. Environmental concerns

Environmental concerns within children´s literature are of special interest not only because of the above mentioned emphasis in the new Playschool Curriculum but because the environment provides a background to the familiar theme of animals. Instead of having the background as just that, a background, it may be used in a specific way to emphasize environmental issues.

Early environmental literature, springing from the American movement of the late 1960s was influenced by Rachel Carson. An American biologist, she published *Silent Spring* (1962) and awakened the general population to the use of insecticides in agriculture (Bragi Guðmundsson, 2009, p. 27). Environmental concerns had then moved into the area of general discussion.

The discussion, however, was not new to Iceland. The geologist, Sigurður Þórarinsson, said in 1949 about value as not deriving from monetary gain, rather as coming from what gives mankind inner life-filling and purpose. He continues with the thought that although it is sometimes possible to correct the damage done to nature, this damage is often irreparable (Bragi Guðmundsson, 2009, p. 28). The environmental discussion amongst the Icelandic public however, was somewhat later in coming to Iceland than in America. It did not become a popular movement until the 1970s with the proposal to build the Laxárdal dam (Bragi Guðmundsson, 2009, p. 28).

Eco-pedagogy, a relatively new realm of children´s literature, combining children´s stories with environmental issues, argues against the underlying premise of endless development and endless growth. It looks at developing basic environmental literacy, or *bioregional literacy*, and seeks to understand the ways in which the local, regional and global economies interact. It also argues for a critique of unsustainable cultures and their features. Eco-pedagogy critiques the anti-ecological effects of industrial capitalism, colonialism and imperialism, defining humanity in relation to "other-lesser humans, animals and nature" (Gaard, 2009, p. 326).

In *Píla í sveitinni* the driving force behind the story is how Píla and the farmer read the landscape. Farmers are depicted as custodians of the land and the countryside is depicted as being farmed, as sustaining life and not as exploitation. The sheep and horses have summer pastures in the mountains, the cows have a modern self-regulating cowshed and the reindeer are wild though in contact with humans. *Píla í sveitinni* is an example of how sustainability is defined by the United Nations in 1987. It is development which provides the needs of the

present generation without damaging the possibilities of the future generation to use this same environment (Kristín Norðdal, 2009, p. 1). The countryside is still intact in Píla´s world although the narrator points out a hydro-electric dam in the highlands in an area where the reindeer once sought grazing.

Local and environmental literacy are important concepts which link historical- and self-awareness. Manuel Castells defines the concept of self-awareness by looking at how historical awareness, neighbourhood awareness and environmental awareness come together to define groups of people. The act of defining one´s area, he continues, is important in modern times when change is radical and unforeseen (Castells in Bragi Guðmundsson, 2009, p. 19-20). Bragi Guðmundsson uses these three types of awareness, historical, neighbourhood and environmental, to define Icelanders as a nation (2009, p. 10-11). In this sense, a children´s book about animals, in an environmental and neighbourhood context, should help preschoolers to become more self-aware, not in a nationalistic sense, but rather to learn how to become psychologically rooted in their local environment. This rootedness is an integral part of becoming literate in one´s environment as proposed by the Curriculum (*Aðalnámskrá leikskóla*, 2011, p. 10).

3.1 Farms versus wilderness

Píla í sveitinni is essentially about animals. It is from an animal's point of view; not remarkable in itself, for animals have a strong historical and cultural background within children´s literature. However, *Píla* is not meant to be a nostalgic backwards look at a time when animal husbandry was essential to the survival of most Icelandic families. Rather *Píla* is a continuation of both the past, bounded by stories that hold a cultural and national appeal, and an appeal to the future where environmental concerns and sustainability are, and will be of greater importance (Þuríður Jóhannsdóttir, 1999, p. 153). She says of this past-future dichotomy that when both the past and the future are allowed to call, they shed light upon each other. The resulting stories are of greater importance because they are in fact newer, stronger stories (p.153 and 172).

The Icelandic consciousness also has roots in another dichotomy which tends to view the landscape as divided into areas where farms, towns and communities flourish as opposed to the highlands and barren wastelands where there is little of community, farming or towns. Icelanders tend to associate the un-built wilderness with a certain superstition. Þuríður

Jóhannsdóttir thinks this association has more to do with the wilderness areas being unknown to the average person living in Reykjavík (1999, p. 173-174).

This dichotomy may steam from the farming sensibility that once permeated Icelandic thought. The land is seen of having a use or a not-use. Beauty in the mountains and the concept of the national park is a relatively new concept. Halldór Laxness, Nobel Prize winning Icelandic author, commented that until the 19th century Icelanders thought mountains ugly. Búlandstindur, rising as an abrupt pyramid was thought "incredibly ugly" and Mývatn with its mountain ring and geo-thermal activity was thought to be "repellent". The poem "Mývatnssveit" by Bjartmar Guðmundsson, 1981 talks about the ugliness of Myvatn´s landscape, saying the view is ugly within the surrounding desolate mountain ring. Laxness accredits the Romantic Movement for giving Icelanders back their mountains, both to think fondly of and later as research material (Bragi Guðmundsson, 2009, p. 28).

Ólína Þorvaldsdóttir (1995) also writes about this town versus wasteland dichotomy and divides it into the *here* and *there*. Security is centred in the home, *here*; within the bounds of community with its agreed upon principles and mores. *Here* are rules, the judicial law and an agreed upon view of God´s law. Outside of the community is *there; there* is insecure, governed under the unwritten rules of nature, the untamed natural wilderness and ruled by the supernatural powers of something without speech, something without a home [emphasis hers], (in Þuríður Jóhannsdóttir, 1999, p. 157).

Píla embraces both the *here* and *there*; both home and country. Being a sheep-dog, Píla goes into the mountains often, both in her duties and out of her curiosity. However, what she encounters has no roots in superstition or heroic stories of outlaws, for her story has moved on from being shaped by the older national stories of trolls and outlaws. The countryside is still natural but still essentially shaped by man. No longer is there a simple dichotomy between built and un-built, the here and there but rather a post-structuralist view of the varying shades of community. There are the mountains were Píla encounters reindeer and though at the height of winter, there are no ghosts or trolls, only the reflection of skyrockets in the sky from the town on the other side of the mountain.

Early Icelandic landscape art explores not the stony, barren uninhabited uplands of the country; rather it depicts the soft, vegetation-covered landscape of the home farm. An example of this type of landscape is *Thingvellir* by Þórarinn B. Þorlaksson (1867-1924). The scene is almost always well-known and usually connected through literature to the sagas, poetry or national beliefs (Bragi Guðmundsson and Gunnar Karlsson, 1997, p. 65). It is an

early landscape art that depicts the home farm as a memory once its inhabitants have moved to the city to find work. Essentially it is a Romantic vision though specific to time and place.

Perhaps it was not until the painter Johannes Kjarval (1885-1972) depicted the uninhabited wilderness with its grey basalt rocks and green lichens that the wilderness was considered anything of beauty (Bragi Guðmundssson and Gunnar Karlsson, 1997, p. 129). He also "rejected the exalted Romantic interpretations of the land, turning his attention to nearby and tangible aspects of nature" (Hrafnhildur Schram, 2005, p. 27).

This is connected with how Icelandic society has evolved, from being a self-sustaining farming economy to an industrialized society. No longer are mountainous slopes appraised only on the amount of hay they could provide but are considered things of beauty in themselves. ("The animals have given us a good income and the land was well used" Bjartmar Guðmundsson, 1981). Kjarval saw the rocks being alive with fairies and elves; "the inner power, the inner forces of nature" interested him (Hrafnhildur Schram, 2005, p. 27). *Píla í sveitinni* views the mountains with both attitudes; one a practical attitude and the other an attitude appreciative of the beauty around her. The home farm is depicted but also the mountain terrain where sheep and reindeer frequent.

Of interest is a recent study by Victoria Francis Taylor for the University of Iceland, 2012, which compares the amount of "untouched land" in Iceland in 1936 with 2010. It was concluded a 68% *decrease* has occurred during these 74 years. Untouched land is defined as being "at least 25km² in size and is at least 5 km away from buildings or roads". In the year 1936, 47% of Iceland was one unbroken, untouched, wild landscape whereas in 2010 only 9% of Iceland was such a landscape (Taylor in Ingvar Guðbjörnsson, 2012). This development has implications for how Icelanders view their countryside and not at least whether the depictions of Píla´s adventures will soon be unrealistic. In a wider sense, the above figures have serious implications for how the environment will be managed in Iceland, with issues like sustainability and environmental awareness needing to be discussed on all levels of society. Conceivably a children´s book with electric power lines, roads, factories and an urban landscape will be the future here in Iceland like so many other countries in the world.

3.2 Children viewing animals

It is commonly thought preschool children view animals in a similar way to adults. Research shows however, this is apparently not so. Two studies, one with preserved animals and another with animals as a domesticated species or pets are examined.

3.2.1 Anatomical features. Research by Tunnicliffe with children in a range of ages from four- to fourteen- years of age found that all children when presented with preserved species of six different animals use anatomical features to name the animals. They explained what animals they were by pointing to physical features. However, the older pupils also used behavioural and habitat attributes to define the animals (Tunnicliffe, 1999, p. 142). Tunnicliffe found when very young children viewed live animals, they identified certain striking features of the organisms.

> In particular, they mention anatomical features such as the dimensions of the animal, its shape and its colour and comment especially on its front end, on its legs, on other disputers to its outline, and on any unfamiliar organ (Tunnicliffe, 1999, p. 143).

These striking features become the defining features for the children´s constructions of animals and are incorporated into the mental models the child has of the different kinds of animals. In Tunnicliffe´s research it was found that over eighty-seven per cent of pupils gave anatomical reasons rather than behavioural reasons (ten per cent) or reasons based on habitat (three per cent) for naming the specimens (1999, p. 147). Interestingly enough, when the responses are examined by gender, "there was a suggestion that girls may be more likely than boys to refer to features of the head [of the specimen animal] such as the face, eyes or ears" (Tunnicliffe, 1999, p. 147) rather than attributes defined by behaviour or habitat.

Another recent study by Kelemen and DiYanni with American adults and pre-schoolers, four- to five-year-olds, "asked what they thought living things, artefacts, non-living natural objects, and their properties were "for" while explicitly being given the option of saying they were not "for" anything".

> Adults assigned function-based answers for specific biological parts some of the time (e.g., ears), and artefacts (e.g., clocks) *"but children assigned a function to almost every kind of object and object part* (e.g., mountains, "for climbing"; clouds, "for raining"; lions "for to go to the zoo"...that children viewed these activities as what the objects were "made for" (Kelemen and DiYanni, 2005, p. 4).

An additional task, as part of the same study, found evidence that "a bias toward purpose... occurs with elementary school children- at least in relation to their reasoning about object properties" (Kelemen and DiYanni, 2005, p. 4). This bias is named *promiscuous teleology,* teleology being "the doctrine of final causes, especially related to the evidence of design or purpose in nature" (Hawkins, 1986, p. 844). Children under ten-years of age selected teleo-functional explanations as often for living as non-living natural object properties over seventy per cent of the time. Kelemen and DiYanni give an example: Children under ten years old

thought “the sand was grainy so that animals could easily bury their eggs in it”, over “it was grainy because bits of shells got broken and mixed up making it that way” (Kelemen and DiYanni, 2005, p. 5). Furthermore, it appears that not only do young children assign a design-purpose to objects and living entities, they usually “construe objects as existing for *intentionally designed purposes”* (Kelemen and DiYanni, 2005, p. 6).

By *intentionally designed purpose* Kelemen and DiYanni are thinking of a higher authority; God, in other words. They cite research by Evans (1994, 2000 and 2001) with Midwestern American children from Christian fundamentalist or non-fundamentalist backgrounds. When asked “How did you think the sun-bear got here on earth?” children from both religious backgrounds favoured a “creationist” account of animal origins whether the question was open-ended or included options like (a) God made it, (b) a person made it, (c) it changed from a different kind of animal that used to live here on earth, and (d) it appeared: it came out of the ground. The tendency for both groups of children ranged around 67% to 73% with open-ended questions and 94% to 98% with closed-ended questions (Evans, 2001 in Kelemen and DiYanni, 2005, p. 5).

These findings are of relevance in evaluating a children´s book about animals because for young children anatomical features are an important identifying feature of animals and so a children´s book should emphasize these features in its depicted animals. Young children think in terms of purpose and so purposeful and utilitarian features of animals can also be emphasized. Both of these features, purpose and usefulness, are emphasized in *Píla í sveitinni.*

3.2.2 Bio-centricity. The “bio-centric” approach to child development argues that “children will exhibit interest in and involvement with nonhuman as well as human aspects of their environments” (Melson, 2003, p. 32). This theory says that as humans we have a propensity to be interested in nature and animals. It applies also to young children and says “that humans have adapted to be attentive to life forms, children are expected to show particular interest in living nonhumans, especially other animals” (Melson, 2003, p. 35).

Melson, 2003, continues by demonstrating the particular usefulness of the bio-centric theory when specifically applied to the subject of companion animals such as pets. Older studies tend to focus upon the emotional and social aspects between children and companion animals but Melson cites several studies that tend to confer that companion animals are “perceptively interesting to young children, sustain their attention, and motivate their curiosity” (Kidd and Kidd in Melson, 2003, p. 36). Children´s learning may well be stimulated by the presence of living animals and in particular, help children understand the

needs and characteristics of animals. This is termed “naive biology”. A Japanese preschool study found children who interacted with live goldfish understood better “unobservable goldfish biology” (Does a goldfish have a heart?). Furthermore, “it is possible that caring for companion animals promotes more elaborated and more accurate ideas about life and death” (Hatano and Inagaki, 1993 in Melson, 2003, p. 36). However,

> there is no consistent evidence that nurturing pets generalizes to more sensitive care giving of humans” although “empathy, or the ability to understand and share the feelings of another, is necessary (although not sufficient) condition for nurturance, these findings should encourage further inquiry into links between nurturing pets and human relationships” (Melson, 2003, p. 35).

Another study by Quinn from 2000 seems to say the opposite for it links explicitly the negative correlation of nurturing in childhood with adulthood relationships in the article “*Animal abuse at early age linked to interpersonal violence”.* In New Jersey, “a study found that 88 per cent of the families who had physically abused their children also had records for animal abuse” (Quinn, 2000, p. 3). The opposite correlation does not necessarily follow, that caring for animals can promote caring in adults; future research here could be significant.

Píla as a companion animal and through hearing about her, it is hoped to stimulate children´s interests in real living animals. This is important because companion animals present learning opportunities for young children. A living animal, as opposed to a stuffed toy or inanimate object, presents “inherently occurring variations in its critical parameters”, that is, is “inherently unpredictable” (Melson, 2003, p. 36). This unpredictability is valued. In terms of Piagetian theory, the child´s schema equilibrium is upset because the animal may behave in unpredictable ways. This imbalance leads to a review of the way the child thinks, and is called “accommodation” (Santrock, 2008, p. 178).

Moreover, Lev Vygotsky (1896-1934), the Russian social constructivist, who developed a socio-cultural cognitive theory of child development, argues companion animals may for many children be powerful motivators for learning. He gives two reasons. Firstly, children learn and retain more about subjects in which they are emotionally invested, and secondly, children´s learning is optimized when it occurs within meaningful relationships (Vygotsky, 1978, in Melson, 2003, p. 36).

These interactions with animals are thought, however, to be more significant than with nature because, as the child develops socially, “he or she perceives an animal as another being with subjective experience of its own” (Myers and Saunders, 2002, p. 155). Once that is established that animals may be *social others* to us with whom we can form relationships it is

thought other consequences follow. Myers and Saunders in 2002 say "[a]nimals are integral reference points for the child´s sense of self" (2002, p.155). Myers and Saunders also connect these reference points to educational aspects of this relationship citing zoos, nature documentaries and other agents of environmental education to build on this connection. However, it is of pivotal interest that the *developmental bases of this potential* have not been yet been explored (Myers and Saunders, 2002, p. 155, emphasis mine).

3.2.3 Juvenile features in animals. Another theory of interest concerning how children see animals can be linked to the research of Conrad Lorenz. He identified certain physical features of juvenile animals also found in adults of the same species and named them neoteny. Genetic factors influence the degree of neoteny in individuals but include "prominent eyes, large foreheads, sharpened noses and jaws, proportionally large heads– characterize human young as well as those of many other domestic species, such as dogs, cats and ducks" (Kahn and Kellert, 2002, p. 25).

Children see animals, especially domesticated ones, as possessing these juvenile features and it can be argued that these neotenous features are perceived as less threatening. For instance, the domestic dog has neotenous traits in the sense it is willing to follow man and strives not to be a pack leader. The shortened muzzle in dogs and pigs is an example of neotenous physical traits. Domestic animals have been selected for a juvenile head shape, shortened muzzles, and other features. Furthermore, retaining juvenile traits makes animals more tractable and easy to handle. The physical changes are also related to changes in behaviour (Grandin, and Deesing, 1998, p.19).

Stephan Gould indeed thinks children like these neotenous features because such creatures trigger "an automatic surge of disarming tenderness. From a child´s perspective, neotenous pets and domesticated animals are "interspecies peers". It is thought the human child tends to see "childlike animals as variants of human children" (Kahn and Kellert, 2002, p. 25). This theory may explain the appeal a juvenile-featured dog like Píla or Depill for has for young children. It also explains the appeal young animals have for most human beings.

3.2.4 Growth in animals. In essence, *Píla í sveitinni* embodies change. The main basis of the book is the yearly cycle of different animals, what needs to change when the weather changes, how this affects the animals, Píla and the farmer. Research evidence is difficult to find on this subject although research from Inagaki and Hatano (1996) indicate that four- and five-year olds believe that animals and plants, but not artefacts, spontaneously change over time (in Coley, Solomon and Shafto, 2002, p. 77).

Rosengren (1991) asked three-year olds whether an artefact would be the same size or larger after a period of time. They responded at "chance levels"; presumably 50:50. However, when the children were asked about an animal, before being asked about an artefact, they were more likely to apply the growth model to the artefacts. When artefacts were presented first, there was no evidence of carryover of a non-growth model to animals. These results suggest that "biological growth is an established model at three years of age" but that "its restriction to the biological domain is fragile" (in Coley, et al, 2002, p. 78).

It would seem the concept of growth and change over an annual cycle is in fact conceptually too advanced for the youngest of preschoolers who will in theory encounter *Píla í sveitinni.* The concept of growth, especially as related to various animal young, may well need to be discussed when reading the book out loud.

3.2.5 Essentialism. This is a belief that a member of a kind has the innate potential to become like other members of the kind. Gelmen and Wellman (1991) have shown that four-year old preschoolers understand that a baby animal would come to acquire the features of its type whether or not it was raised with others of the same type, simply by virtue by being of its kind. Thus, a baby cow, raised by pigs, would come to *moo* and not *oink* because its essence is that of a cow, not of a pig. This essentialism extends to apple seeds planted in amongst flowers. Gelmen and Wellman, 1991, conclude that these results suggest that children have essentialist reasoning biases from early in development and that these biases become more pronounced for living kinds than for artefact categories (in Coley, et al, 2002, p. 80).

Young children understand the connections between a foal and a mare, a lamb and a ewe, and so on. In a book such as *Píla* such a device is age-appropriate for young children.

3.3 Children and nature

Children´s contacts with nature, whether these occur in the real world or through symbolic contacts such as depictions of nature in children´s books, can be shown to have many benefits.

3.3.1 Symbolic versus real-life contacts. Mark Kinver, the environmental reporter for BBC News, recently reported that although "kids are aware of the global threats to the environment- ...their physical contact, their intimacy with nature, is fading" (2012, p. 1). Kinver questions whether this deficit has in fact an influence upon our "health and well-being" (2012, p. 1). He continues by reviewing the work of Richard Louv, author of *Last Child in the Wood*, who coined the term "nature-deficit disorder" whereby children are increasingly missing out on the benefits of contact with nature. This is indicative of how little

time children spend connecting with the outside world and how beneficial it is to be in regular contact with nature.

He cites three main benefits; the physical benefits are obvious,

> [t]he rapid increase of childhood obesity leads many health-care leaders to worry that the current generation of children may be the first since World War II to die at an earlier age than their parents (Louv, 2007, p. 2).

Furthermore, the development of cognitive functioning, although more subtle, is no less important. Louv cites a 2005 study by the California Department of Education which found that "students in outdoor science programs improved their science testing scores by 27 per cent" (Louv, 2007, p. 2). However, the benefits go beyond the test scores. It is also found that children

> ...in outdoor-education settings shows increases in self-esteem, problem solving, and motivation to learn... natural spaces and materials stimulate children´s limitless imaginations...and serve as the medium of inventiveness and creativity (Louv, 2007, p. 2).

Studies with young children who have symptoms of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder show that time spent in a natural setting helps reduce negative symptoms. Also psychological well-being is increased while negative stress symptoms are reduced in children (Louv, 2007, p. 2).

Children interact with nature through three kinds of experience. Kellert broadly distinguishes three ways- "direct, indirect, and what may be called "symbolic" experiences (2002, p. 118).

Direct experience involves actual physical contact with natural settings and nonhuman species. However, Kellert restricts these *direct experiences* to areas of nature outside of human contact and control. These are the areas spoken of earlier in this essay, the half of the wild versus community dichotomy. *Indirect experience* of natural involves actual physical contact but in a far more restricted, programmed, and managed context. These contacts are found for instance in the preschool setting through organized walks. These contacts include pets, flowers and vegetables in gardens and domesticated farm animals. All of these habitats and creatures are dependent upon human intervention and control (Kellert, 2002, p.119). These types of indirect experience are those which the Curriculum recommends with supplying the opportunity for preschoolers to "have contact with nature, respect for nature and its manmade aspects of the natural environment" (*Aðalnámskrá leikskóla*, 2011, p. 30).

Symbolic experience involves encountering nature without actual physical contact with the natural world. The child experiences instead contact with nature that is sometimes realistic, sometimes representative, but is highly "symbolic, metaphorical, or stylized" in its character. These representations include television, film and computers but also include more ancient types of media included print, drawings and tales as the human species has used throughout the ages (Kellert, 2002, p. 119-120). Children´s books fall into this category.

The symbolic experience of nature is often found in children´s books where natural objects are categorized, counted or named. These characterizations are usually highly anthropomorphic, that is animals depicted as having human features and characters. The natural world can still provide children with a rich background to create inquiry to solve problems and develop intellectually. Even symbolic representations of nature seemingly serve this role (Kellert, 2002, p.123 and 125).

However, there is a concern that symbolic representations of nature are poor substitutes for direct or indirect experiences. Indeed indirect experiences seem also poor substitutes for direct experiences of nature, says Kellert (2002, p. 145-146). This ambivalence means that although children do gain some benefits from indirect and symbolic experiences of nature they do not have the same quality; "Direct, personal contact with living things affects us in vital ways that vicarious experience can never replace" (Pyle, 1993, in Kellert, 2002, p. 141).

Symbolic representations of nature can still provide beneficial outcomes including the depiction of a wide variety of emotions including "joy, wonder, revelation, adventure, surprise". However, this world can be "dysfunctional". It needs to be balanced by contact with the actual and real of ordinary and everyday, according to Kellert; a balance between the real and imagined; the exotic and everyday (2002, p. 128). This call for the everyday is of interest in terms of evaluating *Píla í sveitinni* for the depictions of nature in the book are in the main everyday rather than exotic.

3.3.2 Everyday versus exotic nature .A 2012 study shows that children are becoming increasingly isolated from nature of a *natural everyday type*. An analysis was done on children´s books published between 1938 and 2008 which had received the Caldecott Medal awards. There were 296 books in all. The Caldecott medal awards books judged to have the best illustrations by the American Library Association and these books were chosen because it was thought they are the books which children were most likely to encounter. (Often award-winning books are chosen by libraries, for instance).

Overall, in the period 1938 to 2008, depictions of nature in these Caldecott Award winning books were are about half as much as depictions of man-made environments. After 1960, the number of books about animals, playing outside and nature diminishes, and books emphasizing the natural world become a smaller part of a child´s perspective. There has been a significant decline in the depiction of natural environments and animals, while built environments have become much more common (Williams, Podeschi, Palmer, Schwadel and Meyler, 2012, p. 145).

The authors of the Caldecott study also found that since the mid-1970s depictions of nature have been declining in children´s books, although recently, these depictions when present are less likely to be portrayed negatively. The likelihood of a domestic animal being portrayed declined in the 1980s, increasing only very insignificantly since then. Today´s children are reading stories set in built environments, and what they are learning about their environment is that it has relatively few animals, especially images of humans interacting with nature and animals (Williams, et al, 2012, p. 155). A book about animals, such as *Píla í sveitinni* has an educational value if only because this type of book is in the decline, or at least can shown to be in decline within the limitations of the study done by Williams, et al, 2012.

Children learn differently at different ages, and familiar animals, rather than exotic species of animals, can be shown to be more developmentally-appropriate for younger children. Kellert talks about how a child goes through *stages of nature*, loosely based upon cognitive developmental theory. The first stage in the development of children´s values of nature occurs between three- and six-years of age, when a child´s material and physical needs are to be satisfied, whilst threats and danger avoided. The child aims to achieve feelings of control, comfort and security. "Most children at this age show a pronounced indifference or anxiety toward direct contact with all but a small proportion of relatively familiar and domesticated creatures and natural settings" (Kellert, 2002, p. 132).

Bettelheim suggests children in middle childhood are enchanted by "tales, legends, stories, and myths involving scenes and characters drawn from the natural world" with often fantastic portrayals of animals involved in fights between good and evil, freedom against tyranny, order versus chaos, innocence versus corruption (Bettelheim in Kellert, 2002, p. 133). It would seem exotic animals are more developmentally-appropriate for older children than preschoolers.

Kellert´s theory of nature has implications for the Curriculum for Playschools. He says that less familiar animals and exotic natural settings are more appropriate for the older child.

The Curriculum, by emphasizing concepts like sustainability and environmental awareness, seems to aim beyond the comprehension of preschoolers. Playschools need to re-define these global concepts onto a local, familiar and domestic scale that preschoolers can understand and identify with. One possible way is through the familiar medium of a children´s book read out loud.

3.4 Environmental agenda and The Curriculum for Playschools (2011)

The Curriculum for Playschools (2011) envisages a society where each individual is takes part in a democratic process, aware of the values, belief systems and global consciousness associated with equality on a global scale. Nature and the environment are ultimately treated as integral to a world view that incorporates democracy, human rights and justice, pluralism, welfare and healthiness, economic development and a view of the future *(Aðalnámskrá leikskóla,* 2011, p. 13). Education is seen as a way to teach sustainability which is defined as maintaining the environment in a better, not worse state, for the next generation but without leaving them poorer off for choice *(Aðalnámskrá leikskóla,* 2011, p. 12). This is a national political policy as well for the Icelandic government has signed the Children´s Rights Amendment (UNESCO) and the European Community´s directional policy on human rights and democracy (*Aðalnámskrá leikskóla*, 2011, p. 9). On a local level, *Welfare for the Future* is a local council, or *S21* (local agenda 21) concerns environmental policy on a local government level (Kristín Norðdal, 2009, p. 2).

The term *education for sustainable development* has roots in 1990s political and social discourse. Gro Harlem Brundtland, the ex-prime minister of Norway, was the chairman of the committee which first produced the document "An Integrated Future" (1987) in which the term appears. It became accepted at the international leaders' conference in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 (Ingólfur Ásgeir Jóhannesson, 2007, p. 3).

The problem for educators is to re-contextualize the issues of environmental awareness and sustainability into "formal and informal educational settings ...where they can become frameworks for teaching and learning about sustainability" (Macdonald, 2009, p. 3).
The report prepared for the UK-based Teacher Training Agency, *Huckle,* talks about sustainability as *a frame of mind;* a way of relating to nature. Macdonald quotes *Huckle*

> Such a frame of mind is committed to the co-evolution of human and non-human nature and seeks relationships within and between biophysical and social systems

which allow their mutual development to take place in sustainable ways (*Huckle*, 2005, p. 15-16 in Macdonald, 2009, p. 3).

The importance of these relationships between various systems is of special interest here for one way of informing preschoolers of the above mentioned co-evolution is through culturally and socially acceptable media, that is, the children´s book.

3.5 Conclusion

Various theories have been discussed with the aim of discovering how young children view nature and more particularly animals. Of interest is the theory of Kellert which links a broader and more complex appreciation of animals to cognitive development. Children´s experiences of nature may be direct, indirect or symbolic. Through a children´s book young children can experience nature in an emotive way. However, children also share many of adult traits in how animals and nature are viewed and experienced. The Curriculum for Playschools (2011) links political issues of a global scale to community- and school-based policy planners. However, many of the concepts of the Curriculum have been shown to be developmentally inappropriate for preschoolers. They have been shown to be more interested in the familiar and domestic. It is the role of preschool teachers and other staff to interpret the Curriculum so that preschoolers can benefit from its environmental vision. This interpretation may take many forms; *Píla í sveitinni* is such an attempt through the medium of the children´s book.

4. Developmental theories of childhood

Five developmental theories of childhood are examined here with the aim of discovering whether cognitive learning of preschoolers can in fact be accessed through the book medium or whether books as a medium are more appropriate for older children.

The intellectual developmental theory of Jean Piaget is important in understanding how age can affect a child´s perception of the environment. His theory on animism is questioned in the light of recent research. Vygotsky´s social cognitive theory is of interest because he speaks about language, social interactions and the social relationship which occurs between children and animals. John Dewey wrote about education, the interests of children and the role of teachers, all of which are important in evaluating the value of *Píla í sveitinni.* Nel Noddings' theory on caring is of special interest in understanding how environmental awareness can be taught to preschoolers. The developmental role of play is of utmost importance in playschool and this role will be discussed in light of environmental concerns and how they relate to the book as an educational device.

4.1 Jean Piaget

Born in Switzerland in 1896, Jean Piaget trained as a biologist but pursued the field of psychology. His life´s work revolved around the question of the beginnings of knowledge, or more specifically, how children arrive at what they know. Piaget wanted to explain learning itself and how "the child´s interactions with his environment ...create learning" (Mooney, 2000, p. 61). Piaget thought children

> ...*construct* their own knowledge by giving meaning to the people, places and things in their world and that they learn best when they are actually doing the work themselves and creating their own understanding of what´s going on, instead on being given an explanation by adults (Mooney, 2000, p. 61-62).

The process behind a child moving from one cognitive stage to another, according to Piaget, is how a child develops and changes its world view.

He believed that

> children in the preoperational stage [two- to six-years of age] form ideas from their direct experiences in life. This is why telling them is less effective than finding a way to help them think their own way through a problem (Mooney, 2000, p. 70).

The world of Píla and her adventures with animals, in terms of Piaget´s theory may be too far removed from preschooler's direct experiences of life. They tend to believe what they see and many preschoolers who have no direct experience of farm animals or the country may find the concepts in *Píla í sveitinni* to be beyond them cognitively. They may need the concrete evidence of animals, such as farm visits, examining bones, hides, saddles and wool to be able to understand some of the book's ideas. In this sense *Píla í sveitinni* can be a catalyst for preschoolers to understand indirect experience.

However, recent research has criticised Piaget´s stages and that "infant´s cognitive world is not as neatly packaged as Piaget portrayed it...infants are more competent than Piaget thought" (Santrock, 2008, p. 182-184). One of the criticisms of Piaget´s theory, especially relating to the pre-operational stage, concerns *animism.* It is the belief that inanimate objects have lifelike qualities and are capable of action. The child who uses animism fails to distinguish the appropriate occasions for using human and nonhuman perspective (Santrock, 2008, p. 248). Children, contrary to Piaget, do not view all natural phenomena as being equally animate or inanimate. Children seem to make a distinction between plants and animals.

Piaget (1929) asked children which of a range of entities was alive. For example, "Is the sun alive? Is a dog alive? Is a flower alive?" He found that young children did not restrict their judgements of what is alive to the ontological category *living thing* but extended them to such inanimate objects such as cars, clouds, and even statues (in Coley, et al, 2002, p. 67).

However it is now thought these early studies overestimated animistic reasoning. Richards and Siegler (1984) systematically asked children four- through eleven-years age whether various objects such as people, animals, plants, vehicles, other inanimate objects were still, being moved, or (where plausible) moving themselves and which were alive. Results showed that children rarely attributed life to vehicles and objects and never did so systematically. Most younger children systematically attributed life to people and animals, and at around eight most children had added plants. "Thus the largest developmental shift was not learning that inanimate [objects] are not alive but learning that plants are alive" (in Coley, et al, 2002, p. 68).

Research data from Myers and Sanders, 2002 also suggests that

> Young children may not distinguish plants from inanimates...and even after a biological domain of knowledge is developed, children apply psychological traits differently to animals. Animals appear to be living *and* feeling: making those potential objects of care" (Myers and Sanders, 2002, p. 157, emphasis theirs).

Myers and Sanders, 2002, connect *care* with animals from a child´s view. This has important implications for how it may be possible to connect environmental awareness and children through the channel of caring for animals.

4.2 Lev Vygotsky

Like Piaget, Lev Vygotsky was a constructivist. However, he emphasizes the social aspect of learning and the construction of knowledge through social interaction. Whereas Piaget emphasizes the individual, Vygotsky emphasizes collaboration, social interaction and socio-cultural activity (Santrock, 2008, p. 207-208). Vygotsky believed in the importance of social influences, especially in instruction, and on children´s cognitive development. This is reflected in his concept of the *zone of proximal development (ZPD)* defined by him as

> The term for the range of tasks that are too difficult for the child to master alone but can be learned with guidance and assistance of adults or more skilled children... The ZPD captures the child´s cognitive skills that are in the process of maturing and can be accomplished only with the assistance of a more skilled person (Santrock, 2008, p. 251).

The assistance a teacher or a skilled peer offers a child is *scaffolding* and its medium is through social and cultural interaction. Language and dialogue is an important tool for scaffolding but Vygotsky believed "children use speech not only for social communication, but also to help them solve tasks" (Santrock, 2008, p. 251-252). This is important not only for understanding how children learn but also determining where they are positioned in their development. Vygotsky lays great emphasis on observation; by watching and listening, teachers come to know each child´s development. He suggests that through observation the teacher can see what the child is interested in, but struggling with, and the curriculum can be geared to this (Mooney, 2000, p. 85).

In this sense *Píla í sveitinni* has a cultural, language-based value. The subject matter may well be of little interest to preschoolers, not because they dislike animals or sheep-dogs, but because their experience does not include such things. Without their experience, their interest is not sparked, for in terms of their cognitive development they lack the cognitive

skills of imagination, logic or rationality to imagine Píla´s interactions with the animals she meets. However, the fact that *Píla* is a book, a cultural artefact, is important here. Books can be read out loud for preschoolers, questions can be asked and interest aroused.

Bellon and Ogletree, 2000, advocate repeated storybook reading as an instructional method. Reading out loud, using adult scaffolding strategies can

> ...facilitate oral language organization and higher language use. In this context, scaffolding strategies can be defined as procedures that support and encourage language and literary growth (Bellon and Ogletree, 2000, p. 80).

Jalongo and Sobolak (2011) classify read out louds as only one way in which children can be actively engaged in vocabulary development. For children to remember new words and begin to grasp the multiple, nuanced meanings of words, a variety of methods are necessary. These include meaningful repetition, where there is not just repetition of words but meaningful word retrieval, and the use of the word in several contexts (p. 424).

The so-called dialogue style of reading aloud is one way of building vocabulary. When the story is discussed new words in the story can be elaborated upon. In this way a book can found very beneficial to vocabulary development. Even children with the lowest vocabulary made the greatest gains when the adult talked about the new words the children encountered in the book (Justice, 2005, in Jalongo and Sobolak, 2011, p. 425).

These findings have important implications for the value of *Píla í sveitinni*. It can be argued that preschoolers are "not ready to attend to a story being read to them" (Murkoff, 2003, in Jalongo and Sobolak, 2011, p. 425) whereas

> ...other research indicates that when infants are read to by parents and caregivers' important literary skills such as book awareness, print awareness, vocabulary development, fluency and comprehension are developing (Jalongo and Sobolak, 2010, p. 425).

Children´s active participation is the key to supporting literary growth. Repeated readings of children´s books, supported by toys and literary props, literacy related play, and re-inventing the story themselves are keys to making read outlouds a rich vocabulary learning experience (Jalongo and Sobolak, 2011, p. 425). The suggestions for these types of literary extensions related to *Píla í sveitinni* are in Enclosure 2.

4.3 John Dewey

John Dewey, an American educator and author, 1859-1952, published his philosophy of education in a document called *My Pedagogic Creed* in 1897. His views on education are that "true education comes through the stimulation of a child´s powers by the demands of the social situation in which he finds himself" (Mooney, 2000, p. 4). He believed that education was "a process of living and not a preparation for future living" (Mooney, 2000, p. 5). Curriculum should grow out of real home, work and other life situations; "it is the business of the school to deepen and extend the child´s sense of values bound up in his home life" (Mooney, 2000, p. 5).

Dewey also said that "teachers must be willing to tap their general knowledge of the world to help children make sense of their surroundings and experiences" (Mooney, 2000, p. 10). This includes informing children about animals through the story book medium. Animals and indeed books have played an important role throughout Icelandic social, economic and cultural history as has been discussed earlier in this essay. *Píla í sveitinni* is one way, in the spirit of Dewey, which knowledge and experience can be shared with children.

4.4 Nel Noddings

When Noddings writes about caring, she is describing not an attitude or personality but a "moral relation "(Goldstein, 2002, p. 11). The caring encounter is one of "engrossment"...where "the one-caring opens herself to the cared-for with full attention, and with receptivity to his perspective and situation" (Goldstein, 2002, p.12). Motivational displacement is also important in the caring encounter for it "involves stepping out of one´s own personal frame of reference and into the other´s" (Noddings, 1984, in Goldstein, 2002, p. 13).

Myers and Saunders (2002) describe informal observations of the 23-month old daughter of Myers with their two pet cats. Starting at 3 months old, she is observed as interacting with the cats on many different levels. Both by speaking to them, learning their differences she displays engrossment and motivational displacement as mentioned by Noddings. Myers and Saunders say in fact such observations of "initiations, adjustments, and emotional reactions are not rare" (2002, p. 155). They also add these observations are usually bypassed by scholarly analysis.

> Once we discern the structure of this dance of simple social moves, we will be able to appreciate the significance of animals in social development and the genuinely interactive bases of children´s caring towards them" (Myers and Saunders, 2002, p. 155-156).

The interaction of humans and animals may well be the bridge to caring about the natural world in general. Because animals appear as living and feeling, they are "potential objects of care" (Myers and Saunders, 2002, p. 157).This has implications for environmental awareness and sustainability. Any information that contributes to encouraging the human-animal social exchange may help contribute to longer term goals; "natural care" about animals may lead to broader environmental care (Myers and Saunders, 2002, p. 154).

4.5 Play and child development

Play is the leading source of development in the ages between two- and six-years of age according to Vygotsky. Through free play, children develop well-being by becoming able to pay attention and learn to affiliate with other children (Frost, Wortham and Reifel, 2008, p. 125). Play can be social or solitary, make-believe or based on something real, adult directed or free, child-invented play. Play is important to language development, physical development and the building of social skills. Whether play can be connected with concepts like environmental awareness and sustainability needs to be determined.

Various activities based on the book *Píla* are in Enclosure 2. They include telling stories, making masks and acting out various animals. However, usually children make their own play rules; imitate something from family life, television or purely from their own imaginations. The role of a children´s book is then more peripheral. It can provide the language skills, understandings and social groundwork so that children´s play can be richer and more varied.

Play interests Myers and Saunders for it is through play interactions that the young child´s social abilities seem to be "developmentally plastic enough to include other species, with only partial distortion" (Myers and Saunders, 2002, 159-160). Although children play with other children and with animals, qualitatively speaking, their differentiation is not in a categorical fashion. "Thus their sense of human self develops in relation to the available mixed species community (those animals with whom the child interacts)". Whether the child plays with other children or with animals, the social and play benefits seem to be qualitatively equal (Myers and Saunders, 2002, p. 160).

4.6 Conclusion

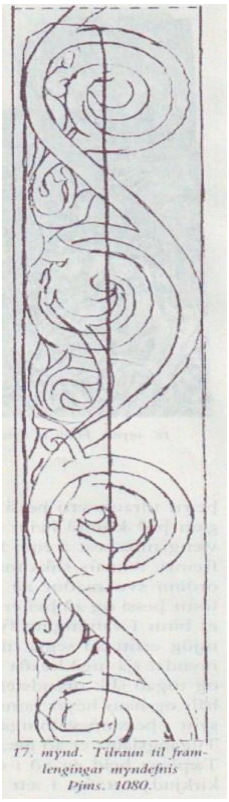
How preschoolers interpret their world has been extensively discussed by child developmental theorists. It appears that children have a natural propensity to want to interact with nature and animals seem to provide a social sphere not unlike children´s interactions with other children. These interactions are often based on caring. Whether this can be the catalyst to caring about animals and the environment in a wider sense needs to future be explored. The social benefits are well established in the child-animal relationship but whether these benefits can be juxtaposed through story-telling and read out louds of a children´s book also needs to be determined. Children´s play can be enriched by imaginative story-telling and various props connected with the story. This is adult-directed in nature. With careful observation, a teacher can scaffold a child´s abilities and curiosity and spark a child´s interests into other realms. This adult-directed play though is generally thought to be of a less rich quality than play directed by children themselves.

5. Methodology

Methodology is essentially practical in nature as opposed to the theoretical sphere of knowledge. This chapter is about writing the book *Píla í sveitinni.* The spark behind the border decorations in the book is explained and the process of printing and production briefly mentioned. Data from my research with preschoolers in two east coast of Iceland preschools is presented, along with a discussion on participatory research methods.

5.1 Initial ideas for Píla í sveitinni

During a visit to the Akureyri Museum as part of the course entitled *Myndmennt og handmennt* (MYH0156) in February 2011, we were asked to find one particular pattern, or part of an artefact in the museum which appealed to us. I chose the pattern engraved into two wooden, carved timber panels, supposedly 14th century. The originals are in the National Museum in Reykjavik but Akureyri Museum has them displayed as photographs with written descriptions.


17. mynd. Tilraun til framlengingar myndefnis Pjms. 1080.

Originally from an outside building on a farm at Hrafnagil in Eyðafjarðarsveit, the patterns were researched by Hörður Ágústsson. He wrote extensively about the timbers and their engravings and his explanations in the Akureyri Museum were of great interest to me. He attempted to continue the main pattern where it was damaged or missing by tracing the existing carved lines (Hörður Ágústsson, 1985, p. 151-155). Later I played with his ideas and tried out various patterns of my own and tried to find the *ideas* behind the drawings (emphasis mine). Initially the pattern translated into the antics of a puppy playing in the snow, the rhythms found in the circling, wavelike 14th century lines, mirroring the puppy´s antics in the air.

Picture 1: One of Hörður´s attempts to re-create the pattern (Hörður Ágústsson, 1985, p. 155).

These first three sketches became the first chapter of *Píla í sveitinni.* Píla became the central character. Having then decided on a sheep-dog as a spokesperson, I thought her interactions with other animals found in the countryside may make a children´s story. We own sheep and horses and, living on the east coast of Iceland, I often see reindeer. *Píla í sveitinni* developed naturally from these connections.

I rather like the idea of using a pattern from the 14th century for a 2012 book; cultural heritage transported through the centuries. Practically speaking, although these borders are part of each illustration, they are also separate from it. When holding the book up for the children to see the pictures, the teacher's fingers can hold the bottom section of the page over the border area, without taking away any of the picture itself.

I looked at some children´s books about animals, mainly domesticated animals, and discovered they were often old-fashioned in their outlook featuring out-dated equipment, animals uncommon to Iceland or animals known to children here, but without their unique Icelandic features. For instance, *Dýrin á bænum* has white-picket fences, black-faced sheep, and a girl pictured hand-feeding chickens (Heller, no year). *Mál dýranna á bænum* also has black-faced sheep with short fleeces with donkeys on the next page (Stefán Júlíusson, 1997). *Óróabók úr sveitinni* has a Friesian cow, a barn with horse-shoes and cobwebs, rabbits and apple trees laden with fruit (Fuller, 2007). I wanted a book something like *Sagan Fóu og Fóu Feykirófu* where the landscape and characters are recognizably Icelandic (Hjördís Inga Ólafsdóttir, 2009).

This Icelandic uniqueness is lacking in books imported from another country. The cow, for instance, is often depicted as being black and white, the Friesian variety, but Icelandic cows are a huge variety of colours. Atli Vigfússon (2012, p. 11) says that recent research from the *Nautastöð Bændasamtaka Íslands* (e. The Cattle Centre for the Icelandic Farmers´ Cooperative) shows the colours of Icelandic cows are in fact "reddish 42%, striped 31%, without horns 15%, black 10% and grey or sea-grey 1-2%". Sheep too, are often depicted as being the fluffy, black-faced variety whereas an Icelandic sheep, often has horns, has fleece nearly to the ground, and enjoys going high up into the mountains. Icelandic dogs with their ring tails, erect ears and thick set features are not depicted.

Marlow (1998) calls for realistic and accurate literature on farming and not the out-dated depictions often found. He says that historical depictions are acceptable if what we are teaching is an historical view of farming. However, if only historical depictions are offered then the connections with other segments of society which depend upon farming are isolated.

> Different segments of the economy are not in isolation from each other but rather are integrated such as farm products and produce are processed by the business world...The processed products are then available for consumption by human beings (Marlow, 1998, p. 277).

Marlow reasons because many pupils are today removed from rural life they have "meagre ideas" in terms of where food comes from (Marlow, 1998, p. 278). *Píla í sveitinni* does not exactly explain where food comes from but for there are no depictions of the slaughtering process. Milk is connected to cows but lambs are not connected with food. Ethical issues concerning what is age-appropriate limit a full disclosure. The aim was not to follow the animals "from conception to consumption" like Lovenheim´s detailed description of two calves which he intended to follow to the state of being hamburgers. Although he traced their lives as individuals to when they were to be slaughtered, he intervened and kept them as pets (Tsovel, 2005, p. 255).

In practical terms, *Píla í sveitinni* is a similar format to *Sagan um Dimmalimm* illustrated by Guðmundur Thorsteinsson, Muggur, from 1921 although published later in 1942 (Margrét Tryggvadóttir, 2005, p. 40). Muggur has the illustrations on one side of each opening of the book, the right-hand side, with the text on the left-hand side. I have followed this format. With *Píla í sveitinni*, it is possible to open the book completely upon itself, double in effect and so the teacher can easily read the text while all of the children can view the illustration. Hopefully this practical consideration will mean no child will call out "I can´t see".

The font, Avant Garde Gothic, was chosen because of its 'cleanness' of style .The letter "a" in that font has a straight back which is how the letter "a" is taught in primary school. This was a consideration in choosing the font. Letter size was first chosen at 24 but later reduced to 18 due to cost considerations.

In the choosing of the paper weight and quality considerations of finance soon became apparent. Fortunately, *Píla í sveitinni* was given financial grants of 50,000 kr. each from two local groups, SÚN (*Samvinnufélag Útgerðarmanna Neskaupstað*) and *Ungmennafélagið Egill rauði*. The second grant is on condition that I talk about *Píla í sveitinni* at the cultural evening which Egill rauði will hold in Neskaupstað in October, 2012.

5.2 Researcher participation methodology

The research section of this essay concerns my questioning preschoolers what they know about animals, specifically farm animals. I consider this of importance because it helped in

writing the text for *Píla í sveitinni*, knowing what previous knowledge preschoolers possessed and what interested them.

The method was researcher participatory for the questions were asked during play sessions with preschoolers when I was actively playing with the preschoolers, rather than trying to be an impartial observer. Researcher participant methods are of particular use for young children. Rather than approach the topic and area to be researched as a "project" or "assignment" where impartial evidence is paramount, the researcher in a participatory situation has less „power" or dominance. He or she shares, in a democratic sense, the research field with the participants of the study (Rannveig Traustadóttir 2003, p. 274).

Furthermore, participatory research methods in a childcare setting have a guiding presumption that children are to be taken seriously and that they have something of importance to say. Not only individual children deserve proper attention, but children as a social group are important.

> As a social group, children are part of a wider cultural context which has shaped their identities, their understandings and the cultural knowledge and skills that they bring with them into the early educational settings (Brooker, 2011, p. 138).

She continues with the call for respecting the dignity and diversity of all children and by "listening to children", letting them speak and "making a common cause with the children" (Warming, 2005 in Brooker, 2011, p. 140). This in effect means that the researcher must be prepared to revise his own views, and practise in light of what the children say. This was certainly the case in my research, especially with the youngest preschoolers. I had expected they could easily name the plastic replicas but instead, they only imitated the noise the animals make and showed little interest in the animals overall.

Brooker also writes about how research might explore what children are interested in outside of the playschool setting, and how this has an impact of what children are interested in and learn during their day hours at the school. Children´s lives are also impacted upon by the "real world". Vandenbroeck (2009) thinks that in this light it is important to modify current perspectives and curricula for preschools (in Brooker, 2011, p. 146).

5.2.1 Research data. Specifically, the preschoolers were asked the following questions:

- What is this animal called?
- Where does it live?
- What does it eat?

- What we get from them / or what they give us?

Research questions and responses from the preschoolers are in Enclosure 1.

5.3 Interpreting the data

The answers the children gave to my enquiries, overall, indicate a limited knowledge of farm animals. I expected more general descriptions of facial features of specific animals as mentioned by Tunnicliffe in her research with young children and preserved specimens (1999, p. 142). I also expected the oldest preschoolers to give the specific names of anatomical parts of animals: for instance, mane, tail, hoof, fleece and horns (*fax, tagl, hófur, ull, hornir*). As Tunnicliffe showed, the specific anatomical parts of animals are named by the youngest children, and before behavioural or habitual features are named (1999, p. 147). My research data did not indicate this. Tunnicliffe does not mention whether her research group imitated the noises the animals made, although her youngest group of participants (four-year olds) were older than my youngest group (under one-year olds to one and a half-year olds). This may have bearing on the results.

Indications of cultural heritage were strongest with the youngest children for they, nearly without exception, indicated a horse made the "gobbity gobb" noise. This is something parents and grandparents and other adults tend to teach young children in Iceland. The children thought a reindeer lives in the Children´s Zoo (*Húsdýragarðurinn*) in Reykjavik and not outside in the countryside. This indicates cultural transfer and the influence of family life outside the playschool as indicated by Vandenbroech (1999, in Brooker, 2011, p. 146).

The children´s answers indicate that there is some confusion even between different varieties of animal. This came as a surprise for I had expected more knowledge about common farm animals, especially horses and sheep. The east coast of Iceland and the areas surrounding Eskifjörður and Neskaupstaður are still rich in rural pursuits. Cows, sheep, horses and reindeer are a fairly common sight in summertime. Horses can also be seen grazing outside during the winter months. This indicates that direct experiences of nature, certainly of these animals are lacking in the preschoolers life. Indirect experiences, as defined by Kellert, seem to have made an impression upon some children as was shown in their answers concerning horses living in stables and the reindeer at the Family Zoo in Reykjavik. No symbolic experiences of animals were shown (no child talked about a similar animal from a book). This is understandable in the light of the theories by Piaget and Dewey, showing

children learn through direct experience and it is not until children are older than knowledge acquired from books becomes relevant.

I found that the youngest preschoolers did not have the vocabulary to answer even the question about what the animal was called. Instead, through a play routine by letting the preschoolers handle the plastic replicas, I listened for *private speech* from the children. Private speech is variously interpreted by Piaget and Vygotsky. For Piaget, private speech is "egocentric and immature". However, Vygotsky "believed that young children use language to plan, guide and monitor their behaviour and that [private speech] is an important tool of thought during the early childhood years" (Santrock, 2008, p. 252). This private speech was directed at the plastic replicas, making animal sounds specific to that particular animal, and ignoring me entirely. Perhaps participatory research with young children has a lower age limit were the children focus on an artefact instead of the researcher.

On another level, the youngest children making these animal noises may be indicative of animism as discussed earlier in this essay (4.1 Jean Piaget). The children intrinsically associate animal noises with animals, whether the animals are real or plastic replicas there appears to be difference. This may also explain why the older children refrained from this display; their animism no longer includes this aforementioned arena.

The oldest children produced less private speech when interacting with the plastic specimens. They also seemed reluctant overall, and only after some prompting, to make the sound specific animals make. It is possible the older children associate such animal noises with younger children and their reluctance can be read as wanting to distance themselves from perceived babyish behaviour.

5.4 Conclusion

In conclusion, the research indicated that Icelandic preschool children, at least the ones I talked with, know very little about animals found in the countryside. I expected the children would know more about the animals´ features *per se*, and know also something, although not as much, about the animals´ behaviour and habitat. In reality, the preschoolers showed limited knowledge, and in some cases, also limited interest in the plastic replicas.

Whether the plastic farm animal replicas were effective substitutes for the real live animal is difficult to answer. A comparison study using real farm animals and the same groups of children would need to be conducted to draw a specific conclusion. Whether

various artefacts connected with animals, such as hides, horns and wool would be better used instead of plastic animal replicas can also be asked.

It would seem participatory research methodology was partially successful in learning what the children think. It also appears a successful method in learning not only what interests them but also what does not interest them much as in this case. (Whether another method is available to discover what preschoolers know about animals could later be researched).

It is not possible to generalize from this case study or its data. My interpretations are strictly limited to the time, group and place in which I conducted the research and no conclusions or generalizations can be drawn. A larger selection of preschoolers in many more playschools would need to be asked. Their selection for the study would need to be on a random sampling basis which was not done in this case. The conclusions drawn from the study need to be understood from the viewpoint that my presence as a researcher had a direct influence upon the results. This may well be the case in one reply which had a horse eating pizza; the child was perhaps showing off or trying to be clever (or perhaps the child really had given the horse pizza to eat).

The research showed, and I think that it is fair to say within the strict limitations of the study, that preschoolers do not know very much about farm animals. It appears the features of the animals and their specific names are not part of their vocabulary. Limited behavioural traits were known and very limited connections to what animals provide in terms of food or agricultural products were discovered.

6. Conclusion and discussion

Píla í sveitinni is a modest attempt to incorporate features of a rich tradition found in children´s literature into a modern realm where concerns such as environmental awareness and sustainability are in focus. By using a commonly known animal as a spokesperson, the voice of the author can be heard. This literary devise is historically well-known and appears to be quite acceptable to an audience of young children.

The reasons behind this acceptance have been recently theorized and involve how children develop cognitively. At a certain young age it appears that young children tend to view animals are social equals, conversation partners and beings to which a caring relationship is a possibility. Not all beings appear in this category for it can also be demonstrated that children tend to endear some inanimate objects with life and worthy therefore of a caring relationship. By encouraging this tendency in young children it may be possible to widen the scope of how they bestow care. Whether this tendency can be encouraged to include less familiar concepts such as a wider global awareness and sustainability needs further to be researched. Developmental aspects for young children of this caring relationship found with animals has not been researched either and promises further understandings in the field of understanding language development and a sense of social self.

Young children´s propensity is to want to interact with the familiar and domestic and understand their own world in terms of the concrete rather than the abstract. The Curriculum for Playschools focuses upon six main elements which should be threaded throughout daily playschool life. One of these, sustainability, tends to be defined in terms of regional if not national views of the economy. Whether this regional and national scope has any interest for preschoolers can be determined by examining what interests them on a daily basis. An examination of developmental theories concurs that preschoolers tend towards the familiar. This problem can be considerably solved by taking the regional concepts of sustainability and environmental awareness and putting them within a familial framework. By beginning with farm animals and a domestic dog as a spokesperson, I have aimed to solve this problem.

The role of the playschool teacher and other staff at the school, parents and the wider circle of people with whom the preschooler comes in contact with, can make a difference. Fairly complicated concepts such as sustainability can be shown in a practical manner and

preschoolers can partake in activities such as becoming aware of where our food comes from and how the animals in the countryside live their lives. This intertwining of communication, culture and sustainability within the form of a children´s book takes an age-appropriate form into a newer area of literature, that of eco-pedagogy.

The medium of a children´s book in itself appears to be limited in giving preschoolers direct and indirect experiences of nature. However, symbolic experiences of nature can be enjoyed through the book medium if they are balanced with real and everyday life experiences of nature. A book as a medium can lead to a variety of other experiences which can in turn lead preschoolers to adult-directed play experiences. Although these usually thought of as being less rich than child-inspired play routines, they may lead in the other direction. The book as a medium can also be shown to encourage communication, increase vocabulary, give words to emotion and lead into other areas such as song, poetry and plays. Historically speaking, the book as a form is important to Icelandic culture although the future will almost certainly electronic media to a greater degree.

Symbolic experiences through books, films and other media, when coupled with play experiences, discussions and interactive reading techniques can have any real benefits for the cognitive development of preschoolers. Developmental theories from Piaget, Dewey and Vygotsky are in agreement that learning for preschoolers happens at a level of direct involvement. By involving preschoolers more directly in the reading experience symbolic experiences can take on certain aspects of the indirect nature experience. This is thought to be more age-appropriate.

The theory of caring as proposed by Noddings may lead into an area where caring of animals has a spinoff effect for caring of the nature and the environment in a wider sense. Preschoolers, as a social group, rather than as individuals, tend to automatically feel affection for domestic animals, as explained by the theories of neotopic features and bio-centrism. This affection or even interest seems mostly to be directed towards animals and environments which are domestic and familiar as opposed to fantastical and exotic. In this sense, preschoolers are cognitively prone, so to speak, to care more about local concerns. *Píla í sveitinni* operates within this local sphere. Older children tend to be more interested in the exotic and unfamiliar as attested by a look at children´s literature for this older age group.

Research conducted with preschoolers using the participatory method concluded that there was a discrepancy between what had been shown in theory the preschooler knew and what my research data actually showed. This discrepancy may be explained in terms

inadequate specimens (plastic replicas are not real animals) and the limits of participatory methods by age (very young children tend not to participate). Animism or private speech can both be offered as explanations for the responses of the youngest preschoolers.

This research has a limited application, applicable only to the time and place of its study. It is not possible to generalize from the findings or draw conclusions to a wider group of children. The methodology meant I was an active participant and therefore could, in theory, influence the outcome. The sample group was limited in size, not chosen at random and limited to two playschools geographically situated within the same region of Iceland. However, I think within these limitations I can say the data do indicate that preschoolers I spoke with know relatively little about farm animals. This may be an indication of the failings of the research method and use of plastic replicas. One the other hand, it may be in fact indicative of a wider shift in children´s literature, lifestyle and society in general away from contact with nature and animals. It may also indicate a lack of co-operation of the preschoolers to discuss what they know, their shyness around me, or discomfort with me as a foreigner with a strange Icelandic accent.

By expecting the book to fulfil the role of explaining concepts like sustainability and environmental awareness, the participation of the playschool teacher is crucial. This participation would make an interesting future study; how are children´s books read out loud to preschoolers? Does this story-time include active interaction between the teacher and the audience or is it used as filler between other periods of greater interest such as lunch-time and play-outside-time? What affect does the use of books as filler have upon children´s view of them?

Also of future interest is an evaluation of the social and developmental aspects of the child-animal relationship. Can this relationship be qualitatively measured? Can there be found to be a difference in the quality of the said relationship if the animal in question is a pet or a farm animal? Does this relationship have any developmental aspects in terms of language development?

Finally, one needs to question the validity of a children´s book about farm animals with a sheep-dog as a spokesperson. The urban landscape is becoming more of a reality for most preschoolers, both in Iceland and overseas. Urban life and issues of a different kind such as gender equality, the democratic process and the multi-cultural society may be more valid as subjects for a children´s book. Píla as a spokesperson may be able to interpret the social changes occurring within Icelandic society for preschoolers in a similar sense older children´s

books discussed social inequality and hierarchy. One of these social changes is the dramatic increase over the past few years in the number of tourists visiting Iceland. With this in mind, I have sought a grant to bring out an English-language version of *Píla í sveitinni.*

Moreover, the reality for many children in Iceland is the playschool arena, every week day and nearly all day. Píla may need to move into the urban environment, just as many other recent children´s books have, and speak out about those concerns affecting preschoolers directly like their long hours at playschool, the increasing need for parents and care-givers to work long hours and the changes in how information is transferred from print to electronic media. I imagine Píla would welcome the challenge.

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Enclosure 1: Research data

I asked the research questions of preschoolers at *Dalborg Playschool, Eskifjörður* during pre-service training period between the months of August and October, 2011.
I took a random sampling of groups of five children from each of three classrooms;

- The Green classroom: 4- to 5 years-old,
- The Red classroom: 2 ½ to 4-years old
- The Blue classroom: 12 months to 2 ½ year olds.

Usually the children I approached were playing in a group inside the classroom with other toys, Lego or something similar, usually after they had been in their organized group activities. I had with me plastic farm animals from the farm activity centre at the playschool because I felt that the children would be familiar with them, having often, supposedly, played with the animals in the farm centre. I chose a plastic cow, a horse, a sheep and a goat. Not having found a reindeer, as in the book *Píla í sveitinni*, I used a pig instead.

I started by approaching the children and sitting with them on the floor and showing them the animals I had with me. This was done in the spirit of participatory research methodology.

The responses from children were:
The first group I asked were children in the Green classroom; a group of two girls and two boys playing with wooden building blocks in a room off from the main classroom. These children are the oldest group in the playschool who will be going to primary school within the following year. One of the girls answered at first until the others joined in. One of the boys, unbeknown to me, has problems with speech and his answers were more than often indicative of a younger child. I have visited their classroom a few times over the previous nine weeks, but had not worked with them closely on a daily basis, though I had sometimes interacted with them in the playground and at other times.
(RV): What is this animal? [I hold up a cow].
(Child): It is a cow.
(RV): What does it give us?
(Child): Moo, uhh?
(RV): What noise does it make?

(Child): MOO? [The child answers in a hesitating manner].

(RV): Where does it live?

(Child): ...in the animal zoo [Húsdýragarðinn in Reykjavík].

(RV): But in winter when there is snow everywhere, where does it live?

(Child): [No answer].

(RV): In winter does it live in the animal zoo too?

(Child): Err, NO! [The child answers emphatically].

(RV): What does it eat?

(Child): Uhm? ...grass.

(RV): What is this animal? [I hold up a sheep].

(Child): A sheep.

(RV): What does it eat?

(Child): Grass.

(RV): What does it give us?

(Child): Milk.

(RV): What is this animal called? [I hold up a horse].

(Child): A horse.

(RV): Have you seen a horse now in summer?

(Child): Yes.

(RV): Where does it live?

(Child): In the stables. [Eskifjörður´s town stables are very close to the playschool, within walking distance for the children. The children are sometimes taken to feed the horses stale bread].

(RV): What does it eat?

(Child): Grass.

(RV): What is this animal? [I hold up a pig].

(Child): A pig.

(RV): What does it eat?

(Child): Ummm...grass.

(RV): Have you seen a pig this summer?

(Child):

(RV): Have you seen this animal? [I hold up a goat].

(Child): No.

(RV): Have a look at it...see...

(Child): A sheep!

(RV): No it´s a goat.

(RV): What sound does a pig make?

(Child): Garg garg garga garg.

RV): Oink Oink Oink.

(RV): What noise does a horse make?

(Children):[More children join into answer the questions]:That´s not a horse! [child pointing to the goat].Neigh, neigh, neigh.

(Children): [pointing to the goat] what does that say? That is my horse!

(RV): OOOHH OOOOHH. Baaarr baaar. Yes, maybe. What does a sheep say?

(Children): BEEE BEEE. Meer Meer.

(RV): What does a cow say?

(Children): Mou mou moo.

(RV): Thank you all!

The second group of children were from the Red classroom. There is a considerable age range in this classroom, which was my home classroom for my 10-week pre-service training. My personal group of children were the youngest, with ages from 2 ½- to 3-years of age. I found it quite difficult to hold their attention more than the first two questions. I sat on a mat with four children in an area used for singing, reading and talking together.

(RV): What is this animal? [I hold up a sheep].

(Children): Bee Bee. No no.

(RV): What´s its name?

(Child): Bee Bee...Mearrr mee. Voff Voff. [Assorted animal sounds from every child].No, no that´s a sheep! Voff voff!

(RV): What do we get from our cow?

(Children) [More children join in to answer the question]: BEE BEE...bee bee. Milk, milk from here. [He points to the udder].

(RV): Yeah, milk comes from there. What more do we get? [I am thinking more of cheese rather than meat].

(Child): On its back!!

(RV): What does this animal say? [I am holding a horse].

(Child): Moo Mooo.

(RV): Does this animal say moo?
(Child): Yes...no...eehor eehor...THAT...mee meer arrhh!
(RV): What does this animal say? [I hold up a pig].
(Children): Gobbidy gobbity. [This is the sound of an Icelandic horse galloping in young children´s language].
(RV): It´s a pig...pig.
(Children): Pig!
(RV): What´s this animal? [I hold up the goat].
(Child): It's a goat!
After this exchange the children rapidly lost interest. The supervisor of the classroom wished for the children to join the others in outdoor play and so I stopped the questions there.

With the youngest group of children, those from the Blue classroom, I never progressed beyond asking what the animals we called and what they ate. I sat on a mattress on the floor and the children came to me out of curiosity. They played with the animals which were the same as I had used with the previous two groups. Sometimes there were several children, sometimes only one. Most of these children had little or no vocabulary beyond single words and repetitive phrases. They were not particularly interested in the animals, although two children did say "gobbity gobbity" when shown the horse. This was more a private conversation than as a direct answer to my queries.
I continued the research *Sólvellir Playschool in Neskaupstaður*, at my usual workplace in January of 2012, using almost identical plastic replicas taken from a farmhouse and animal set. Whereas previously I had used a Dictaphone to record the children´s responses, in Neskaupstaður I relied upon my memory to write down answers after each session. The first group were five children born in 2008, either in June or July of that year. They could mostly name the animals correctly, although there was some confusion about a cow being called a bull (*naut*, although it was in fact a cow). No one knew what the goat was called. One child knew that cows lived in a cowshed (*fjós*). They all knew that animals ate grass, and two children also added hay to the animals' diet. As to specific animal features, the cow was given the tail of a dog (*skott* and not *hali).* The sheep´s horny feet caused confusion too and were named as though they belonged to a horse (*hófur*).

Enclosure 2: Assignments connected with Píla í sveitinni

These assignments can loosely be divided into those which (a) promote environmental awareness, (b) promote ideas connected with sustainability, and (c) encourage vocabulary development connected with the book as a whole.

(a) Environmental awareness

Sheep

- What products do we get from sheep? Find pictures, collect examples of and discuss.
- Find examples; discuss how children in the past played with bones from the sheep. Different bones were said to be horses, cows, and lambs.
- Make a four-stranded rope from wool using four weighted drink bottles suspended from ceiling. Such ropes used to bind hay onto horses. Find old photograph.
- Try wet felting with combed sheep´s wool. Try felting around smooth stones to make sheep. Complete with eyes from knotted wool, horns from birch twigs.
- Try felting inner soles for our water boots.
- Sing songs/ recite poems connected with sheep and lambs. *Sigga litla systir mín. Upp í sveit. Smaladrengurinn. Smalastúlkan. Draumalandið. Næturljóð úr Fjörðum. Nú er úti norðanvindur. Hver er upp í bænum, bænum? Magga litla lambið á. Bíum, bíum, bamba. Sumardaginn fyrsta.* Þorfinnur Jónsson from Ingunnarstaður (Poem to sheep).
- Talk about different names for sheep; the leader, the rams and ewes, the lambs (twins and triplets). Horned and not-horned.
- Web-site with different sheep´s colours. Story about how Icelandic sheep´s colours came to be; The farmer Grímur from Náttfaravíka in Þingeyrarskýsla (Jón Torfasson and Jón Viðar Jónmundsson, no year, p. 9-10).
- Visit a farm in lambing season.

Cows

- What do we get from cows? Collect cartoons, packages, pictures from magazines and discuss.
- Arrange to visit supermarket and find what dairy products are available.
- Collect words that describe cows, bulls and calves.
- Find website about dairying, milking, cheese-making.

- Visit to museum (or get sent collection of old equipment) to see machinery connected with dairy products.

Horses

- Examine horse shoes. Play game outside throwing horse shoes around wickets.
- Visit museum or stables to examine saddles; how women once rode as compared to now. Ride horses with supervision.
- Find a website with old photographs showing working farm horses.
- Find a website showing the different colours of horses.
- Collect the common names of horses (Mósi, Rauðka, Skjóni, Nótt, Lýsingar; what colours could the horses be?)
- Read the story of Sleipnir.
- Discuss the names of gaits.
- Find songs connected with horses; for instance, *Riðum heim til Hóla. Riðum, riðum, rekum yfir sandinn. Afi minn fór á honum Rauð. Foli, foli fótalipni.Folalidið mitt.*

Reindeer

- Listen to music from Finland with Sami and their reindeer.
- Examine reindeer´s horns and skin, articles of clothing and buttons made from reindeer skin or horn.
- Find a website about reindeer and pictures of what they eat, where they live and their life cycle.
- Is Rudolf an Icelandic reindeer?
- Discuss the names of male, female and calves.

Dogs

- Who owns a dog? What do you do together? What does he like to eat? Play with? Where does he sleep?
- What sort of dogs are there in the world? Find a website or books.
- What differences are there between farm and town dogs?
- Sing songs and say poems connected with dogs; *Dýravísa, Heyrðu Lobba.*

(b) Sustainability

Discussions could centre upon what farmers give their animals to eat, what they do with the waste and how the fields are fertilized. Ask if the children think the sheep, cows and horses like being out in the fields in summer. Where do they go in winter? What do they need in

winter? Is there much rubbish in the country? What should we do with rubbish? Have you helped someone sort rubbish? How can we cut down on making waste like plastic and paper? What happens to waste paper from our playschool? Can we make our own paper? What does the green rubbish bin mean? When we wash our hands how much paper should we use? Is it better to use a cloth?

(c) Ideas to promote vocabulary development

- Discuss and explain terms in Píla which children may be unfamiliar with.
- Encourage discussion of what Píla is doing in the book. Ask questions while reading. Encourage a re-telling of the story (important in helping children move from the spoken language form to reading and writing. Hrafnhildur Ragnarsdóttir, 2004, p. 27).
- Maybe some children have toy dogs at home and are willing to come with them to playschool. When reading Píla these toys may re-enact her activities. This applies for toy horses, cows and reindeer. Other animals not included in the book may also make an appearance as toys so no child is excluded.
- Encourage children to learn the correct names for different animals, males, females and their young. Build upon this knowledge by later using these terms in other questions such as relating to colour of a particular young animal, or specific names related to its body parts. For example, foal has been introduced as a term. Maybe on the next reading of the book, the term foal is re-introduced, but in a sentence asking about its skinny legs and lack of balance.
- Learn different songs, poems and rhythms connected with animals or compose our own. This may be a prospective event for parents' day or spring open day at the playschool.
- What do various animals eat, how do they chew their food and where their food comes from are examples of discussion topics. Bring examples of different types of food to the playschool for the children to examine. Examples are reindeer moss, dried pellet cows´ fodder, hay from hay bales or rolls, salt stones for sheep, herring for sheep, fresh grass and other plants.
- Make up our own stories concerning animals, either farm animals or pets. Toys, cardboard boxes made into farm buildings, fences made from twigs or cardboard, toy tractors, and other props could complete the setting.
- Encourage children to draw animals and then make up stories about them.

- Children make face-masks in the likeness of their favourite animal.
- A play could be staged involving the face-mask characters and the children´s own story-line.