Care, learning and leisure:
The organisational identity of after-school centres for six-to nine-year old children in Reykjavík

Kolbrún P. Pálsdóttir

Submitted in partial fulfilment of requirements for the degree of PhD
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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the development of the role and organisational identity of after-school centres in Reykjavík, Iceland, from the perspectives of different stakeholders: (a) the system or the society at large, (b) different professionals working with children in after-school centres and in schools (that is, recreation personnel and teachers), and (c) the children themselves and their parents. The provision of after-school care for young school children is an important part of most European child-care policies and is the fastest growing day care service in Europe. In Reykjavík, after-school centres have been operating in some form since 1971 and offer day-care for first to fourth graders in the afternoon, from 2:00 pm to 5:00 pm. Children attending the centres have generally already been in school from approx. 8:00 am to 2:00 pm or for about five to six hours a day. In addition, the after-school centres in Reykjavík stay open from 8:00 am to 5:00 pm on school holidays and during the summer vacation. This study of the development of the after-school centres in Reykjavík reveals how unclear the rationale for the service is, as its justification has shifted between care, learning and leisure over the years.

The literature about after-school services for school-aged children is scant and fragmented, not only as concerns Iceland but concerning Europe generally. After-school care for school-aged children falls within different spheres: the educational system, the welfare system and the private domain of the home, which leaves it unclear who is primarily responsible for such care and what its role should be. This study describes the specific status of the after-school centre in the educational-system from a holistic perspective, drawing upon the views of all major stakeholders. Three main research questions were asked: (a) What is the purpose of the after-school centres in Reykjavík, and how has public policy reflected that purpose? (b) How do recreation personnel experience their role? (c) How do children view the daily activities in the after-school centre, and how do they experience the difference between their school and their after-school centre?

The theoretical framework for the study was mainly drawn from two sources: Firstly, Wenger’s theory of Communities of Practice (CoP) was used to examine how various stakeholders understand and participate in constructing communities of practice in after-school centres. Organisational theory has shown that the identity of organisations emerges from the variety of perspectives portrayed by different stakeholders. Secondly, this research was underpinned by theories of childhood studies. Children were considered as active participants in constructing the organisational identity of the after-school centre. The
sociology of childhood examines the status of children as social actors and the ways in which the increased institutionalization of childhood has affected their lives. This approach was used to examine how the perspectives of the children might influence the moulding of the after-school centres.

A holistic method of research was used to examine after-school centres from multiple perspectives, including the historical, organisational and professional dimensions. A qualitative, multi-case study design was used to investigate Reykjavík after-school centres as institutions and the experiences of stakeholders in the centres. Two different after-school centres in Reykjavík were chosen as subjects for detailed investigation, and research methods included interviews, observations, and an analysis of documents and drawings. Data gathering took place between 2008 and 2010.

The main findings of this study are threefold: (a) the institutional status of the service is weak, (b) the professional identity of the recreation personnel is unclear, and (c) after-school centres provide an important opportunity for play and social activities, from the perspectives of the children.

Firstly, from the point of view of the system the main function of after-school centres is to provide day-care, even though developments in recent years tend towards a more pedagogical understanding of their purposes. There does not seem to be consensus in the society, either from the political or at the professional level, about what the main aims of the services should be. No specific legislation addresses the operation of the after-school centres. The first after-school centres in Reykjavík operated as part of the day-care system, and legislation addressed the goals and conditions of the after-school centres. However, in 1993, when schools started to offer extended services to young children in school, the centres were placed under the direction of the Educational Council. In 2002, these services were taken over by the Sport and Recreational Council, and the emphasis was placed upon enabling children to participate in various recreational activities and fostering their social skills and independence. In that sense, the aim of the services was educational and involved strengthening children’s capabilities to participate in a democratic society. In 2011 a new Department of Education and Youth was established, merging the schools and the after-school centres at the administrative level, a step towards a more holistic approach to the organisation of schools and after-school centres. However, resources that would support work towards that goal are not yet forthcoming.

Secondly, the professional identity of the personnel has developed in a very fragmented manner. The majority of the recreation personnel in the two after-school centres did not have specific qualifications and made only short-term commitments to the workforce of the centres. Personnel felt
that they were intruders in the school-facility and that their work was generally not being recognized within the school system. This finding is in accord with other studies (EFILWC, 2006; Cartmel, 2007). The recreation personnel held a variety of views on the main purpose of their work, such as: (a) to provide physical and emotional care, (b) to support social development of children and (c) to organise leisure activities that promote informal learning. The present study shows that the leaders of the after-school centres assumed the principal responsibility for the operation of the centres and provided support and guidance to their personnel.

Finally, the findings of this study indicate that the after-school centres provided an opportunity for children to play and take part in a variety of social activities in the after-school hours. Children constructed their own communities of practice, within which they organised their social relationships, experiences of learning, and histories of knowledge, that were present both in the schools and in the after-school centres. The children did the work of ‘brokering’ as they connected school, after-school centre, and home environments. The peer-group was an important community for the children, and establishing friendships helped the children to cope better in school and after-school centre, as has been found in other studies (Højholt, 2001; Stanek, 2011). Only by feeling capable and accepted do children experience themselves as active members in the community of practice.

This study concludes with some practical recommendations. The lack of educational vision for the after-school centres should be redressed by encouraging politicians to work with the professional educational community in developing a holistic view of the work day of children in schools and after-school centres. This may require a re-definition of the important components of child education and of the organisation of the school day. Authorities should acknowledge the weakness involved in making the after-schools administratively subordinated to the school authorities without any educational responsibilities being carried by the latter. The fostering of a class of professionals whose task it is to nurture the social skills of children and their overall well-being in the after-school hours should be given high priority. Finally, this research suggests that a much closer investigation of the relationship between the various institutions that take care of children, in this case schools and after-school centres, is needed, both from educational and administrative perspectives. In addition, particular consideration should be given to how the views and experiences of children might be harnessed in moulding the enterprise.
ÁGRIP

Rannsóknin kannar hvernig hlutverk og staða frístundaheimila í Reykjavík hefur þróast frá sjónarhóli ólíka hagsmunaaðila: (a) Kerfisins eða samfélagssins alls, (b) fagfólks sem vinna með börnum á frístundaheimilum og í skóla, þ.e. starfsfólki frístundaheimila og kennara, og (c) barnanna sjálfra og foreldra þeirra.

Skóladagvistun fyrir ung börn er mikilvægur þáttur í stefnu flestra Evrópuþjóða varðandi um önnun barna og er sú tegund dagvistunar sem vex hvað hraðast í Evrópu. Fyrsta skóladagheimilidi í Reykjavík var stofnað árið 1971. Í dag bjóða frístundaheimilin upp á þjónustu fyrir börn úr 1.–4. bekk eftir að skóla lýkur, frá kl. 14:00 til kl. 17:00. Börnin sem eru á frístundaheimilunum hafa þegar verið í skólanum frá u.þ.b. kl. 8:00 til kl. 14:00 eða í um fimm til sex tíma. Auk þess eru frístundaheimilin opin frá 8:00 til 17:00 á frídögum skóla og yfir sumarleyfistímann. Þessi rannsókn á þróun frístundaheimila í Reykjavík leiðir í ljós hve forsendurnar fyrir þjónustunu eru óljósar þar sem réttlæting hennar hefur í áranna rás færst frá umhyggju til lærðóm og yfir til frístunda.

Fáar rannsóknir beinast að skipulagi skóladagheimila/frístundaheimila, ekki bara á Íslandi heldur almennt í Evrópu. Frístundaheimili fyrir börn á skólaaldri lenda á milli ólíka sviða: Menntakerfisins, velferðarkerfisins og einkalífsins eða heimilisins, sem veldur því að ekki er skýrt hver ber höfuðábyrgð á þeim og hvert hlutverk þeirra ætti að vera. Þessi rannsókn lýsir sérstöðu frístundaheimila innan menntakerfisins frá viðum sjónarhól og byggist á viðhorfum allra helstu hagsmunaaðila. Aðalrannsóknarspurningar eru þrjár: (a) Hver er tilgangur frístundaheimila í Reykjavík og hvernig birtist hann í opinberri stefnumótun? (b) Hvernig upplifir starfsfólk frístundaheimila hlutverk sitt? (c) Hvert er álit barnanna á daglegu starfi á frístundaheimilinu og hvernig upplifa þau muninn á skóla og frístundaheimili?


Helstu niðurstöður þessarar rannsóknar voru að: (a) staða frístundaheimila innan kerfisins var veik, (b) fagvitund frístundaleiðbeinenda var almennt óljós, og (c) frístundaheimilin voru mikilvægur vettvangur fyrir leiki og félagsslíf frá sjónarhóli barnanna.

Í fyrsta lagi virðist meginhlutverk frístundaheimilra frá sjónarhóli kerfisins vera að veita dagvistun, jafnvel þótt þróun síðustu ára stefni meira í áttina að því að þau sinni uppeldislegu hlutverki. Á þeim virðist ekki vera samstaða í samfélaginu, hvorki meðal stjórmálamanna né fagfólk, um það hvert ætti að vera helsta markmið þessarar þjónustu. Það er engin sérstök löggjöf um umrekur frístundaheimilra. Fyrstu frístundaheimilin í Reykjavík voru rekin sem hluti af dagvistunarkerfinu og þá voru sett lög um markmið og skilyrói skóladagheimilra. En árið 1993 var þjónustan færð undir fræðsluráð þegar skólar tóku að bjóða upp á lengda viðveru fyrir yngri börnin. Árið 2002 fluttust rekur frístundaheimila yfir til ípróttta- og tómstundaráðs og áhersla var löggjöf á að börnin gætu tekið þátt í fjölbreyttu tómstundastarfi og hlúð að félagsfærni þeirra og sjálfstæði. Að því leyti var markmið þjónustunnar uppeldislegt og fól í sér að styrkja færni barnanna til að að þaka þátt í lýðræðislegu samfélagi. Árið 2011 var sett á laggirnar nýtt Skóla- og frístundasvið þar sem skólar og frístundaheimilí voru sameinuð undir einna yfirstjórn, sem er skref í áttina að skólar og frístundaheimilmí bjóði upp að heildstæða þjónustu. Þar skortir samt enn á fjárfraðslögg og úrræði til að vinna skipulega að því markmiði.

Í öðru lagi hefur fagvitund starfsfólks þróast á mjög brotakennndan hátt. Meirihlut starfsmanna á báðum frístundaheimilinum höfðu ekki sérstaka menntun og réðu sig aðeins til skamms tíma á frístundaheimilinum.

Starfsfólk í þruflum og froskflum og taldís að framlag þess væri ekki metið að verðileikum í skólakerfinu. Þessi niðurstöð vera er í samræmi við aðrar rannsóknir (EFILWC, 2006; Cartmel, 2007). Starfsfólk frístundaheimilí höfðu margvislega viðhorefr til starfsins og markmiða þess, svo sem: (a) veita líkamlega og tilfinningalega umönnun, (b) styðja við félagsslegan þroska barna og (c) að skipuleggja tómstundastarf sem stuðlar að óformlegu námí. Þessi rannsókn síndi að verkefnastjórnarinn á frístundaheimilunum tóku á sig viðamikla ábyrgð á daglegri starfsemi og veittu öðru starfsfólkí stuðning og leiðsögur.

USE OF CONCEPTS

After-school programs (i. skipulagt tómstundastarf fyrir börn á skólaaldri) stand for different kinds of organised day-care for school-aged children that may operate in the mornings, in the afternoons, or during summer holidays and other school-vacations.

After-school centres (i. frístundaheimili/skóladagvist) will be used in this thesis to refer to after-school programs that are mainly organised in after-school hours.

Leader (i. verkefnastjóri) is the person engaged to supervise the after-school centre.

Leisure-time centres (i. frístundaheimili) is the term currently used in public documents for the after-school centres in Reykjavík.

Recreation centres (i. frístundamiðstöð) are operated in each of the six areas of Reykjavík and organise youth centres for 12–16 year old children, leisure activities for 6–16 year old children, and after-school centres for 6-9 year old children.

Recreation pedagogues (i. frístundaráðgjafi) refers to individuals who have received tertiary qualifications, within the field of pedagogy or recreation, to work in after-school centres.

Recreation personnel (i. frístundaleiðbeinandi) will be used to refer to unskilled personnel working in the after-school centres.

School day-care (i. skóladagvist) refers to an after-school centre that the school operates.

School day-care homes (i. skóladagheimili) refers to the first after-school programs that operated in Reykjavík.

Sport and Recreational Council (SRC, i. Íþróttar- og tómstundasvið) was the administrative unit of the city of Reykjavík responsible for organising recreation and youth activities.
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Finally, I am forever in debt to the participants of the study, the recreation personnel, the children, the parents, and teachers that were willing to talk to me and invited me to observe their activities. Especially, I want to thank the two leaders who never let my questions and curiosity throw them off, and helped me understand better the complexities of their work.

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1 INTRODUCTION

Provision of after-school services for young school children is an important part of most European child-care policies and is the fastest-growing day-care service in Europe (European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (EFILWC), 2006). The Nordic countries have often been looked upon as international leaders in providing public day-care for children. These countries also have the highest proportion of working mothers (Eydal, 2008). However, there are different levels of investment in after-school services in the various Nordic countries. For example, while Sweden and Denmark have invested in building up a professional platform for recreation pedagogy, Iceland and Norway have lagged behind in that area (Johansson & Thorstenson-Ed, 2001). This thesis focuses on the organisational identity of the after-school centres in Reykjavík, the largest municipality in Iceland, probing their rationale, their place within the system, their mode of operation and the views of all the participants and stakeholders. A holistic methodology will be applied, and after-school centres will be considered from multiple perspectives, including the historical, the organisational and the professional; and an analysis is offered of the organisational identity of the after-school centre as it is construed by personnel, children and their parents as well as by the system itself. This holistic scheme of research allows us to analyse how the after-school centres have developed and where they seem to be heading. This thesis particularly examines three aspects of the after-school centres: (a) public policy regarding the after-school centres and their organisational status; (b) the perspectives and professional identities of the recreation personnel; and (c) the perspectives of the children themselves and their experiences of the transition from the school to the after-school centre.

After-school centres are a part of the available services for children and parents in Reykjavík offering day-care for first to fourth graders from 2:00 to 5:00 pm. Children attending the centres have already been in school from approximately 8:00 am to 2:00 pm, that is, for about five to six hours a day. The after-school centres in Reykjavík are also open from approximately 8:00 am to 5:00 pm on school holidays and during the summer holidays. According to the Reykjavík City website, the aim of these centres is to:

- offer variable leisure activities for six- to nine-year old children after the end of the compulsory school day. The aim of after-school
centres is to provide children with a caring and secure environment that allows them to enjoy themselves and to develop. Emphasis is placed upon enhancing social skills through play and different activities, as well as self-respect and respect for others and the environment. The after-school centres use democratic rules to empower the children to make independent decisions and to influence their environment and conditions. (Reykjavík, n.d., *my translation*)

Important issues are mentioned in this statement, and it will be of interest to trace the ways in which the policy is reflected (or fails to be reflected) in daily practice. It is also of interest to study if the government and the community at large acknowledges these goals or not, and if they are reflected in public policy.

National statistics on children’s registration in after-school centres are not available; however, a recent survey showed that 75 percent of municipalities in Iceland offer some form of after-school service and the majority of children from grade 1 and grade 2 attend the centres (Ágústsdóttir, 2010). Reykjavík documents attendance, and Figure 1-1 shows the proportion of children age six to nine registered from 1991–2011.

![Figure 1-1. Proportion of children from grades 1–4 attending after-school centres in 1991–2011](image)

The numbers show a relatively steady increase with a fluctuation which could be explained by differences in how attendance is registered. In the years 1993–2001, the service was provided and organised by each school, and homework assistance was considered a part of the after-school
services. During that time, a certain proportion of the children attended only the home-work assistance sessions. In 2001, when the service was put under the Sport and Recreation Council, homework assistance was no longer offered. The general view has been that assistance with homework within the school should be offered only by teachers, not by un-trained personnel (Reykjavík, 2002).

Figure 1-2 shows the percentage of children in grades 1–4 who were registered in after-school centres in Reykjavík during the school-years 2008–2011.

![Figure 1-2. Percentage of children from grades 1–4 enlisted in after-school centres 2008–2011](image)

As can be seen from Figure 1-2, most of the children registered were in grades 1–2, and there was a decline in registration as the children moved into grade 3, but especially into grade 4. However, the statistics show that the percentages for fourth graders has risen from 10 percent to 17 percent in the last three years, and the numbers for third graders have risen from 43 to 57 percent. Nevertheless, parents of the six to seven year old children are registering their children in much higher degree to the after-school centres than parents of the eight and nine year old children.

1.1 The Icelandic school system

The after-school centres in Reykjavík are located on school sites and operate in close cooperation with the compulsory schools. In Iceland, school is obligatory from the age of six to age 16, and the education
system consists of pre-school, compulsory school, and upper secondary and higher education. The vast majority of compulsory schools are run by the municipalities although the Ministry of Education sets the general agenda for schools and supervises its implementation. Compulsory schools operate nine months a year (a minimum of 180 days) and students in grades 1–4 are supposed to receive a minimum of 1200 minutes of teaching per week (Compulsory School Act, no. 91/2008). This means that, with recess and refreshment, the school day is five to six hours long for six- to nine-year old children in Iceland. The majority of schools operate after-school programs in some form for the youngest school-children (Pálsdóttir & Ágústsdóttir, 2011). However, in some municipalities, after-school programs are run under the auspices of other authorities, such as the Sport and Recreational council, as was in fact the case in Reykjavík when this study took place. The organisation of the Icelandic school system is similar to that of the school-systems in the other Nordic countries. In the Nordic countries, especially Sweden and Denmark, after-school day-care has increasingly become a part of the school system. Nevertheless, there seem to be interesting differences in the way after-school service is organised, both within, and at the same time outside of, the school system in Western societies.

1.2 Current legislation concerning after-school centres in Iceland

Special legislation concerning the operation of after-school centres in Iceland does not exist. However, both the Youth Act (Youth Act, no.70/2007) and the Compulsory School Act (Compulsory School Act, no. 91/2008) refer to services comparable to after-school centres. The Youth Act (2007) includes directives addressed to those organising youth activities for 6–25 year old people, both activities based on voluntary initiatives and activities run by community authorities. The opening article of the Youth Act states that “in all organised youth activity social, preventive, pedagogic and educational values should be considered, aiming to enhance the personal qualities and democratic awareness of participants”. In addition, this act states that “those working with or in charge of children and young people in youth activities should be legally of age and should have received training and education and have acquired knowledge or experience for the job” (Youth Act, no.70/2007, article 10).

It should be kept in mind that the Youth Act is aimed at a large variety of activities, ranging from Boy and Girl Scout activities to sports training programs and to community centres and youth clubs run by municipalities. Thus, it is far from clear from the specified criteria how to implement after-school services. What, for example, would qualify as satisfactory knowledge
or experience for personnel? The qualifications, if any, required for personnel in after-school programs vary from case to case. Over half of the municipalities in Iceland do not require that program leaders have any tertiary education (Ágústsdóttir, 2010). Still, 93 percent of six- to nine-year old children in Iceland live in municipalities that do insist that program leaders have tertiary-level education (Ágústsdóttir, 2010).

In 1995, a chapter was added to the Compulsory School Act stating that schools are allowed to offer after-school services and to charge parents for such services (Lög um grunskóla, nr. 91/1995). However, no further directives can be found in Icelandic laws or regulations on the implementation of after-school services. The Compulsory School Act (Compulsory School Act, no. 91/2008) also states that students should be offered the opportunity to participate in organised recreational activities after school, but without any further directives.

1.3 The changing lives of children in Iceland

The lives of children in Iceland, as in most industrialized countries, changed drastically during the 20th century. Icelandic society developed, within a short period, from a relatively poor peasant society to an industrial society relying on various technical industries in addition to fisheries (Stefánsson & Karlsdóttir, 2007). The establishment of compulsory schooling and day-care services has institutionised the education and caring of children from birth to 16 years, removing them from the home and placing them in institutional settings within the public sphere (Cohen, Moss, Petrie & Wallace, 2004). The following sub-sections provide a brief history of the changing lives of children in Iceland—the history of schooling, day-care, and the establishment of after-school centres in Iceland—and concludes by discussing the changing views towards children in Icelandic society.

1.3.1 History of schooling

Formal Western schooling has brought about substantial changes in the cultural lives of families and children (Rogoff, 2003, p. 340). These changes are evident in the lives of Icelandic children. In the traditional Icelandic peasant society, the extended family would live together with the man of the house being responsible for the well-being of every family member. Iceland has been a Lutheran Protestant society since the 18th century, and religious education called for the ability to read (Stefánsson & Karlsdóttir, 2007). The majority of the nation could, therefore, read already in the early 19th century. The majority of children in the 18th and 19th centuries were home-schooled, although it was not unusual for prosperous farmers
to hire teachers to come to their districts and set up temporary schools (Guttormsson, 2008).

In 1880, laws concerning the education of children in writing and mathematics were published for the first time. They stipulated that parents were responsible for the education of their children and should provide instruction in reading, writing and arithmetic (Stefánsson & Karlsdóttir, 2007). However, priests were responsible for visiting every home at least once a year to evaluate progress. Higher education was valued but was only possible for sons from affluent families or for gifted young men who had the luck to be supported for further education. Icelandic lawyers, priests and other public servants were mostly educated in Copenhagen, as Iceland had been under Danish control since the 14th century. In 1907, the first law on compulsory schooling was accepted by the Icelandic parliament. It stipulated that every district should set up a school for local children between the ages of 10–14 for at least six months of schooling per year. The range of obligatory subjects included geography, history and natural sciences (Stefánsson & Karlsdóttir, 2007). The first elementary school was established in 1852, but home-schooling continued to be common during the first decades of the 20th century. However, compulsory schooling was gradually extended. In 1946, a new Education Act marked the beginning of the current system, with compulsory education extended to include all children aged 7–14 years. Later, the reform of the Compulsory School Act in 1976 extended compulsory schooling to include all children aged 6–16 years. Nationally coordinated tests on core subjects was introduced to grades 4, 7, and the final grade, 10. These tests were to be used by pupils, parents, and teachers to evaluate a student's progress (Stefánson & Karlsdóttir, 2007).

Today, the Icelandic law on compulsory schooling is extensive and addresses matters such as administration, organisation of the school, cooperation with parents, rights of students with special needs, evaluation, and quality control. The aim of the compulsory school is “to encourage pupils” general development and prepare them for active participation in a democratic society” (Compulsory School Act, no. 91/2008). This is meant to be done in cooperation with the households. Furthermore, the schools are supposed to provide the pupils

with the opportunity to develop and use their creativity and to acquire knowledge and skills in their strive towards education and development. School activities shall lay the foundations for pupils’ autonomy, initiative and independent thinking and train their cooperation skills. (Compulsory School Act, no. 91/2008)
Students are to be given equal opportunities for schooling without regard to sex, economic status, religion, handicaps, or cultural background. When the law was revised in 2008, it was added that students should have a representative in the School Council, which participates in policy making for the school. Furthermore, it says that pupils “have the right to express their opinion regarding their study environment, the organisation of studies and school activities, and other decisions that affect them. Their opinion shall be taken into account whenever possible” (Compulsory School Act, no. 91/2008, article 13).

1.3.2 History of day-care

The origin of pre-schools in Iceland traces back to day-care centres, which were established in Reykjavík in the first quarter of the 20th century. At that time, Reykjavík was changing from a village into a small city, and worries aroused over young children being left to play unsupervised in an unhealthy city environment. Thus, playgrounds were created, and the first day-care centre was established in 1924 (Jónasson, 2006). More centres were established by a voluntary organisation called Sumargjöf and by other organisations; and in 1940, five day-care centres operated in Iceland (Broddadóttir, Eydal, Hrafnsdóttir & Sigurðardóttir, 1997). A law on day-care was proposed in the Icelandic parliament in 1946 but not accepted. It was introduced again in 1960 but was again not accepted (Eydal, 2005). The arguments made for the need for public day-care had shifted. While the first proposal emphasized child welfare, the latter one (1960) emphasized the “labour market rationales and the need for women to enter the labour market” (Eydal, 2005, p. 178).

The first act on public day-care was not passed until 1973 and the administration of day-care placed under the Ministry of Education. The Day-Care Act focused on the economic and practical issues pertaining to the operation of the day-care centres. However, the first article addressed the purpose of such centres, which was to provide children with the opportunity to “be cared for by pedagogues in an environment that enhances their personal and social development (Lög um hlutdeild ríkisins í byggingu og rekstri dagvistunarehimila, nr. 29/1973, my translation). The law addressed (a) day-care nurseries (i. dagheimilí) established for children aged 3 months through six years, (b) school-day-care homes for school-aged children and (c) play-schools (i. leikskóli) for children between the ages of two and six years. The day-care nurseries offered children of single parents, or from deprived social settings, up to nine hours a day of care, while the play-schools provided part-time care either before or after lunch.

Those two different forms of day-care institutions for younger children—day-care nurseries and play-schools—operated until 1991, when
day-care nurseries were changed by law to play-schools (pre-school). The focus was moving from care to learning (Jónasson, 2006). Today, the pedagogical value of the pre-school for children from birth to five years is acknowledged. The pre-schools became by law the first part of the overall educational system in 1994 even though they are not obligatory for children (Lög um leikskóla, nr. 78/1994).

Thus, there was a consensus on the need for public day-care, but the rationale remained twofold: (a) the pedagogical value of those institutions and (b) the economic and social value of enabling mothers to join the labour market (Jónasson, 2006). When explaining the necessity of the law, the Minister of Education stressed the pedagogical value of day-care institutions (Eydal, 2005). He said that the homes no longer provided the children with the best environment for development. Moreover, the minister claimed that policies on the equal rights of men and women could not be realized if public day-care wasn’t provided (Eydal, 2005). Jónasson (2006) has maintained that the professionals emphasized the importance of such institutions for the development of the child while the rationale emphasized by parents and politicians was the increasing need for day-care. However, Jónasson (2006) maintains that the systematic development of the Icelandic day-care centres into pre-schools shows a considerable amount of continuity and stability. The practice and ideology of Icelandic pre-schools has been influenced by both European and North American early education literature (Einarsdóttir, 2006b). Increasing emphasis is placed on preparing children for schooling and on academic progress, thus diminishing the time children in pre-schools spend in free play. Today, Icelandic pre-school teachers debate how to “combine care, education and teaching” within the pre-schools (Einarsdóttir, 2006b, p. 176). The debate on the purposes of pre-school, is, thus ongoing, as pre-school teachers continue to develop their professional identity within the educational system.

1.3.3 History of after-school centres

The first after-school centre in Reykjavík was founded in 1971 by a charity organisation called Sumargjöf, which by that time had already established playgrounds for young children and several day-care institutions for pre-schoolers by agreement with the municipality (Jónasson, 2006). The Union of Single Parents in Reykjavík fought for day-care for school-aged children, which resulted in the establishment of School Day-Care Homes (i. skóladagheimili) (Eggertsdóttir, Hafstað & Kristjánsdóttir, 1982). During this first period, young school children were in school for only two to three hours a day, and every school had two or three groups of children attending in the course of the day. Hence, after-school care was available
all times of the day for different groups of children depending on, for
example, whether they were in school before or after lunch. These first
after-school centres belonged to the social welfare department in
Reykjavik and were defined as a part of the overall day-care system for
children. As such, they fell under the aforementioned Day-Care Act that
had been issued in 1973, which stipulated that pre-school teachers should
be in charge of the service (Lög um hlutdeild ríkisins í byggingu og rekstri
dagvistunarheimila, nr. 29/1973). The Ministry of Education was
responsible for the administration of day-care institutions.

Two major reforms have been made in the operation of the after-
school centres since their establishment. The first was implemented in
1993, when city authorities in Reykjavik decided that every elementary
school should offer extended services for children in grades 1–4. This
meant that such care was now available for all parents in need of day-care
for their school-aged children. However, this also meant a change of
professional direction, as pre-school teachers were no longer to be
providing the services. Instead, teachers were offered extra hours to
oversee activities in the after-school hours. The second major reform
occurred in 2002, when the responsibility for the management of the
after-school centres was moved from the Education Council to the Sport
and Recreation Council. By that time, all the elementary schools in
Reykjavik were able to offer classes for first to fourth graders from approx.
8:00 am to 2:00 pm, instead of the previous twofold system of morning
and after-noon classes. Again, the professional responsibility changed,
as teachers were no longer responsible for the services. A detailed analysis of
the historical changes in the development of the after-school centres may
be found in Chapter 5.

1.3.4 Views towards children

One way to examine the changing lives of children is to look at how views
towards children and work have changed. In Iceland, it has been
considered important to nurture children’s independence, and children
have enjoyed considerable freedom. Today, Icelandic children are often
allowed to play outside without adult supervision, and many school-aged
children take care of themselves for several hours a day (Einarsdóttir,
2006b; Eydal, Rafnsdóttir & Einarsdóttir, 2009). The emphasis on freedom
and independence follows an emphasis on participation and work. In the
old Icelandic peasant society, children from a young age had chores and
participated in daily work (Eydal, Rafnsdóttir & Einarsdóttir, 2009).
Traditionally, hard work has been valued, and unemployment was
considered a sin (Eydal & Satka, 2004). Girls were supposed to learn
feminine virtues and take part in household chores, such as cooking,
sewing, cleaning and caring for younger siblings. Boys, however, were expected to follow in their fathers' footsteps and become able farmers and fishermen. Following World War II, there was rapid industrialization and urbanization in Iceland. Reykjavik had become the centre for industry and fisheries in Iceland. At that time, it was common for people to have many children, and soon worries developed that not all children were being cared for properly but were being left to wander the streets while their parents worked. Teenagers were sent to the farms to work during the summer time, and idleness was considered a “real threat to the well-being of children” (Eydal, Rafnsdóttir & Einarsdóttir, 2009, p. 190). It was common for Icelandic children as young as eight years old to work on farms and in fish-factories (Eydal, et al., 2009). The general attitude regarding child labour during most of the 20th century was that work was considered pedagogically valuable. The Compulsory School Act from 1995 gave permission for schools to dismiss temporarily all students if circumstances in the labour market required (Lög um grunnskóla nr. 66/1995). However, that article is no longer found in the Icelandic compulsory school law. Nevertheless, it is still common that Icelandic children start working at 13 years of age, mostly in summer jobs; but some children have work alongside school, including delivering newspapers and babysitting (Eydal, et al., 2009).

The emphasis on children as capable contributors to society who can take care of themselves has slowly been changing in Iceland. This has been particularly evident in Reykjavik, where children used to enjoy considerable freedom. The public discourse on ‘latch-key children’ from the last decade of the 20th century emphasized that leaving children to care for themselves might be something to worry about: children might not be safe, they could harm themselves when alone, traffic can be dangerous, etc. (Pálmadóttir & Rútsdóttir, 1992). Icelandic children no longer participate in production in the society as before. More and more, children are looked upon as burdens, something that society has to provide for, rather than as active participants in the society (James & Prout, 1990). Furthermore, the lives of children are organised by adults within schools, day-care institutions, and the home.

1.4 Why this study?

In the spring of 2001 two events marked my life: I graduated with a master's degree in Education from the University of Iceland, and I had my fifth child. The spring semester of 2002 I spent in Copenhagen with my family, as my husband was on sabbatical from his work at the University of Iceland. We rented a small house, and our children attended Danish schools and pre-schools. I soon realized that most of their schoolmates
also attended “fritidshjem” or leisure-time centres. I did not have much knowledge of such services, although my two eldest girls had attended two after-school centres in Reykjavík. In 1992-93, when I was an undergraduate student at the University of Iceland, my eldest daughter attended a private after-school centre, operated by our church. I remember feeling really secure to have that haven for her in the after-school hours. Later, my second eldest attended an after-school centre in her school in the borough of Grafarvogur. As we lived close by, she usually walked home by herself. However, I occasionally collected her and I remember admiring the seemingly cozy and relaxed atmosphere provided by the personnel in the two temporary buildings on the school site, which housed the after-school centre. One spring day in 2002 I was surfing the web in an Internet café in Copenhagen, looking at news from home, when an advertisement for a leader in an after-school centre caught my attention. It was located at the school which my girls attended in Reykjavík. I applied, and to make a long story short, I was hired after a telephone interview. This was a turning point in my life and led to my interest in the organisation of after-school centres. I worked as a leader in this after-school centre from 2002 to 2004. At that time, the Educational Council in Reykjavík was still responsible for the service in this area of Reykjavík, but in 2004 the Sport and Recreation Council (SRC) took over. I was hired as a department leader in my local recreational centre and took part in re-organising the services through 2004–2007. At that time, nine after-school centres were operating in my neighbourhood, and my job was to hire and offer professional support to the leaders of each of these centres. I organised weekly meetings with the leaders of the nine centres. I also attended a variety of meetings with school leaders, parents, and personnel, representing the interests of the after-school services. I also took part in the policy development at SRC during those years. This was a period of change, optimism, and new possibilities, with increased collaboration, investment in leadership, and professional development of the service. But it was also a time of uncertainty and tension. The structural framework of the service was still unclear, and it was difficult to hire qualified recreation personnel. Furthermore, we had to negotiate with the school leaders on the quantity and quality of the facilities available, and in some cases that proved to be a difficult task. However, the aims of the service were gradually being clarified, as were the methods and means to achieve those aims.

My professional experience as leader and department leader of after-school centres taught me two things. First, I learned in my work that the after-school service was highly valued by most children and their parents. The after-school centre could offer children a very positive and stimulating
experience. The emphasis on free play, friendship and children’s choice was very different from the school environment, where the emphasis was on academic progress, organised activities, and adult control. Second, in my work as leader in an after-school centre I soon became aware of the lack of investment and interest in the professional development of after-school centres in general. Not many politicians in Reykjavik or government officials were genuinely interested in what was going on in the after-school services. There was no control system to support and oversee the quality of the services. There was in this way a contradiction, a conflict that I wanted to explore further: on the one hand, the value of the service for children and their families, and on the other hand, the lack of resources and public investment in the sector.

1.5 The stakeholders

This thesis examines the after-school centre from the point of view of four groups of stakeholders: the children, the personnel, the parents, and the system. "The system" stands for society at large, the general community, which invests in, and benefits from, the operation of the after-school centres. These four groups represent those who invest in the service in some way and contribute to the practice and the formation of the organisational identity of the service. This section introduces briefly the four main stakeholders in the operation of after-school centres.

1.5.1 Children

Growing numbers of children are placed in after-school programs for a considerable amount of time each week. Research with children has indicated that the after-school centre is becoming an important place for children to meet other children, make friends and have the opportunity for free play (Højholt, 2001; Klerfelt & Haglund, 2011). Children value the service for a number of reasons, not least because the after-school centre is different from both home and school and offers activities to which they would otherwise not have access (Smith & Barker, 2002). Children in Western societies are living highly institutionalised lives. During the first six to eight years of their lives they are likely to communicate with large numbers of personnel, first in pre-schools and then in schools and after-school centres (Moss & Petrie, 2002). For those reasons, children are probably the most important stakeholders in the further development of the services provided in after-school hours. Therefore, it is important to investigate this setting from the children’s point of view and listen to their voices with respect to the services provided.
1.5.2 Personnel

The qualifications required for personnel in after-school services differ from country to country. In Iceland no specific requirements are mandated by the government other than having some experience with children and no criminal record (Youth Act, no. 70/2007). A 2006 report about after-school programs in the European Union countries showed that in general there is little investment in such services (EFILWC, 2006). Personnel are often underpaid and have poor working conditions. The majority of the personnel in the after-school centres in Reykjavík have not completed tertiary education, although a high percentage of them are university students. Some, for example, are currently undertaking a degree in social studies, pedagogy or teaching (Pálsdóttir, 2008). The remuneration is not high and the jobs are mostly part-time, which contributes to the difficulties of attracting professionals, such as teachers or pedagogues into the workforce. Furthermore, in Iceland a profession of recreation pedagogues, as can be found for example in Denmark (d. fritidspedagog) and Sweden (s. fritidslærer), has not developed. A Recreation Studies Program has only been available since 2001 at the University of Iceland, offered by the School of Education. Recreation Studies is not a vocational program. However, the theories behind the program are strongly rooted in the work undertaken in recreational centres for children and young people. The program is not directed towards the requirements of after-school centres in particular, and the program does not provide formal professional credentials of any kind. As a professional sector, recreational pedagogy is, thus, still in its early beginnings. It will rely on both external conditions, such as public investment and recognition, and internal conditions, such as increased professional knowledge and experience, in order to develop and sustain itself. For those reasons among others, the recreation personnel play an important part and are vital stakeholders in the organisation of the after-school centres.

1.5.3 Parents

Parents are responsible for the well-being and education of their children. According to Icelandic law, parents are the primary caregivers and should always have the best interests of their children in mind (Barnalög, nr. 76/2003). Parents trust day-care institutions to care for their children during working hours. In Iceland, the majority of parents, both fathers and mothers, have full-time work (Eydal, 2008). This would be difficult without the availability of public day-care services, including services for the school-aged sector. Public discussion in Iceland shows that parents in rural areas also expect the government to provide such services. Without the provision of day-care, parents may face difficulties in managing full-time work and providing for their families. Research has shown that day-care is
especially important for mothers, who seem to take more responsibility for child-care arrangements than fathers (Forsberg, 2009). Furthermore, it is important for parents that their children are cared for in the widest sense, so that not only their physical safety is ensured but their emotional well-being as well (Garey, 2002). However, little is known about the expectations that parents have towards after-school services or how these services affect the lives of their children or their own.

1.5.4 The system

The provision of after-school service is not only important for families but also for the society at large. Authorities arrange for after-school service to support economic growth and to support the welfare system (EFILWC, 2006). Although the provision of after-school services is not obligatory by Icelandic law, most municipalities offer such services (Pálsdóttir & Ágústsdóttir, 2011). The organisational framework may vary, such as whether the service is connected to the school, or whether it is operated by the recreational sector or other organisations in the community. Nevertheless, in most cases the municipality provides the majority of funding and is responsible for its application and economical use. Moreover, the organisational framework needs to be accepted by the local authorities, although a formal process of accreditation for after-school programs does not exist in Iceland. Thus, I consider the system to be a stakeholder in the operation of after-school centres. Included in the system are authorities at both regional and national governmental level.

1.6 Significance of the study

This study provides insight into the organisation of after-school centres for school-aged children, which is an under-researched subject. The purpose of the study is to offer a holistic account of the status of after-school centres in the educational system in Reykjavík, thus providing valuable information that may guide policy makers and personnel in further developing these centres. The findings will contribute to an understanding of the roles and responsibilities of professional recreation personnel as seen from the perspectives of children, their parents, municipalities and policy makers. The issues raised may help others to investigate further the status of the after-school centres in Iceland. Also, the findings may be beneficial for public policy and professional development of after-school programs, not only in Icelandic communities but in other countries as well. The thesis refers to research on after-school services from Australia, United Kingdom, United States of America as well as the Nordic countries.
1.7 The theoretical framework of the study

Social reality is complex and sometimes contradictory. Those who have first-hand experiences with daily life within after-school centres know the fluctuating schedules, the conflicts that may arise from time to time, and the chaotic atmosphere generated when groups of children gather or move from one place to the next. The after-school centre is also positioned as an intermediate between school and home, thus placing children in a setting with unclear boundaries or goals. The lack of research about the institutional framework and practices within the centres calls for a variety of theoretical perspectives. To understand social reality one needs to use different kinds of tools and concepts at hand (Kincheloe & Berry, 2004). Thus, the theoretical framework of this study was drawn from two main sources, and influenced by the literature on organisational identity.

The concept of organisational identity applied in the current thesis is a concept of identity as socially constructed bricolage. The process of identity construction takes place through practice as lived and experienced. To investigate the organisational identity of after-school centres thus involves the study of perspectives of various groups of stakeholders, as well as the study of the institutional and professional framework of the service.

Firstly, Wenger’s theory of Communities of Practice (CoP) was applied to examine how individuals understand and take part in constructing the practices within after-school centres. Organisational theory has shown that the identity of organisations is unfolded in the variety of perspectives portrayed by different stakeholders. Wenger is the author of Communities of Practice: Learning, meaning and identity (1998) in which he explains his theory of CoPs. He co-authored the book Situated Learning with Jean Lave in 1991, which marked the beginning of his study of communities of practice as sites of social learning. His theory provides analytical tools to demonstrate the elements that shape the experiences of different participants and the ability they have to negotiate and share meanings, both within the practice itself and within the wider community of practices. To explore the organisational identity of after-school centres, the concepts of care, learning and leisure are defined and discussed.

The latter theoretical base reflects the influence of the children in structuring the study. This research was inspired by the sociology of childhood studies in the sense that children are here looked upon as active participants in constructing the organisational identity of the after-school centre. As a researcher, I am influenced by the paradigm of childhood studies, or the sociology of childhood, as developed in the past 15–20 years (see, for example, Corsaro, 2005; James & James, 2004; James &
The sociology of childhood examines the status of children as social actors and the ways in which the increased institutionalisation of childhood has affected their lives. Research shows that children in primary schools seldom get a chance to make decisions within the school about what they want to do (Einarsdóttir, 2010; Thomsen & Gunther, 2009). The hierarchy of the school is very clear, placing children in an institutional setting over which they have little or no control (Büchner & Fuhs, 2001). The present study considers whether this is a general phenomenon that is tied to the institutional rigidity of the compulsory school or a general feature of institutions for children, including after-school centres.

Thomsen and Gunther (2009) describe three related arguments for increased student participation within schools: (a) Children have the right to have a say in every matter that concerns them, as stated in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989), thus schools as other institutions have legal responsibility to invite children to participate in research; (b) through participation in a democratic institution, children learn to be active and develop important skills, such as team work, negotiation and decision making; (c) children know best what needs to change in their schools. They have knowledge and insight that teachers and parents lack, concerning information about peer relationships, student culture and of course, about their own experiences and feelings. Furthermore, it is educational, not only for the children, but also for the adults to learn about children’s lives.

1.8 Aim of the research

Although children may spend a large amount of time in after-school centres, these centres have received remarkably little attention from both the political and academic communities in Iceland and have an unclear status in the welfare system. Six- to nine-year old school-children may spend many hours a week in an after-school centre, in some cases as many as they spend at school, if they attend such a centre every weekday and on school holidays. After-school service is an under-researched area. Petrie (1991) states that the invisibility of school-age childcare has something to do with the fact that, traditionally, child care belonged to the private sphere of the family, and was as such in no need of public scrutiny or formal contract. Today, however, after-school service is receiving more attention, as policy developers acknowledge the need for shared standards and goals for these services (EFILWC 2006, 2007). Research on after-school services is needed to help inform policy making about the sector.

Public schooling and day-care have significant effects on the lives and experiences of children who spend many of their waking hours in
institutions (Moss & Petrie, 2002). Research from Sweden and Denmark indicates that participation in an after-school centre can enhance children’s social skills and contribute to their well-being (Højholt, 2001; Johanson & Ljusberg, 2004). The increased institutionalisation of school-aged children calls for a study of the conditions and the nature of their participation. Together, schools and after-school centres frame children’s institutional lives in their first years in school. The legal framework for the first years in school is clear, and its function is to educate and enlighten children (Compulsory School Act, no. 91/2008). However, no specific legislation mandates the role of after-school centres, and, therefore, this service is organised in various ways (Pálsdóttir & Ágústsdóttir, 2011). The after-school centres have a relatively short history compared to schools, and it is left unclear whether they are a part of the educational system or not, i.e. what their formal role or aims are, under what public service purview they fall and what professional demands should be made to their personnel. Consequently, it is of interest to probe further into their status and purpose in society.

The research is designed to study the role and organisational identity of after-school centres in Reykjavík from the perspectives of different principal stakeholders: (a) the system or the society at large, (b) different professionals working with children in after-school centres and in school, that is recreation personnel and teachers, and (c) the children themselves and their parents. My aim is to examine holistically the pedagogy and practice of after-school centres and their developing institutional status in—or related to—the educational system by listening to the voices of different stakeholders. The study of the after-school centres in Iceland is particularly interesting with regard to the development of recreational pedagogy which has gained substantial prominence in recent years and has made inroads into the after-school programmes. Nevertheless, in Iceland, few personnel hold a degree in recreational pedagogy or an equivalent degree in education, and personnel turnover is high. Consequently, it is questionable whether it is possible to talk about a professional body of recreation pedagogues in after-school centres.

1.9 Structure of the thesis

In this chapter, I have presented the main aims of this thesis and explained how and why the need for after-school care has grown in Iceland. The increased institutionalisation of children in Iceland has been discussed, and the theoretical framework of study has been introduced briefly. The main stakeholders were introduced and the significance of the study has been made explicit. Chapter 2 reviews the literature on after-school programs and research in the area. It introduces various policies
concerning after-school programs and compares the legal frameworks of such services in four Nordic countries: Denmark, Sweden, Norway and Iceland. The chapter also addresses current literature on childhood studies, with emphasis on how children experience the institutional setting of school and after-school centres. Chapter 3 outlines the theoretical framework of the study. Chapter 4 discusses the research design and the research methods used in the study. It describes the generation of data, participants, and ethical considerations. Chapters 5, 6, and 7 present the main findings of the study. Chapter 8 summarizes and discusses these findings. Chapter 9 is a concluding chapter, which presents the implications of the study for practice, policy, and future research.
2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Most industrialized countries are setting up various forms of after-school programs. The institutional underpinnings and professional development of such services vary significantly between countries, and that makes it difficult to compare quality and outcomes (EFILWC, 2006). Generally there is a lack of research in this area, but it is necessary to introduce here the research currently available from different parts of the world. Research from Europe, Australia, United Kingdom (UK) and United States of America (USA) is included in the literature review presented in this chapter. It is important to keep in mind that what is being researched under the heading of ‘after-school service’ can indeed vary greatly. The services can be in the form of occasional service provided by unqualified personnel or by volunteers, in ill-suited venues, or they can be provided by professionals in specially designed premises.

This chapter discusses the status of knowledge reflected in the current literature on this subject. It examines research about how different stakeholders define the purposes and organisation of after-school centres. Firstly, the chapter discusses the increasing need for day-care in Western societies. Secondly, the various organisational forms of after-school programs are outlined. Thirdly, the Nordic countries are taken as examplars of different systems and their legislative frameworks compared. Fourthly, the chapter sheds light on research about the views of after-school program personnel towards their roles and responsibilities, their working conditions and their cooperation with the schools. Finally, the chapter introduces research about the views of children towards participation in after-school services and parental points of view.

2.1 Increasing need for day-care

After-school services are found in most industrialized societies for children of working parents, but it still remains in the developmental stages in most European countries (EFILWC, 2006). At the end of the 20th century, many cities in Europe were seeing a rise in ‘latch-key’ children, which is a term used for children that go home after school and have to take care of themselves for up to several hours per day (Seligson, 1991). The implications of children’s self-care depend on many factors, such as a child’s personality and resilience, the safety of the neighbourhood, and the conditions at home (Bell, 1999). Although there is some debate about the negative effects of children’s self-care, it is clear that both parents and
the ‘system’ have judged it to be important to provide infrastructure to care for children outside of school hours, while the parents are at work.

The establishment of day-care services for young children has proven crucial in making it possible for women to enter the labour market (Eydal, 2005). The arrangements for after-school services are closely linked to employment of mothers. Research has shown that mothers assume responsibility for child care more often than fathers, and adjust their careers according to the needs of their children (Eydal, 2008; Forsbjerg, 2009). Statistics show that in countries where there is equal access to day-care, more women are assuming full-time roles in the labour market and have their own careers (Eydal, 2008). Hence, for many, it is a matter of equality between men and women to ensure quality day-care for young school-children.

In the final decade of the 20th century, The Women's Studies International Forum published a special issue on school-aged child care (Petrie, Meijvogel & Enders-Dragässer, 1991) which provided an overview of various policies and programs that were in place in Northern Europe at that time. This is one of the very few sources that describes the international development of after-school programs and provides insight into these under-researched services. At that time, organised after-school service was found in most European countries, although the volume of care differed according to how the school day was organised (Moss, 1991). In fact, it is difficult to separate after-school service from the issue of schooling, because after-school service is constructed around the traditional school day, which can be organised in different ways (Moss, 1991). Longer hours spent in school mean fewer hours in after-school services.

According to Eurydice (2009) 73 percent of elementary schools in the 27 European Union countries offer some kind of after-school service. About 75 percent of Swedish children six to nine years of age attend leisure-time centres (Haglund & Anderson, 2009). Approx. 61 percent of Norwegian children six to nine years of age attend after-school centres (Foss, 2011). Organised after-school programs have also increased significantly outside of the EU. Although access to out-of-school programs in the USA is not as widespread as in the Nordic countries, a recent survey showed that, in 2005, 40 percent of children in kindergarten through grade 8 in USA were in at least one weekly nonparental after-school service arrangement (James-Burdumy, Dynarski & Deke, 2007).

2.2 Different practices—different aims

The aims of after-school services can be very diverse. Garey (2002) suggested that after-school programs are aimed at meeting a variety of overlapping but distinct goals. These include enabling parents to be employed, supervising children to increase their safety (and possibly
prevent juvenile delinquence), and supplementing the children’s school opportunities with the same or alternative learning experiences. This section outlines the two main frameworks that emerge when reviewing the international scene of the organisation of after-school care: after-school centres as day-care and after-school centres as part of schooling. Finally, the section discusses what is known about the activities in the after-school centres.

2.2.1 After-school centres as day-care

Historically, day-care for school-age children began outside the school, in playgrounds or private homes and was organised by various non-profit organisations before moving into the territory of the school itself (Cartmel, 2007; Pálsdóttir, 2009). Such out-of-school services are provided by (a) institutions that also offer day-care for younger children, such as pre-schools; (b) various public or private organisations, such as scouts, churches or different youth organisations, and (c) day-care providers operating in their own homes. Services for young children develop as mothers’ participation in the work force increases. However, day-care for school-aged children is organised differently than day-care for younger children; it serves older children, and the amount of time spent in after-school care varies depending on the timing of the school day.

Still, some countries rely on out-of-school arrangements to provide day-care for school-aged children, for example Finland, which has a tradition of out-of-school programs, although attendance at school-based centres is increasing there (Strandell, 2008). In Finland, it is not unusual that various public and private organisations offer after-school services. However, the scope and nature of such programs varies significantly. Petrie (1996) distinguishes between ‘day-care’ and ‘open door’ services. Day-care services are based on agreements between the personnel and parents, who decide the length of time a child spends at the service, while an open door service is a place where children can come and go, based on agreements between the children and the staff. Open door services operate both in the UK and the Nordic countries. Increasingly, care for children is provided in a centre-based setting rather than at home or in family-based care (Statham & Mooney, 2009).

The establishment of day-care for school-aged children in the Nordic countries is based on practical considerations as well as an ideological point of view linked to day-care for younger children and the development of pre-schools. The rationale for the establishment of services is similar, and in countries that have professional pedagogues working both in pre-school and after-school centers, such as Denmark and Sweden, the background of the professionals is similar.
2.2.2 After-school centres as part of schooling

In Europe, after-school services are operated by many schools, generally on school sites (Eurydice, 2009), and this affects the daily practice. Even within the Nordic countries which have emphasized care and social pedagogy, there now seems to be an increasing focus on learning activities within the after-school centre and how the after-school centre can promote the overall aims of the school (Haglund & Anderson, 2009). In many countries the hours spent in school have been increasing rapidly (Eurydice, 2011), thus diminishing the need for organising separate institutions outside of the schools. Also, the idea of the “extended school” (i.e., heildstæður skóli) has gained considerable recognition and has been placed on the agenda in some countries. There are several arguments for whole-day schooling, including the idea that such a plan would (a) offer a holistic service to children and parents, (b) provide a better learning environment with a more diverse range of learning activities, and (c) enable a more flexible curriculum for the teachers. The development of the whole-day school shows how the concept of school develops and changes as the society changes. The school has responded to the increasing need for day-care for school-aged children.

The policy concerning extended school in UK covers various types of after-school service. Children six to nine years of age in the UK are in school from approx. 9:00 am to 3:00 pm. The UK government issued the Extended Schools Agenda in 2005 with the aim that, by 2010, every elementary school in the UK would provide access to “year-round extended services including learning activities, sports, and the arts” (Mortlock, 2007, p. 50). The Extended Schools Agenda recognized that schools cannot alone solve problems of social exclusion and that they would need to work hand in hand with social and health services to provide support to children and their families (Wilkin, White & Kinder, 2003). In 2006, 91 percent of all primary schools in UK offered some kind of after-school service. 58 percent of the schools offered family learning courses, 81 percent of the schools allowed people outside of the school to use at least one of their facilities (including sporting facilities and library), and 18 percent of the schools offered some kind of health or therapeutic services (Gilby, Mackey, Mason, Ullman & Clemens, 2006). Although it is beyond the scope of this thesis to analyse the development of the extended school, it relates to the question of the purpose of after-school services, and how it connects with schooling. Some countries prioritise the provision of holistic services to children and families by the schools, including arrangements for after-school service.
2.2.3 Activities in after-school centres

The activities in after-school programs vary greatly and can range from very structured programs emphasizing learning opportunities (either to enhance academic skills or the social development of the children) to comparatively unstructured services providing care for children and opportunities for them to socialize and play together (EFILWC, 2006). It needs to be clear that this is not a distinction between good services and poor services: both overly-structured and too-loosely structured programs may have negative impacts on children and hinder their development. There seem to be many and complex factors that make for a quality service (EFILWC, 2006).

In most countries, more and more children are attending the services and the adult-child ratio has decreased. In the case of Denmark, where the provision of after-school services is lead by a professional workforce, there has been a movement away from highly structured activities and towards children’s free play (Højholt, 2001; Raymond & Schoug Larsen, 2002). At the same time, there has been increasing emphasis in most Nordic countries upon defining after-school centres as a part of the school-system, supporting the overall goals of the school. The content of the programs has also been changing, and now, for example, most after-school centres in Denmark and Sweden offer assistance with homework. This is in accordance with an increasing emphasis in government policy upon the idea that after-school centres should support the overall goals of the schools, including the academic skills of children.

The typical Danish after-school centre offers each day a variety of workshops and play-areas from which the children can choose. These after-school centres generally have their own dedicated premises, although located at school sites. Those premises are designed to suit the purposes of the children’s activities and may consist, for example, of a reception area and canteen, a large area for play and gym activities, and smaller areas with different play-equipment. For those centres in which investment is greater, there might even be a music room, a facility for arts and crafts, and a computer room.

In Denmark and Sweden, the pedagogues in both pre-school and after-school centres often arrange an activity referred to as “circle time” where the pedagogue sits down with a group of children in a circle to provide an opportunity for discussions, to exchange information, or to promote the social atmosphere in the group (see for example Haglund, 2004). Those “get-together” meetings are more often used with younger children in the after-school centres and less often with older children. The pedagogues in Højholt’s study (2001) found it important to arrange a special “fruit-time” where the
children would sit down in a circle with an adult for a few minutes every day with fruits being offered. The pedagogues felt that this would support the personal connections between children and pedagogues (assuming that the same pedagogue meets with the same group of children). Some of the children objected, however, and said that it disturbed their play to be forced to sit down in a specific room when they were engaged in activities elsewhere (Højholt, 2001).

In the UK, most clubs apparently offer a wide range of activities (for example painting, football, cooking, and off-site trips). The venues for these activities included schools (48 percent of all services according to Smith & Barker, 2002), community centres, nurseries, youth clubs, and church halls. There were also purpose-built premises, although these were relatively rare. According to Petrie et al. (2000) most clubs in UK offered a mixture of organised activities and free play, although some offered only organised activities. Child protection was a core value for many of the services as well as providing play opportunities for the children (see Petrie et al., 2000, pp. 59–60).

The above discussion about the different forms of after-school service and the range of activities provided in after-school centres highlights the fact that the purposes of after-school services vary. The first after-school programs were founded because children required care in the absence of their working parents. They were initially established outside the school system in playgrounds, homes and day-care services. The establishment of school-based after-school services has been growing. In many countries, schools are providing extended services for their students.

2.3 After-school service policies in the Nordic countries

The Nordic countries have developed substantial welfare policies to support the quality of lives of children and families. Support to families is considerable both through public day-care services and the development of various benefit schemes (Eydal, 2005). In the Nordic countries, after-school day-care is generally a service provided by municipalities with state support and regulation (Johansson & Torstenson-Ed, 2001). The following section addresses the similarities and differences in the arrangements for after-school services in Iceland, Denmark, Sweden, and Norway.

2.3.1 Social pedagogy

Within the field of caring for children and youth, a certain vision of pedagogy is shared in the Nordic countries. In order to probe further the operation of after-school centres it is necessary to understand the Nordic idea of pedagogy. The word pedagogy has different meanings in various
countries. In the Nordic countries it refers to education in its widest sense, rather than just the formal school curriculum and may include “childcare, youth work, family support, youth justice services, secure units, residential care and play work” (Petrie, 2005, p. 177). Interestingly, the term pedagogy traces its origin back to ancient Greece, where the slaves who looked after sons of wealthy Athenian families and escorted them to and from classes were called pedagogues (Moss & Petrie, 2002). This ancient use of the concept implies service or care provided outside the school. However, in English-speaking countries today, such as UK and USA, the word pedagogy refers to the formal systems of classroom and academic learning (Petrie, 2005).

The theory of pedagogy as it has developed through the centuries has been enriched from different fields, such as philosophy, psychology, sociology, and social history. In the practice of pedagogy, several key elements can be identified: the idea of the child as a whole, an emphasis on reciprocal interaction between individuals, creative activities, teamwork, and recognition of the rights of children (Moss & Petrie, 2002). These are essential components of the work of Nordic leisure-time centres, specifically in Denmark and Sweden. The ideals of social pedagogy are strongly linked to the concept of leisure, which will be discussed further in section 3.6.3. In fact, leisure is included in the name of these centres in Sweden and Denmark, as they are referred to as leisure-time centres.

The social pedagogy of the Nordic countries can be traced back to the theories of Friedrich Froebel (1782‒1852) who first introduced the idea of the ‘kindergarten’. Froebel emphasized the importance of children’s free play, as well as the importance of providing children with a stimulating environment and specifically designed play-equipment. His theories had a profound impact on how day-care services for young children and the pre-school developed. According to Froebel, the kindergarten was a place for the “self-instruction, self-education, and self-cultivation of mankind, as well as for the many sided and, therefore, for individual cultivation of the same through play, creative self-activity, and spontaneous self-instruction” (Froebel, 1897). What is interesting in those words is the emphasis on the self operating to instruct, educate, and cultivate itself. In this sense, development is something that is realized through the activities and inner motivation of the individual. Social pedagogy encourages the professional to take a ‘child-centred’ approach. The main objective of the pedagogue is to create a stimulating environment and thus encourage the natural development of children.

In many ways, the Nordic pedagogical discourse has built on the idea of the “competent” child (Kryger, 2004). Social pedagogy has incorporated a vision of children as agents in their own lives and development. Ideal
pedagogical plans take into account that children should be able to choose what to do when possible, and exercise autonomy up to a certain level. This rhetoric builds up on a constructivist understanding of learning: children learn by experience and construct their knowledge in an interactive relationship with the environment (Dewey, 1938; Rogoff, 2003; Vygotsky, 1978). Hence, the social pedagogy of the after-school centres places the child at the centre and the aim is to encourage the overall development of the child.

2.3.2 Comparison of legislation

Denmark and Sweden are, as mentioned above, the only countries that have developed a profession of recreation pedagogy, made up of professionals who are specially educated to work with children in after-school centres. In both these countries, after-school programs are already provided as a part of an extended school day. Table 2-1 compares the organisational framework of after-school centres in Iceland, Denmark, Norway and Sweden.

In Sweden and Norway communities are obliged to offer after-school care: in Sweden, for children from six to twelve-years old and, in Denmark, day-care for school-aged children should be offered if there is vacancy. Some municipalities like Copenhagen ensure every child in school a place in an after-school centre. In Denmark there are two kinds of after-school service: Leisure-time centres (d. fritidshjem) and school day-care (d. skolefritidsordning). Leisure-time centres were established in the early 20th century to create a safe environment for children of working parents in the city, to provide care, and to foster the well-being of children (Allerup, Kaspersen, Langager & Robenhagen, 2003). The legislation was changed in 1984 to allow schools to organise after-school centres. This meant that more children could be offered organised after-school activities in school day-care. The leisure-time centres have declined rapidly, but at the same time there has been a steady increase in school day-care centres. Each school leader has the overall educational and administrative responsibility for the form and content of the associated school day-care centre. Although, at the political level, the emphasis is on the children’s break from school in the after-school hours, the distinction between the school and the after-school centres has become less clear (Langager & Robenhagen, 2005).

The current organisation of after-school care is somewhat similar in Iceland and Norway. Research on Norwegian after-school centres shows that public investment in such centres is low and policy concerning their pedagogical aims is vague (Foss, 2011; Kvello & Wendelborg, 2003). In their research on the status of Norwegian after-school centres (n. skolefritidsordning), Kvello and Wendelborg (2003) found that in order to enhance the quality of the Norwegian after-school centres, five things
Table 2-1. Comparison of the Organisation of School-day-care in the Nordic Countries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Structure</th>
<th>Legislation</th>
<th>Aims</th>
<th>Qualifications</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Iceland</strong>*</td>
<td>Different forms of school-day-care and leisure-time centres</td>
<td>Laws on elementary school allow schools to offer day-care and to charge parents</td>
<td>Not stipulated in law</td>
<td>Not stipulated in law</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Denmark</strong></td>
<td>School-day-care (d. skolefritidsordning) and leisure-time centres (d. fritidshjem) Leisure-time clubs for 10–12 year olds</td>
<td>Laws on elementary school allow schools to offer day-care Leisure-time centres operate under the law on day-care institutions</td>
<td>Each school is to develop goals for school day-care centres. The leisure-time centres should encourage the child’s overall development and foster independence.</td>
<td>Regulation on school-day-care stipulates that employees have tertiary education in pedagogy or equivalent. (d. fritidspædagog)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sweden</strong>*</td>
<td>Leisure-time centres (s. fritidshem) and home day-care (s. familie daghem) Leisure-time clubs for 10–12 year olds</td>
<td>Until the age of 12, children have a right to day-care according to law</td>
<td>Collective curriculum for elementary school and leisure time centre. Leisure-time centres are to support the schools’ goals to educate and nurture children</td>
<td>The law stipulates that communities should seek to hire personnel with pedagogical education (s.fritidspedagog/fritidslærer)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Norway</strong>**</td>
<td>School-day-care (n. skolefritidsordning) and various recreation offers (n. musikk-og kulturskoletilbod) Leisure-time clubs for 10–12 year olds</td>
<td>Communities are obliged to organise school day-care for grades 1–4 and for children with special needs from grades 1–7.</td>
<td>The law on elementary schools contains a chapter on school day-care. Day-care centres should promote play and recreation and provide a safe environment for children</td>
<td>Not stipulated by law</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* (Compulsory School Act, no. 91/2008)
** (Day-Care Facilities Act no. 314, 2011; Folkeskoleloven nr. 998, 2010)
*** (Skollagen, 2010; Skolverket, 2011)
**** (Act of 17 July 1998 no. 61 relating to Primary and Secondary Education and Training)

need to be implemented: (a) increased cooperation between school and after-school centre, though in such a way that the school culture does not
override the more socio-pedagogic work in the after-school centre; (b) that at least 30 percent of the personnel should have a college education (n. fagutdanning); (c) that different types of professionals should be hired, including pre-school teachers, social pedagogues and special teachers, to increase interdisciplinary work; (d) that the leader of the after-school centre should be a part of the school’s administration team; and (e) that the personnel group should be improved in order to be able to meet the needs of all children, including children with special needs. Nine years later, Foss (2011) stated that there was still a lack of professional support for the recreation personnel and that the Norwegian after-school centres were not able to meet the needs of all children.

However, unlike Icelandic law, the Norwegian Education Act addresses after-school services:

The municipality shall provide day-care facilities for school children both before and after school hours for grades 1–4 and for children with special needs attending grades 1–7. Day-care facilities for school children shall be designed for play as well as cultural and leisure activities appropriate to the age, functional level and interests of the children. Day-care facilities shall provide the children with care and supervision. Disabled children shall be given good conditions for development. Spaces, both outdoors and indoors, shall be suitable for the purpose. (Act of 17 July 1998 no. 61 relating to Primary and Secondary Education and Training)

Furthermore, it is mandated that the after-school activity centres should have by-laws on issues such as the admission of children, area stipulated per child for play, and on the staffing and management of the services. It is of interest that no reference is made in the Norwegian law to the qualifications of the staff, that the purpose of the centres is defined very widely (provide care and supervision), and no bench-marks for quality control are made explicit.

In Sweden, the curriculum for compulsory school sets the framework for both school and after-school centres (Skolverket, 2011). Instead of serving as a complement to the home, after-school centres are now considered to complement the school (Calander, 2000; Haglund & Anderson, 2009). In that sense, after-school service in Sweden is considered an integral part of the school system and is intended to support the overall goals of the schools. In Sweden, as in Iceland, municipalities are responsible for the schools and provide different services.

The Nordic countries have emphasized the provision of after-school service for school-aged children. Such services are based on the social-pedagogical model which places the child at the centre of the philosophy
and the practices, the aim being to encourage the overall development of the child. Such pedagogy, furthermore, acknowledges that learning happens everywhere, even without intentionality, and most of the learning that takes place in the after-school centres is informal. There are some variations within the institutional frameworks for after-school centres within four Nordic countries: Iceland, Denmark, Sweden and Norway. However, increasingly, after-school services are considered part of the school-system.

### 2.4 Status and views of the recreation personnel

There are many challenges for those who seek to work in after-school services. There is a general lack of public investment in these services. Working conditions are often poor and opportunities to develop professional competence are few (EFILWC, 2006). Even where professional bodies of recreation pedagogues have developed, as in Denmark and Sweden, the professionals find it difficult to sustain their identity within (and outside) the school system. Research indicates that increased cooperation between schools and after-school programs can be positive (Højholt, 2004; Kvello & Wendelborg, 2003; Raymond & Schoug Larsen, 2002), but such cooperation is not without complications (Calander, 2000; Cartmel, 2007; Haglund, 2004).

Firstly, this section introduces the different qualifications that have been defined (or not) for recreation personnel in various countries. Secondly, the section examines the various roles that recreation personnel assume in their work. Thirdly, previous research on the professional identity of recreation personnel are discussed. Finally, the views of recreation personnel towards sharing premises with the school, and their collaboration with teachers, are examined.

#### 2.4.1 Qualifications of personnel

A report about after-school services in the European Union shows that the qualifications and training of personnel in after-school programs varies (EFILWC, 2006). There is a range of job titles used for after-school personnel, for example child minder, after-school service teacher, nanny, social worker, and leisure-time teacher, to name a few (EFILWC, 2006). Within the early education system today there are two professional systems operating. One is based on the pedagogue as professional, and the other focuses on the teacher as professional (Moss, 2006). There is some conjecture as to whether care for school-age children falls within the same category as early education and as to what type of professionals should operate the after-school services.
The term *pedagogue* was introduced when Nordic societies began to organise professional training for individuals who set out to work with children within day-care institutions. In Denmark, students who want to work in the pedagogic field can seek training at the Bachelor level in pedagogy and can earn qualifications to work with children in pre-schools, in after-school centres, or in special education. Further degrees can be obtained, such as Master and Ph.D. degrees. Traditionally, pedagogues in Denmark and Sweden could specialize in different work areas: (a) pre-school care, (b) recreation care and (c) special care. By the mid-20th century, the Danish recreation pedagogues had already formed an organisation and had started to publish their own professional journal, which attests to the independent status of the pedagogy of leisure-time. Such emphasis on recreation pedagogy is, however, missing from the Icelandic pedagogical discussion, and the qualities of after-school services for young school-children were by and large considered comparable with the care provided for younger children.

In Sweden, a major change in the education of pedagogues and teachers was introduced when pedagogue-education was merged with the teacher-education in 2001. Teacher-education now consists of three different fields from which students choose a specialization: pre-school teacher, school teacher, and recreation pedagogue (school-age child-care worker) (Moss, 2004). The majority of personnel in after-school programs in Denmark and Sweden are pedagogues, even though their number has been declining in the past few years. Norway and Iceland do not have the tradition of recreational pedagogy. The teaching of recreation studies only began at the University of Iceland in 2001. In Norway most of the personnel is unqualified as in Iceland (Kvello & Wendelborg, 2003; Pálsdóttir, 2008).

In the United Kingdom, individuals can get training in a work-related qualification program specially designed for caregivers working with children, usually at the high school level. The above-mentioned differences in the qualifications of the recreation personnel make comparisons between countries difficult. However, the daily assignments in the workplace seem to be very similar, and, therefore, it is interesting to look at how different groups of personnel talk about their work in the after-school centres.

### 2.4.2 Role of recreation personnel

Interestingly, even though the institutional frameworks of after-school services vary, there are many similarities in the roles that recreation personnel assume in their work with children in after-school centres. Only
in Denmark and Sweden do recreation pedagogues work in school classrooms as well as in the after-school centres.

Petrie (as cited in Petrie et al., 2000) researched the status of after-school programs and their personnel in the United Kingdom. She found that the personnel faced complex and important circumstances of work but were under-paid and that their conditions of employment left much to be desired. Staff members needed to perform a variety of tasks, including cooperating with the school and social services, maintaining contact with parents, writing brochures, purchasing and maintaining equipment, and preparing and planning daily activities. They also took part in face-to-face work with children such as “collecting children from school; preparing a snack, or a meal; implementing policies to keep the children safe and healthy; facilitating free play; teaching school subjects, sports, arts and crafts; keeping children amused; relating to children in groups and as individuals; carrying out equal opportunity policies” (Petrie, 1994, as cited in Petrie et al., 2000, p. 55).

When describing their work, the recreation pedagogues in a Danish study (Højholt, 2001) emphasized (a) the social development of the children, (b) creating a quality time together with the children (doing something together/talking together), (c) providing care, and (d) encouraging creativity and free play. The pedagogues experienced an important difference between their work and the work of the school teacher: According to them, the teacher is supposed to teach children to read and write—to enhance the academic skills of children. The recreation pedagogues, however, prioritised the social aspect of learning (d. det sociale) rather than the academic aspect (d. det boglige). The pedagogues identified more with the pre-school than with the primary school. Other studies have also found that personnel in after-school services emphasize the social aspect of children’s development and the provision of nurturing care rather than academic learning (Petrie et al., 2000; Smith & Barker, 2002).

A part of providing quality service is being able to meet the needs of every child. Increasing numbers of children and decreasing numbers of personnel make it more and more difficult for recreation pedagogues to meet the needs of all children in after-school centres (Højholt, 2001). It means that pedagogues get to spend less time per child and there are fewer opportunities for pedagogues to arrange activities for small groups of children. There was also less time to have conversations with the children, as there were constant disturbances. However, being able to talk with the children was very important, according to the pedagogues (Højholt, 2001). Pedagogues in another Danish study also complained that, as school hours have increased continually in the last few years, the time
the recreation pedagogues have for arranging activities with the children is increasingly limited (Raymond & Schoug Larsen, 2002).

It can be difficult to accommodate the different needs of all children, especially children with special needs and the older-age groups of children. Previous research shows that insufficient support is given to after-school centres for caring for children with special needs (EFILWC, 2007; Kvello & Wendelborg, 2003; Petrie et al., 2000). The recreation pedagogues sometimes feel that they should be more actively involved in cooperating with other professionals in supporting children with special needs (Højholt, 2001). Furthermore, some personnel find that since children are more easily bored and more difficult to entertain as they grow older (Petrie et al., 2000), the easiest course for the personnel is to plan activities that accommodate the younger children in which the older ones may join. Also, the personnel experienced more challenging behaviour amongst the older children and said that this could sometimes have negative influence on the younger ones (Petrie et al., 2000). Thus, resources need to be developed so that the recreation personnel can meet the needs of all children.

2.4.3 Role of recreation personnel in school

In most countries, formal cooperation between recreation personnel and teachers is scarce (EFILWC, 2006). However, in Denmark and Sweden such cooperation is quite formalized. In these countries recreation pedagogues administrate and work in the after-school centres, but they also work in schools in the mornings, making it possible to have full-time employment (see for example, Christensen & Hansen, 2011; Haglund, 2004).

In Denmark, the after-school programs are used to integrate children effectively into their new school environment when moving from kindergarten to elementary school. The after-school-centre personnel play an integral part in the transition between pre-school and school, as most children register at the after-school centre in August, before school begins (Brostrøm & Schytte, 2005). The pedagogues in the after-school centres introduce the children to the school premises during the first weeks, and, when school starts, they make sure that the children go to classes and return safely to the after-school area.

Since 1998 Swedish legislation has mandated that recreation pedagogues and teachers are expected to cooperate in schools to educate children (Skolverket, 1998). Changes have also been made in the education of recreation pedagogues so that the curriculum has much in common with teacher education. These changes have been made to emphasize the importance of social care in schools and children's play and
creativity (Haglund, 2004). Recent changes in educational policy in Sweden has further underpinned the overlapping roles of teachers and recreation personnel (Skollagen, 2010; Skolverket, 2011).

Research in Sweden indicates that school-directed practices tend to override the traditional goals of the recreation tradition (Calander, 2000; Haglund, 2004; Pramling Samuelsson, 2005) and that recreation pedagogues are struggling to reinvent their professional identity within the school (Ackesjö, 2011). There is a down side to the fluidity of the relationship between the pedagogue and his subject: in comparison to teachers, pedagogues sometimes appear to be unstructured, unprepared, and unclear about their goals. This tension arises when teachers and pedagogues work together in schools. Calander (2000) maintains that recreation pedagogues who work in collaboration with teachers in schools in Sweden soon become “the teacher’s assistant”. Calander followed two groups of work-teams consisting of teachers and recreation pedagogues in two Swedish elementary schools. He interviewed personnel, undertook observations, and recorded the meetings of the work teams. In both schools, the personnel divided time into categories of teaching time and free time (s. fritid, see p. 213), although in one of the schools the borderline became unclear between lessons, which the teacher organised in the classroom, and sharing spells, conducted in the classroom by the recreation pedagogues. Calander stressed that integrating schools and leisure-time centres “may lead to changes in the occupational identities of team members” (p. 208), and he asserted that the recreation pedagogues in his study were pressed to change occupational values so that they linked better with the school’s pedagogical role. His research seems to confirm that occupational groups with more resources and symbolic power in society tend to dominate groups that have fewer resources.

Another Swedish study (Haglund, 2004) arrived at similar conclusions. Haglund (2004) interviewed 15 recreation pedagogues and observed how they organised and conducted circle times with children in school. A circle time is a time when the recreation pedagogue and a group of children come together for discussions. When circle time was first mentioned in Swedish policy documents on after-school care, the overall aim of such meetings was to support the social development of children, enhance friendship, and produce fellowship in the group. Haglund wanted to understand what ideas guided recreation pedagogues when arranging circle time and how they accomplished them in practice. Haglund distinguished between social-directed practice and school-directed practice, the former focusing on the traditional recreation pedagogy of the after-school centres and the latter on the traditional school practice of developing knowledge and mastery of reading, writing, and arithmetic. According to Haglund, the purpose of circle times with children whithin the
region of the leisure-time centres was generally associated with the socially directed practice, and the aims of such meetings were to enhance the child’s self-confidence and social development. However, Haglund observed that when working with teachers in the classroom, the recreation pedagogues organised circle times in a more school-directed way. Instead of focusing on activities that serve the children’s self-confidence and social development, recreation personnel seem to be affected by the idea of what ‘one ought to do’ in school (Haglund, 2004, p. 233).

Thus, the role of recreation pedagogues in school is unclear (Calander, 2000; Haglund, 2004). In a recent Swedish study, children in both the schools and in the after-school centres were asked to draw pictures of the recreation pedagogues (Ackesjö, 2011). In 76 percent of the school pictures, the recreation pedagogue was not shown while the corresponding number for the after-school pictures was 26 percent. Ackesjö suggested several reasons for the ‘absent’ recreation pedagogue in the school-pictures (s. ej närvarande): (a) maybe the recreation pedagogues are not often present in the classroom, (b) the recreation pedagogue might not have a clear role in the school, according to the children, or (c) pictures were drawn during school-hours in the classroom, which may have influenced the perspectives of the children. In conclusion, recreation personnel can assume a variety of roles in school, and take part in the integration of first grade children, organisation of social activities and supporting the teacher in his work. However, research shows that the professional dialogue between teachers and recreation pedagogues is vague and unclear.

2.4.4 Sharing premises with schools

The majority of after-school centres operate on school premises, whether the school is responsible for the service or not. Previous research shows that the school culture generally sets the frame and affects both how premises are organised and how the after-school service may use the premises (Calander, 2000; Cartmel, 2007; Haglund, 2004; Smith & Barker, 2002). Moreover, the needs and interests of the school are promoted rather than those of the after-school centre.

Although in Australia, personnel in after-school centres do not generally undertake work in schools, the leaders of the centres have to negotiate with school leaders about use of facilities and other practical matters. Cartmel (2007) set out to examine what happens when after-school services share premises with school. To do that she undertook a critical ethnographic study on the communication and dialogue that occurred between the personnel of two after-school services and school principals in the associated schools. Her findings showed that after-school
programs were in danger of being marginalized due to a lack of validation and collective identity (Cartmel, 2007). The two after-school leaders had to fight for a place for the service on school site and had to rely on the school leaders’ good will. In Australia, as in Iceland, the workforce in after-school care usually lacks special qualifications, works part-time, and is underpaid, making it difficult to develop professionalism and a shared vision. Cartmel maintains that this makes it hard for the after-school personnel to argue for their cause and gain the respect of their collaborators.

In the UK, most after-school clubs operate on school sites, and this influences the socio-spatial environment of the after-school clubs in a number of ways (Smith & Barker, 2002). Premises can only be used for after-school clubs on the condition that such use (a) does not interfere with after school activities of teachers (who might be marking or planning) or of cleaning staff, (b) the children’s behaviour does not contravene the strictly hierarchical adult-child relationship present within the wider school setting, and (c) the space used for play is not required for other purposes, such as parents’ meetings, governors’ meetings or commercial use (Smith & Barker, 2002, p. 63). Smith and Barker give examples of how after-school personnel often consciously or unconsciously adhere to the traditional rules of the school environment. This happens because they are situated on the school premises and sometimes experience being under the watchful eyes of school personnel, who comment upon, and have opinions about, how children should, for example, behave on school grounds.

2.4.5 School as ‘above or far away’

Research suggests that there is an uneven power balance between school and after-school centres where school is, in a sense, ‘above or far away’ the after-school centre (Højholt, 2001, p. 287). Højholt (2001, 2004) organised a three-year study in which children were followed from kindergarten to grade 1, including the after-school centres and playgrounds. Højholt states that it is important not only to focus on how children make the transition from pre-school to primary school but also how children move from pre-school to after-school centres and then into primary schools. She discovered that the different professionals, on the one hand teachers and on the other hand recreation pedagogues, had different perspectives on how to best support the children in their development. The recreation pedagogues felt that after-school centres did not receive enough attention or esteem in the school system. One of the interviewees describes the lack of cooperation between the schools and the after-school centres: “each takes care of his own and something tremendous must have happened before we talk to each other. It is like
two different worlds” (Højholt, 2001, p. 287, my translation). However, there was some cooperation when children were coming from the preschool (d. börnehave) and beginning in the after-school centre (which usually happens in August before the school begins). There was an exchange of information concerning the group of children that were moving from one institution to the next. In this case, the recreation pedagogues were informed that the group of children that would be coming included many individuals who could be expected to need special support and care. The descriptions of the children that the pedagogues received contained ‘dramatized stories’ and detailed lists of anticipated problems. However, the way in which this information was delivered was disorganised, and random—and the recreation pedagogues felt as if they were being put down in the process (told how things were, rather than consulted as equals). Höjholt also points out that the focus was on the background of the children rather than on how the children cope within an institution, or how the professionals could cooperate to support a child. Furthermore, there was little discussion about different perspectives on the developmental process.

The leader of one of the two after-school centres that participated in Højholt’s study described how she was called the day before a scheduled meeting to discuss the forthcoming group of children and invited to participate. For her, it felt like the school was not really committed to inviting her for serious cooperation. The recreation pedagogues, however, prioritised cooperation whenever possible and even went to great lengths to attend meetings outside their working hours. The leader felt that meetings were scheduled in accordance with the needs and working hours of the teachers. In fact, it was difficult to find a time for meetings between teachers and recreation pedagogues, because each group was working with the children at times when the other was not. This was reflected in Højholt’s research; for even though she would have liked to hold shared meetings with personnel from both schools and after-school centres, that proved impossible. Furthermore, teachers seem to show less interest in taking part in any collaboration than do pedagogues (Broström, 2001), which results in a lack of collaboration. There are indications that teachers and pedagogues do not have knowledge of each other’s profession and hence do not feel the need to collaborate (Broström, 2001; Einarsdóttir, 2007b).

As previously stated the majority after-school centres in Denmark are now operated by school authorities, and there is a demand for closer collaboration between the two institutions. A recent study compared the views of school leaders and after-school leaders on possibilities for cooperation (Langager & Robinson, 2005). The participants were asked, among other things, to answer how much they agreed/disagreed with a
number of statements. Fifty two percent of school leaders and 83 percent of after-school leaders agreed that diversity of activities within the children’s day at school would be positive and that the cooperation between school and after-school centres should be based on the diversity of activities in school and after-school centre; 48 percent of school leaders and 17 percent of after-school leaders disagreed with that statement (Langager & Robinson, 2005, p. 3). There was also a clear difference in the views of school leaders and after-school leaders on whether children should, already from grade 1, experience a difference between being in a “learning” setting (d. undervisningssituation) and a “play” setting (d. legesituation): 76 percent of after-school leaders agreed but only 55 percent of school leaders. Although, the participants may have understood concepts differently, the results imply that there is a difference in how school leaders and after-school leaders view the practices of the after-school centres and their connections with school activities. Langager and Robinson (2005) conclude that the Danish after-school centres seem, in many ways, to stand at a crossroad, and how their pedagogy develops will depend upon what politicians and professionals will define as “essential learning environments” (p. 11).

The research into the collaboration between teachers and recreation pedagogues, and on the negotiations that take place between school and after-school services, shows that behind the facade of the general positive discourse around the whole-school day, one finds discrepant views and tensions in the different pedagogical discourses.

2.4.6 Developing professional identity

Many contributing factors explain why it seems to have been a challenge for those working in after-school services to develop a strong professional identity (see for example Cartmel, 2007; EFILWC, 2006). In many countries, there does not exist a professional body that is responsible for these services. In the few countries where such a professional body exists, it is often met with mistrust and suspicion, which has a negative impact on the profession. This has led to a high turnover that makes it difficult to develop and stick to pedagogical plans (Højholt, 2001). There are undoubtedly many reasons for a high turnover, including, in some cases, low salaries, poor working conditions, work-related stress, and a lack of possibilities for developing one’s competence (EFILWC, 2006; Højholt, 2001; Petrie et al., 2000).

Few countries have invested in support for the professional body of recreation pedagogues, and those that strive to develop such a body lack support when they meet obstacles. Cartmel (2007) analysed the discourse between school leaders and two after-school leaders and found out that
the after-school personnel lacked the collaborative identity that would have been helpful to the leaders when fighting for better conditions for the services.

2.5 Children’s views on participation in after-school centres

There is a strong tradition of looking at a social phenomena like the after-school centre from the perspective of politicians, administrators, principals, teachers, or parents, i.e. only from the adult perspective. But perhaps the most interesting and most rewarding perspective is the one provided by the main users of the service, namely the children. Through increased awareness of children’s rights and the establishment of the sociology of children (see for example James & Prout, 1990), researchers and practitioners increasingly seek to find ways to involve children in decisions on matters that affect them. Interestingly, the majority of research on after-school centres in the Nordic countries as well as in the UK to date has been ethnographic research with children. The majority of the research discussed below has been inspired by the theoretical framework of the sociology of childhood, as well as social constructivism that looks at children as participants in constructing knowledge. This research explores the diversities of children’s lives and challenges the dominant discourse of children as passive dependents (Petrie et al., 2000). It has revealed among other things how children talk about what they do in after-school centres and how that relates to other parts of their lives (Hviid, 1999; Højholt, 2001; Johansson & Ljusberg, 2004; Klerfelt & Haglund, 2011; Petrie, Egharevba, Oliver & Poland, 2000; Smith & Barker, 2002; Strandell, 2008). This section discusses the themes developed in previous findings concerning the perspectives of children towards after-school centres.

2.5.1 After-school centre as different from home and school

Research has revealed that children who attend after-school centres consider it a special kind of place, different from both school and home, and that the majority of children like attending after-school programs (Elliot, 1998; Petrie et al., 2000; Smith & Barker, 2002). Most children do not enjoy school-like activities such as homework during their time in the centres, and they do not like to be told what to do (Smith & Barker, 2002).

Petrie et al. (2000) conducted a study called the Children’s lives research on how children and young persons in the UK experienced different kinds of after-school programs. It explored the everyday lives of children who use after-school services. The research included ethnographic fieldwork in 33 different services as well as interviews with
parents and children, mostly in their homes. Interviews were taken with 185 parents selected randomly from a group of 27 services; the services were visited, and the senior worker was interviewed.

Smith and Barker (2002) conducted a two-year-long study in the UK in which 400 children, aged 7–12 years, participated. A group of 70 children from different after-school clubs identified five themes that were important to children participating in after-school programs. Those themes were (a) activities available in the centre, (b) play workers (relationships with adults working in the centres), (c) friendships, (d) rules, and lastly, (e) their ability to participate in decision making (Smith & Barker, 2002, p. 60). Moreover, children appreciated being able to participate in activities that they could not pursue at home or in school.

2.5.2 Importance of friends

Research to date indicates that after-school services are valued by children because they provide spaces for making and meeting friends (Johanson & Ljusbjerg, 2004; Klerfelt & Haglund, 2011; Petrie et al., 2000; Smith & Barker, 2002; Stanek, 2011).

Klerfelt and Haglund (2011) studied the views of children through ‘walk-and-talk’ technique that took place while the child introduced the researchers to important areas in the after-school centre. The research method was designed to give the children power to control the discussions, instead of the conventional interview technique where the researcher is in charge and asks specific questions. The children were given a camera, and they took pictures while they explained why the specific area was important to them and what they did there. The study showed that being with friends was most important for the children in the after-school centres. It also showed that waiting was experienced negatively by the children, such as waiting to be able to go home, waiting for a difficult conversation to be over, or waiting to be able to go and play with friends. Some of the children in the study said that they avoided specific places, such as the football field, because aggressive behaviour among the children was common there.

Stanek (2011) studied the transition of a group of children from pre-school to elementary school and the after-school centre. The research was inspired by critical psychology as well as social practice theories of Lave and Wenger. Her findings show that the social life of children cannot be confined to the after-school centre or the school recess. Rather, how children manage their social lives affects how they function in the school in general. Stanek maintains that the children’s resources for learning are intertwined with their possibilities for engaging in the social network of
children. There is an interactive relationship between academic competence and social competence, and each component can affect the other (both positively and negatively). For children, it is more important to be accepted in the peer group than to be listening to their teacher (Stanek, 2011, p. 257). Stanek argues that professionals should increase their understanding of the social communities of children and should use that knowledge as a resource to engage children efficiently in school activities. Furthermore, it is important for children to connect to other children and make friends in the after-school centres, otherwise they may feel lonely or even excluded (Petrie et al., 2000).

2.5.3 Importance of autonomy

Children value after-school centres because they provide spaces for free play without constant adult interference (Ackesjö, 2011; Smith & Barker, 2002). However, children do not generally decide themselves whether they attend an after-school centre or not. Usually, it is the parents’ decision to enroll the child. Some children, especially as they grow older, might prefer to go home after school, even though they would have to spend some time alone before the parents return from work (Strandell, 2008). From the children’s point of view there may be positive sides to self-care, including to be able to do what they want at home or get some private time after a busy school day (Bell, 1999; Petrie et al., 2000; Strandell, 2008). A recent study showed that many eight-year old Finnish children liked going home alone, as they had the home to themselves, and many reported having friends, siblings, or neighbours with whom they socialized (Forsberg & Strandell, 2007).

The feeling of wanting more control and more autonomy from the pedagogue is more evident as children grow older (Ackesjö, 2011). Smith and Barker (2002) found that older children seem to be less happy in the after-school centres than the younger children, feeling that the activities were babyish. Ackesjö (2011) studied whether children in one Swedish elementary school viewed the role of the recreation pedagogues differently in school and in their after-school centre. She analysed 277 pictures drawn by children from grades 1 to 4 which showed, on the one hand, recreation pedagogues in the school, and, on the other hand, recreation pedagogues in an after-school centre. Interestingly, in 54 percent of the drawings the child had omitted the recreation pedagogue from the picture, even though the children had been asked to include them in the pictures. Furthermore, Ackesjö maintains that perhaps the children were expressing their desire to be independent and with their friends, rather than in direct communication with the pedagogue.
Within the compulsory school system, the perspectives of children are generally not incorporated in either practice or research (Christensen & James, 2008; Einarsdóttir, 2010; Thomsen & Günther, 2009). Although educational authorities in Reykjavik emphasize individualized and cooperative learning, research shows that the individual child rarely gets to take part in decision-making or in choosing their collaborators (Einarsdóttir, 2010). Einarsdóttir conducted a study in an Icelandic primary school in which she consulted 20 six- and seven-year old children (10 girls and 10 boys). The children in the study experienced little time to play in the primary school. They could play only in recess time when they were outdoors. They also agreed that most of the time they did not get to decide what to do or how, only in recess could they do so within certain limits. Some of the children said that they could occasionally choose what to do from several activities after they had finished the assignments prescribed by the teacher. Hence, the children did not experience democracy in school, nor were they able to influence the school curriculum.

According to a study by Petrie et al. (2000), personnel in out-of-school programs in UK consult the children about their wishes concerning (a) the activities that they would like to see included in the programme and their satisfaction with the program and (b) the rules which should be in operation in the service (Petrie et al., 2000, p. 64). However, in many cases, consultation was given only lip-service. This could be because of insufficient resources in terms of space, equipment or material, restricting the children’s choice. There were also examples where the adults disapproved of what the children wanted, and often personnel decisions prevailed over the wishes of children. The children were not used to their wishes being taken seriously and, therefore, they did not take it seriously when consulted. Petrie et al. (2000) describe two examples of failed consultations. In the first case, the personnel held a meeting with the children in which rules were decided for the summer program. But the children did not take the discussions seriously, the meeting was chaotic, and the children did not show interest in deciding the rules. When interviewed, one of the personnel said the meeting was just a formality to make it look like the children had a hand in making the rules. But the main point was to make sure that the children knew the rules so that they would be likely to follow them. The second case involved a committee of children being chosen to represent their peers in decisions on matters of importance. But instead the “young representatives acted in some ways as monitors, carrying out the wishes of the adults (checking that litter was cleared away, for example) rather than facilitating the wishes of other users” (Petrie et al., 2000, p. 66).
2.5.4 Multiplicity of experiences

Social contexts and personal attributes affect how children experience after-school programs. Children seem to have strong opinions about what they would like to be doing in their after-school time, but it is not possible to generalize any particular perspective to all children. Research suggests that it is important for providers of after-school services to develop ways to fight social exclusion which is experienced both by people with disabilities and by people who belong to ethnic minority groups (Petrie et al., 2000). The 18 disabled children who participated in Petrie et al.’s research experienced limited autonomy with regard to activities, location and use of time. The majority of them attended a special school or a special unit at a mainstream school located outside their local neighbourhood. Thus, some children experienced confinement and lack of companions, since they could only associate with peers during school hours. Disabled children need additional resources and care to be able to be allowed to flourish as active social agents in their own lives.

Research indicates gender differences when it comes to children’s participation in their leisure time. Within the Children’s lives research in the UK, girls were under-represented in sporting activities and over-represented in art and craft activities (Petrie et al., 2000). How much freedom and autonomy the children would get in their leisure time varied greatly. It was more common that boys would get more freedom to do what they wanted than girls, making it possible for the boys to engage with their local neighbourhoods. In general, the girls’ use of time and choice of activities were more under the control of their parents than those of the boys. A comparative study of the after-school lives of fourth graders from the USA, Taiwan, and Bulgaria revealed that girls spend a greater proportion of their free time after school in reading and extracurricular activities than boys. Boys, however, spend more time playing and playing video/computer games than girls. Interestingly, in Bulgaria and Taiwan girls and boys spend an equal amount of time in sports while boys in USA spent twice as much time as girls in sports (Newman, Bidjerano, Özdogru, Kao, Özköse-Biyik & Johnson, 2007, p. 447). This is in line with other research. Cherney and London (2006) studied 120 children aged five to 13 in Nebraska, USA, and discovered that boys were more likely to be involved in outdoor sports and computers than girls. However, an Icelandic study into the recreation activities of school-aged children showed that more girls participated in art classes than boys, while there was no significant difference between their participation in sports (Björnsdóttir, Kristjánsson & Hansen, 2009). However, boys had more access to computers and used them significantly more than girls.
Bell (1999) provides a thorough analysis of the after-school lives of 53 children living with their families in the Boston area. Firstly, her research shows convincingly that children have a wide range of after-school experiences. Some children take care of themselves for several hours each day, some children have household chores or take care of siblings, others stay with friends or spend time at the local library, and still others attend different kinds of after-school programs. Secondly, Bell reviewed US research which compares student’s self-care and academic results, and she shows that findings are contradictory: while some research shows better academic results from children under constant adult supervision, others show better academic results from children who take care of themselves in after-school hours. Importantly, Bell shows how making sense of their after-school hours can be a challenge for many children, as many of them experience being lonely, experience lack of freedom, or miss their parents.

The results indicate that the views and needs of children vary and that it is difficult to generalize how children experience after-school services. Children are not a homogeneous group of individuals but are different in many ways, including gender, social class, ethnicity, and personality. Children, like adults, therefore adhere to a number of different groups and should not be seen merely as ‘children’ who all share the same interests. We also need to be aware that children’s needs are emergent and flexible; they like different things on different days and want to have an increasing say in things as they grow older (Edwards, 2001).

2.5.5 Views towards the personnel

Getting along with the personnel in the after-school centre is important for children (Petrie et al., 2000). Children describe personnel as ‘fun’ or ‘boring’, according to how they perceive the personnel. Those who are perceived as ‘fun’ are relaxed, friendly, active, and talk softly to children. ‘Boring’ personnel are those who exert their control unfairly and persons who shout at children (Petrie et al., 2000, pp. 122–127). According to the children, the personnel can take on different roles, ranging from a passive role as an observer to an active role as a participant in play and organiser of activities (Ackesjö, 2011). Ackesjö (2011) identified seven different roles that recreation pedagogues seem to assume according to drawings made by children in one Swedish elementary school. Those were: the adult, creative, controlling, supportive, watchful (s. övervakere), participant, and finally, the ‘absent’ pedagogue roles. Interestingly, the most common role that the pedagogue played in the drawings was the ‘absent’ pedagogue. Ackesjö (2011) suggests that perhaps the pedagogues in the after-school centres choose to be passive when the children are managing their own
activities successfully, but that they step in when required. Also, it would be possible to interpret the omission of pedagogues from the drawings as an indication that the children prefer that the pedagogues not be involved in their activities. Hence, while children in after-school centres value good relationships with personnel, their attention is generally more focused on being with their peers.

2.5.6 Transition between school and after-school centre

It seems plausible that the way school teachers and recreation pedagogues arrange their cooperation would affect how children experience their day at school. To date there is lack of research in this area. However, a study was made in Sweden to establish whether different forms of day-care for school-aged children had an influence on students' academic results. Söderlund (2000) studied whether different forms of cooperation between school and after-school centre affect children’s well-being or social competence. She distinguished between three forms of collaboration. First, integrated collaboration where there was close cooperation between teachers and recreation personnel and the children continued to stay in the same place and with the same group in the after-school program. Teachers worked at least six hours per week in after-school, and recreation personnel worked at least six hours per week in school. Second, interactive collaboration, where there was a clear distinction between school and after-school environments, even though there were shared meetings once a month. Recreation personnel worked in the schools at least six hours a week, but the teachers did not work in the after-school centres. And finally, mixed cooperation, where some teachers had closer cooperation with recreation personnel than others.

No relationship was found between different models of cooperation and school performance, children’s well-being, or social competence (Söderlund, 2000). A longitudinal study from the USA showed similar results, that is, no statistically significant effects on academic outcomes (James-Burgdumy, Dynarski & Deke, 2007). However, the students involved in the latter study reported feeling safer after school when participating in an after-school program.

Danish research has shown that taking an active part in after-school programs can be important for children who are struggling in school, such as children experiencing social problems or children with special needs (Hviid, 1999; Højholt, 2001; Raymond & Schough Larsen, 2002; Stanek, 2011). When studying the effect of longer school hours on children, Raymond and Schough Larsen (2002) found that children who have difficulty in managing the skills required by the school have difficulty handling longer hours in school; those children often enjoy themselves
and do well in the after-school centre. This is important because it is vital for children to be able to experience control and get rewarded for being who they are. Therefore, positive experience in the after-school setting can enhance self-confidence and help children cope in school (Højholt, 2001). In fact, Højholt (2004) maintains that increasing cooperation between professionals working with children, such as pedagogues and teachers, is crucial to providing more effective support for children, especially disadvantaged children and children who are socially deprived. To weave a tighter web of support is important to help children cope within different settings and also helps them transfer learning experiences more efficiently between settings (Højholt, 2001). A child who is, for example, doing well in the after-school centre but not in school (or vice versa), may need additional help to apply his strengths. Organised meetings with professionals, parents and children stimulate a flow of information and a dialogue in which all voices and perspectives are heard (Højholt, 2004).

The literature on after-school programs in the USA focuses mostly on the educational benefits of these programs. It is maintained that “high quality after-school programs can have significant, positive effects on student outcomes, whereas low quality programs can fail to show positive effects or even have negative impacts” (National Institute on After-school Time, 2009, p. 7). Bell (1999), however, argues that US research has failed to show the variety of both positive and negative effects of after-school programs for children, because the research has relied upon a simplified and limited understanding of the importance of social and contextual issues. Thus, Bell maintains that it has been difficult to assess the educational value of after-school programs. Furthermore, the majority of US literature is focused on policy recommendations for how to organise quality after-school care, while little empirical research in the area is presented.

The after-school centre seems to be, from the point of view of children, a setting that they experience as different from school and home. They value being able to be with friends in the after-school hours and take part in a variety of activities. Children experience more freedom to decide their activities in the after-school centre than in school. However, there are children who do not thrive in the after-school centre and would rather be at home. In some cases disabled children or children with special needs experience a lack of resources that hinders their full participation in their peer group. Although most children do not like school-like activities in the after-school centre, it is not possible to generalize children’s perspectives, because children are a versatile group of individuals with different needs and expectations. Research has, furthermore, established that social
criteria, such as disability, ethnicity, and gender, may influence the participation of children in after-school hours, the range of activities, and the level of parental control. Whether increased cooperation between school and after-school centre strengthens the academic outcomes of children remains unclear. However, research has shown that increased cooperation between teachers and pedagogues offers new possibilities for dialogue and transfer of learning between settings.

2.6 From the parents’ point of view

According to surveys conducted by the Sports and Recreation Council in Reykjavík, the majority of parents using the service of the after-school centres in Reykjavík say that they are content or very content with the services (Reykjavík, 2012). However, it should be kept in mind that parents are generally satisfied with a program if “their children [are] happy in the program and [get] something out of it” (Garey, 2002, p. 779). Little else is known about the expectations that parents have towards after-school services, or how it affects the lives of their children or their own. In the fragmented literature on after-school services, the views of parents are occasionally addressed.

Day-care is an important service for parents of young children and makes it possible for both parents to work full time or to pursue their educations (Eydal, 2005). The school day is not structured to accommodate to the needs of working parents, as it ends long before the parents’ work day. There are also variations in schedule between schools and even between week days. In some schools the school day may end at 1:00 pm on some days and at 3:00 pm on others (EFILWC, 2006). Quite regularly, the school day ends early due to, for example, teacher preparation, and parents also have to arrange care for their children on school holidays. Parents often expressed concerns about their children being left to wander the streets in their leisure time (Bell, 1999; Petrie et al., 2000), and they complain of the stresses of managing work and family life (Forsberg, 2009).

Providing care in after-school hours is most often the mother’s responsibility (Bell, 1999; Forsberg, 2009). Therefore, mothers need to adjust their work life to the school calendar, the hours children spend in school and the occasional early endings of the school day or when there are preparation days for teacher. According to research by Forsberg (2009), mothers in Sweden take more responsibility for child-care than fathers; they work shorter hours and stay in contact with their children during the day. Furthermore, mothers often see themselves as ‘managing’ their children’s leisure time: they act as “chauffeurs” driving their children to various recreation activities. Moreover, mothers in UK say that they provide diversion for the children, to fight off boredom and that they in
general respond to their pleas (Petrie et al., 2000, p. 23). Thus, after-school programs for children not only support parents in their role as caregivers and breadwinners, but make a significant contribution to gender equality.

Elliot (1998) maintains that parents in Australia consider participation in after-school service to contribute to the social development of their children. In Australia after-school service is considered to be “an important bridge between home and school, constituting an integral component of the Australian child care services” (Elliot, 1998, p. 387). Still, the after-school programs in Australia, as in most countries, seem to be struggling for recognition of the importance of their pedagogy within the school system (Cartmel, 2007). Thus, the views of the parents do not necessarily accord with the general value attributed to the service in society at large. My time our place. A framework for school age care in Australia (Australian Government, 2011) has parent support material designed to encourage parents to become more involved in the provision of the school-age care curriculum.

Nor is it clear that the care parents wish for their children is shared by the wider community or by those providing the care. In her ethnographic study of state-funded after-school programs in Connecticut, USA, Garey (2002) found out that how parents define care may be different from how government or service providers define care. Garey maintains that the after-school site is a place where several social domains meet, for example, the social domain of family and the social domain of school. Furthermore, parents are “faced with the internal logics and practices of the fields of education and government, among others, and the social domains of schooling, law enforcement, legislating, and administration” (Garey, 2002, p. 770). Parents have different aspirations for their children and different expectations with regard to children’s services (Bell, 1999; Petrie et. al, 2000). Some parents emphasize social interaction and play, while others emphasize various recreation activities, or homework completion (Garey, 2002). However, most parents want the personnel working in childcare not only to ensure the safety of their children, but to nurture them and care for them in a wide sense. Garey distinguishes three forms of care: (a) care as nurturing protection, (b) care as instruction and (c) care as containment. Firstly, most parents consider after-school centres to provide substitute protection for their children while they themselves are not present. This did not collate with the policy of the after-school centres in Connecticut, which emphasized the care as instruction. The relatively new legislation on after-school centres stipulated that the after-school centres “were not designed to provide child-care for working parents” (Garey, 2002, p. 780). The after-school centres were designed to
support academic outcomes and positive behaviour among the children. In fact, attendance five days a week for three hours a day was compulsory. This was met with frustration by parents who did not understand why they could not pick their children up earlier if they, for example, had leave from work. In this case two different notions of care clashed, care as protection and care as instruction. Lastly, Garey argues that one of the rationales of the governmental policy was the idea that the containment of children in the after-school centres three hours a day increased child safety and reduced juvenile crime. From the point of view of the lawgiver, it was plausible to take measures to protect society against the possibility of unsupervised children becoming delinquent. Thus, care as containment is still another way to rationalize the operation of after-school centres.

After mothers left the home to work in the late 20th century, it remained unclear who was to fill the gap for children (Roland, 1992). Although changes in the parental leave system in Iceland are now encouraging fathers to take a more active part in caring for their children, mothers assume primary responsibility for child-care (Eydal & Gíslason, 2008). Parents find various ways to bridge the gap between the end of the school day and their return home from work. Many parents rely on the extended family or neighbours to help with the childcare, in addition to taking advantage of various after-school programs. The general view today is that it is unhealthy or even dangerous for children to spend many hours “home-alone” (see, for example Strandell, 2008; Bell, 1999). This again leaves some parents with the stigma of leaving their children to care for themselves, as not all parents have access to quality after-school service. In some countries (especially the US) such care can be very costly, making it impossible for single parents or low-income parents to enroll their children. In fact, many children rely on themselves in after-school hours, especially children eight years or older.

In the Reykjavík community, there is a general lack of personnel in after-school centres every autumn when school begins, resulting in waiting lists at most after-school centres. Some parents do not get a place for their child, at least not for the first weeks of the school year. This has resulted in periodic public discussion in local newspapers on the “situation” of after-school centres in Reykjavík (see for example Silja Björk Huludóttir, 2005). In fact, this is almost the only time discussions on the after-school centres are found in the local media.

2.7 Conclusion

The literature on after-school services for school-aged children is fragmented. Out-of-school care for school-aged children falls between different spheres: the educational system, the welfare system and the
private domain of home, thus making it unclear whose responsibility it is and what its role should be. Thus, the way in which after-school care is organised varies, even though the rudimentary care function gives it a basic framework. In Western societies different forms of such services are found, ranging from open door services provided at different facilities to school-day-care centres that operate on school site. The aims of these centres are highly varied, which makes comparison between countries difficult. However, three key aims that reappear in the literature relate to the concepts of (a) care, (b) learning and (c) leisure.

Generally, there is lack of public investment in the services, and the majority of personnel are unskilled. The Nordic countries provide different examples of how after-school centres have been organised. Even though the Nordic countries seem to share a social pedagogy, the ways in which after-school centres are structured are very different. Iceland and Norway are similar in many ways, as there does not exist a professional sector for out-of-school care. Denmark and Sweden have both developed a professional body to oversee the services, but their legal frameworks are very different. Research indicates that when the teachers and the recreation pedagogues work together, the school-directed practices of the teachers tend to override the social-directed practice of the recreation pedagogues. Hence, recreation pedagogues and personnel in after-school centres face the challenge of strengthening their collective identity. The roles of recreation pedagogues in school is unclear, and they are struggling to develop their professional identity.

Recreation personnel find it hard to meet the needs of every child in the after-school centre, and often they experience lack of resources, such as time, facilities or professional support. When sharing premises with the school, the recreation personnel have to adjust their work according to school rules and demands from the school. The Danish and Swedish recreation pedagogues often feel that they are not taken seriously in cooperation with the teachers and that their contribution is not always valued.

Research shows that participation in after-school centres can strengthen children’s social skills and their well-being in the school environment. Friends, play, and relationships with caretakers are among the things that children value in the after-school centre (Petrie et al., 2000). Children also value the fact that the after-school centre is different from school and allows them to be more autonomous. They value the fact that recreation personnel are there for them, including initiating activities and providing support when needed. However, children do not want personnel in the after-school centre to be constantly involved in their activities (Ackesjö, 2011).
The provision of after-school service supports parents in their role as breadwinners and caregivers. Although parents have different requirements regarding their children’s recreation activities, most of them expect recreation personnel to care for and nurture their children’s personal well-being. The parents’ understanding of care does not necessarily match with the political system’s understanding of the care provided in after-school centres.

In conclusion, the literature about after-school centres demonstrates that there is a multiplicity of perspectives about their purpose and function in society. The primary motive of the service is providing care for young school children. However, the type of care they should provide is unclear. There has been increased emphasis on providing learning experiences within the after-school centres, and there is a variety of opinion concerning the type of learning that should and could take place in this setting. The social pedagogy of the Nordic model of after-school care relates to the concept of leisure which looks at the child as a whole, and encourages reciprocal and creative activities. The aims of after-school centres seem to shift between ideas of providing care, of learning and of leisure. Thus, there seems to be a conflict between the various perspectives of the individuals that take part in the practice of after-school centres and the organisational system in which the after-school centre is based.

2.8 Research questions

This thesis is the first in-depth study about after-school centres in Iceland. It is, therefore, important to provide a comprehensive picture of this institution that has been neglected by researchers and policy makers. It offers a holistic analysis of the status of after-school centres, combining the perspectives of different stakeholders. After-school centres are investigated from the outside by looking at the organisational design of the after-school centre from both historical and institutional perspective, as well as from the inside by examining the practice from the view of different participants, the children, their parents and the recreation personnel. This investigation is a holistic approach to examine the after-school centres from the viewpoint of the system (the politicians and administrators and thus the regulatory framework), the personnel (those who provide the service), and the children and their parents (the clients).

The generally undefined role of the centres and also the undefined professional underpinnings of after-school centres call for a further study of their organisational identity. The literature shows that participants and stakeholders may hold a variety of views and perspectives. What kind of care do stakeholders prioritise, what kind of learning do they anticipate, and in what sense is leisure an integral part of the after-school centres? To
be able to address those questions, we need evidence on how different stakeholders define the purpose of the after-school centre and its relation to school and society at large.

It has been noted that within different systems there is a debate over what the actual purpose of after-school centres should be, and public policy with regard to their operation and organisation is, in most cases, vague and unclear (see section 2.1). To understand how the purpose of the after-school centre is seen from the point of view of the system and how changes in the organisational framework have affected policy, the following question emerged:

1. What is the purpose of the after-school centres in Reykjavík and how has public policy reflected that purpose?

Similarly, there is debate about the qualifications that should be required of personnel in after-school centres. Generally, the level of qualification is low, public investment in professional development is scarce, and the professional identity of the personnel is in most cases lacking. Nevertheless, personnel assume a variety of roles, and there seems to be a shared notion of providing care and stimulating children’s overall development (see section 2.4.2). To understand the experiences of the personnel and how they construct their professional identity and that of their institution, the following question is posed:

2. How do recreation personnel interpret their role?

Children are key stakeholders with regard to the organisation of the after-school centre and consider it to be an important setting for play and being with friends (section 2.5.2). Furthermore, the connections made between personnel and children seem to affect whether children experience the services positively (see section 2.5.5). From the perspective of the children, the after-school centre is different from school and home, (section 2.5.1) and it becomes, thus, important to probe further in which ways these settings are different. To understand the organisational identity of the after-school centre from the point of view of the children and how they define the purpose of the after-school centre compared to the purpose of the school, the following question is asked:

3. How do children view the daily activities in the after-school centre and how do they experience the difference between school and after-school centre?
The above questions guided the data-gathering and analysis in this study. However, I still needed a conceptual tool to frame the research and guide the analysis—a tool that would help me connect the institutional perspective to the perspectives of the participants. In order to offer a holistic approach it was crucial to look at how the practices of the after-school centres and the institutional framework within which they operate are connected. Furthermore, I wanted to find a theoretical framework that would help me explain how personnel and children learn to become participants in the after-school centres and understand what characterizes their participation and identification within the practice. For those reasons I turned to the theory of Communities of Practice and the sociology of childhood, which are introduced in detail in the next chapter.
3 TOWARDS A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter outlines the theories that frame my analysis of the identity of the after-school centre. The study of the identity of after-school centres provides a unique possibility for investigating the forces that affect policy and the development of services. Previous research on after-school centres shows that in most communities the institutionalisation of the practice is very limited. Schools are accepted as educational institutions, cornerstones of the development and progress of society. However, after-school centres are not such institutions; they are much younger and operate largely without a specific institutional framework, as has already been made clear from the brief history of the after-school centres in Reykjavík. The organisational identity of these centres is unclear. Hence, there is a need to focus on current practices to understand the emerging organisational identity.

The concept of identity, as used in this study, is the idea of social identity, as opposed to the study of self-identity or developmental identity. In a sense, the idea of social identity always assumes the existence of another, someone who defines your identity (Jenkins, 1996). Furthermore, the term ‘organisation’ refers to a social structure in which both individual and collective activities are organised to some extent (Jenkins, 1996). The organisational identity can, therefore, only be examined through personal and collective identifications—through practice as it is experienced and organised.

This study will use Wenger’s theory of the Community of Practice (CoP) to analyse how the organisational identity of the after-school centre is constructed from the perspectives of multiple stakeholders and participants. A community of practice can be defined as a social structure that comes into existence when a group of individuals engage in collective activities on a regular basis. Every community of practice operates within a social landscape and is, in various ways, connected to other CoPs. Furthermore, individuals are participants in a number of CoPs in their private and public lives, such as family, work, and circle of friends. The theoretical landscape for this study will draw on the dominant themes from the theory of the communities of practices and of the sociology of childhood. Although Wenger’s theory of communities of practices provides an excellent framework for examining how participants construct the organisational identity of an institution, it is not specifically aimed at children or their participation in the community. The sociology of
childhood points to the ways in which the participation of children has traditionally been ignored in social theory and in the dominant framework on children’s development. Therefore, the theory of communities of practices will be complimented with perspectives on the participation and empowerment of children in social practices.

This chapter begins with, firstly, a section that introduces the main theoretical framework of the study which is built on the socio-cultural context of the after-school centres. Links will be made between this conceptual framework and the aims of this study, which are to examine the purpose, nature and status of after-school centres in Reykjavík. Secondly, an overview of Wenger’s theory of CoP is provided, including a description of the key concepts that define CoP, and then, thirdly, the chapter will discuss CoP within organisations, specifically the relationship between the design and the emergent practice in an organisation. Fourthly, the chapter outlines the social ecology of identity as outlined by Wenger. The chapter, then, examines the concepts of care, learning, and leisure which are critical to understanding the specific practice within after-school centres. Lastly, the chapter describes dominant themes from the sociology of childhood, which emphasizes children as active participants in shaping the communities in which they take part. The sociology of childhood is thus an essential element in the theoretical and social landscape in which the after-school centre exists as an organisation.

3.1 The socio-cultural context of the after-school centres

Research on after-school centres is characterised by the socio-cultural perspective that seeks to understand how individuals, specifically children and recreation personnel, participate within this social setting. Socio-cultural theories look at the interactive relationship between the individual and his context, and explore how identification and knowledge is constructed and re-constructed in a reciprocal process between the individual and the community of practice in which he is situated (Lave & Wenger, 1991). This perspective provides a useful tool to tackle the research questions of this thesis.

The main purpose of the current study is to explore the after-school centre from a holistic perspective, and to shed light on the organisational identity from various perspectives. Hence, the theoretical framework weaves together multiple perspectives to construct a conceptual tool for analysis and drawing conclusions. However, the common essence of these theories is that they draw from the socio-cultural paradigm. This section discusses the concept of organisational identity and provides rationale for the two main theories that are used: The theory of the community of practice and the sociology of childhood.
3.1.1 Organisational identity

The concept of organisational identity applied in the current thesis is a concept of organisational identity as socially constructed bricolage. The process of identity construction is thus seen as “the process of institutional bricolage, where organisations incorporate cultural meanings, values, sentiments and rules into their identity claims” (Glynn, 2008, p. 424). The idea that the organisational identity is socially constructed, and even multi-layered, opposes the essentialistic approach that an organisational identity consists of a unified, social experience of the members that adapt their views to prevailing constitutive rules to define identity (Glynn, 2008). Instead, organisational identity can be seen as the “original collage of the experiences and expectations of a wide array of people who view the organisation from a multiplicity of perspectives and approach it with a variety of motives” (Hatch & Schultz, 2004, p. 1). To investigate the organisational identity of after-school centres thus involves the study of perspectives of various groups of stakeholders as well as the study of the institutional and professional framework of the service. People care about things that are within their range of negotiability and their desire to participate diminishes if they do not have a voice in the (Wenger, 1998). Therefore, we can learn about the possible effects that each group of participants has on the organisational identity of the after-school centres by examining how they organise their activities within the practice. The identification and negotiation processes that take place between different groups of stakeholders hold keys to the future development of the organisation.

The study of the organisational identity of after-school centres may be regarded as a study of social learning in the widest-sense. Children, recreation personnel as well as parents learn to have certain expectations towards the services and they learn to adapt and even conform to the prevailing ideology. The after-school centres are organisational fields that appear to be both loosely structured but at the same time they are intrinsically linked to the development of schooling and to children’s participation in social settings. There is a policy conflict as stakeholders prioritise care, learning or leisure as defining the main role of the after-school centre, which sometimes seem to be contradictory roles. However, such policy conflicts also press hard for a reflection on these roles and can open up a window for change and innovation. However, those concepts need to be explored further to clarify their impact on the organisational identity of the service (see section 3.6).

The multiple strands of organisational and institutional literature stem from a wide field of social sciences, including economics, political science, sociology and psychology (Greenwood, Oliver, Sahlin & Suddaby, 2008). At
one end, the analysis concentrates on large or small organisations in industry or business and, at the other, political institutions operating at global, national (e.g. national governments) or local levels, including public institutions like hospitals or schools with their well developed institutional characteristics. After-school centres do not fit easily into any of these categories, neither in aims or structures. They do not seem to be independent organisations, or institutions. However, after-school centres seem to present an organisational field which is developing a collective rationality (Wooten & Hoffman, 2008). Thus, the notion of a community of practice was adopted as a framework for exploring the development of structures and identity of a phenomena that did not clearly belong to any of the quite well developed entities within our social structure.

3.1.2 The theory of the community of practice

There are four main arguments for choosing Wenger’s theory as an analytical tool for the purpose of examining the organisational identity of after-school centres and for complementing it with the theories-of-childhood approach. Firstly, the theory of CoPs examines in detail how the organisational identity develops through participation and non-participation of individuals in social practices. Wenger unravels how individuals develop modes of belonging through various sources, which emphasizes the importance of being able to negotiate and share meanings (to be an active participant in a practice). This is particularly important when investigating social phenomena whose identities seem to be moulded by outside constraints only to a limited extent. Secondly, the theory of the CoP introduces analytical concepts for understanding the interactive relationships between social practices, the social partners (including the children) and institutional frameworks. This becomes crucial in the case of after-school centres where institutional reifications occur at a very low level. Wenger shows how important it is for a practice to balance the relationship between the design and the emergent practice. Moreover, it is important to consider the institutionalisation of childhood in modern society and the specific status of children within schools and after-school centres. Thirdly, the theory of the CoP is essentially a theory about the social character of learning and thus provides a conceptual framework for examining how social learning takes place through participation and non-participation in a CoP. It is of specific interest to trace the ways in which children organise their social learning in the after-school centre and in the school. Lastly, the purpose of this thesis it to develop knowledge that can contribute to the professional development of the after-school centre as a community of practice. Of course, there are strong indications that many factors affect educational change, such as
policy frameworks, funding, and community pressure (Fullan, 2001). However, the driver of change is to be found within the community of practitioners, at the “individual and small group level” (Fullan, 2001, p. 49). To this purpose, the theory of the CoP is well suited, as it draws out the main elements of practice at the community level.

3.1.3 Children as participants

The generational gap between adults and children feeds the unequal status of children, as they live and act in settings created and developed by adults. Two theoretical perspectives have moulded modern ideas on children as participants. Firstly, researchers inspired by the sociology of childhood have explored the social status of children and argued that traditional developmental approach to childhood has ignored the essential contribution of the children themselves as participants in their lives and societies (James & Prout, 1990). Instead, the sociology of childhood has provided a framework that seeks to understand children as active participants in meaning making and knowledge in the widest sense (see further section 3.9). This position supports the claim that children are active participants in the CoP and provides a theoretical perspective on the status of children in such communities and their experiences.

The second major source of knowledge on children as participants stems from socio-cultural theories in education that emerged from the writings of early 20th century theorists, such as Dewey (1938) and Vygotsky (1978). Vygotsky’s theory of learning and development as culturally, historically and institutionally situated marked a turning point in 20th century educational theory. Vygotsky realised that social relations, and specifically other persons, are vital for the individual development and for the development of identity. He came to the conclusion that “children are capable of doing much more in collective activity” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 88), than they are able to do individually, a fact that had been largely ignored in previous theories on human development and learning.

Rogoff (1990, 2003), inspired by the socio-cultural paradigm, has dedicated her research to exploring how children are participants in reconstructing meaning and knowledge. Rogoff proposes that we look at the concept of ‘guided participation’ which, in her view, is central to understand children’s learning processes (Rogoff, 2003, p. 284). The term ‘guided participation’ goes beyond instructions aimed at teaching and should be understood quite broadly. In fact, “guided participation focuses on the side-by-side or distal arrangements in which children participate in the values, skills, and practices of their communities without intentional instruction or even necessarily being together at the same time. Guided participation is “jointly managed by children and their companions in ways
that facilitate children’s growing skills and participation in the activities of mature members of their community” (Rogoff, 1990, p. viii). Children use a variety of methods to learn to strengthen themselves as participants, as do adults, and often, they initiate and call for guidance to which others may or may not respond.

Thus, the socio-cultural paradigm invites us to look at children as equal participants in the formation of the organisational identity of the after-school centre, and to explore the central role that children themselves play in the community of practice at large.

3.2 The origin of the theory of CoP

The concept of CoP was first introduced in the seminal book *Situated Learning* (1991), written by E. Wenger and J. Lave, which examines how the development of the workplace identity rests on the situated learning processes that take place in a specific social context. Their book became a major source for the workplace-learning field as well as for those studying the concept of ‘learning’. The theory of CoP was further developed by Wenger in his book, *Communities of Practice. Learning, Meaning and Identity* (1998). Lave and Wenger originally set out to understand how newcomers to specific practices acquire the skills and knowledge of the practice and examined how learning processes take place within social settings. Thus, they developed a theory of *situated learning*, where the concept of *legitimate peripheral participation* was the key concept. Although Wenger did not continue to use that concept, it still contains the three important ingredients as to how identity evolves. Firstly, it is through *participation* that individuals engage with others and the world, thus creating meanings and gaining knowledge. Secondly, at the boundaries or *periphery* of the community there is a fertile place for change and learning as newcomers and guests bring fresh perspectives. Those who are located at the periphery of a particular community are partly outsiders and partly insiders. Thus, they are likely to be influenced by other communities, but they may also promote and implement new ideas. What happens is that the “practice then develops as the community constantly renegotiates the relations between its core and its periphery” (Wenger, 1998, p. 118). Thirdly, individuals have to be *legitimized* and recognized as potential participants in the community to become members.

The theory of situated learning seeks to explain how learning takes place in every community in which individuals operate and live. Lave and Wenger (1991, p. 40) stated that “... learning through legitimate peripheral participation takes place no matter which educational form provides a context for learning, or whether there is any intentional form at all”. This observation is especially relevant to the practice of the after-school centre because of its unclear status in the educational system.
Wenger takes the theory of situated learning a step further in his book, *Communities of Practice. Learning, Meaning and Identity* (1998). There, he weaves together the components of a sound theory of practice, learning and identity by examining how communities of practices are sustained and developed at the level of the individual, the community and the organisation. He unravels the modes of learning that take place through engagement, imagination and alignment of practices.

### 3.3 Components of CoP

In social practice people form different kinds of groups and communities that may be formal or informal. Wenger, McDermott, and Snyder (2002, p. 4) state that “groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis,” form a community of practice. Such a community involves, at least to a degree, (a) mutual engagement of participants within a particular *domain* of interest, (b) their forming a specific *community* by taking part in joint enterprises and reciprocal relationships, and (c) their developing a *shared repertoire* of resources, such as meetings, discussions, stories, information sharing etc. (Wenger 1998, p. 73). A family, a classroom, or a school can all be considered communities of practice. An ideal community of practice would be a community where all the abovementioned conditions were met. In reality, conflicts and tensions exist in communities of practices.

#### 3.3.1 The domain

To understand a community of practice we need to look at the ‘glue’ that holds it together. A specific domain is the *raison d’être* of the community, for it “brings people together and guides their learning. It defines the identity of the community, its place in the world, and the value of its achievements to members and to others” (Wenger et al., 2002, p. 31). In the case of organisations, policies, curricula, and guidelines become institutionally public and can cross over boundaries. The domain provides the glue to hold the community together. Although people may have different ideas about what it means to be a teacher, for example, the term has certain meanings and expectations that are shared within the larger culture.

However, a domain of a particular community is always created by individuals operating in specific social contexts. Although organisations, such as schools, are places with highly structured area of domain with regard to public policy, the practice within each school is distinct and relies on the engagement of the practitioners. To understand the domain, it is,
therefore, essential to examine the experiences and perspectives of different groups of participants.

3.3.2 The community

A community of practice starts to develop when a group of people interact regularly over a period of time. CoPs may exist within organisations, and to understand them one needs to look at the community created by the practitioners. Wenger states that

Workers organise their lives with their immediate colleagues and customers to get their jobs done. In doing so, they develop or preserve a sense of themselves they can live with, have some fun, and fulfil the requirements of their employers and clients. No matter what their official job description may be, they create a practice to do what needs to be done. Although workers may be contractually employed by a large institution, in day-to-day practice they work with—and, in a sense, for—a much smaller set of people and communities. (Wenger, 1998, p. 6)

In the case of after-school centres there are several groups of participants which are involved and have a stake in the community: personnel, children, parents, administrators, and politicians. Through constant mutual engagement they create the CoP within the centres and fuel it. However, it is important to note that while arguing that communities of practice are characterized by mutual engagement and a joint enterprise, Wenger does not maintain that such communities are harmonious or positive in any essential sense (Wenger 1998, p. 6). In fact, some CoPs thrive on instability and conflict. For example, children and personnel in after-school centres participate in different ways and, to a certain extent at least, the children seem to be managed by the adults. They participate within the boundaries set by the adults. Research has also shown that recreation personnel often find it hard to accommodate the needs of every child (Petrie et al., 2000), and to maintain discipline can be a challenge. In this sense, children and personnel seem to be engaged in a conflict, with one group trying to maintain control over the other group.

3.3.3 The shared repertoire

A shared repertoire of “routines, words, tools, ways of doing things, stories, gestures, symbols, genres, actions or concepts” (Wenger, 1998, p. 83) is generated through time within the CoP. This collection of tools, artefacts and concepts gradually becomes a part of the practice, and is an important element in the negotiation of meaning, containing both reificative and participative aspects. These artefacts are connected both to
histories of experience (how things have been done in the past) and to the possibilities of renewal (how things could be done in the future):

The fact the actions and artefacts have recognizable histories of interpretation is not exclusively, or even primarily a constraint on possible meanings, but also a resource to be used in the production of new meanings. (Wenger, 1998, p. 83)

3.4 CoP within organisations

An organisation is a “social design directed at practice” (Wenger, 1998, p. 241). Communities of practice may develop within organisations and, in fact, CoP are “the key to an organisation’s competence and to the evolution of that competence” (Ibid). It is, therefore, important, in the case of after-school centres, to examine the relationship between organisational structure and practice within the organisation. Institutional prescriptions may initiate or dissolve communities of practices but they do not necessarily reflect or even support the practice. However, for organisations to sustain and flourish, they rely on practitioners to develop communities of practices that work to strengthen and develop the organisation. Thus, it is important to distinguish between a) the designed organisation and b) the practice (Wenger, 1998, p. 240).

3.4.1 The design

Organisations are designed to work efficiently at reaching certain goals, and they rely on the development of sustainable CoPs within them to produce knowledge and expertise in the subject field. The design provides focus points, documents, guidelines, and other tools that establish boundaries and show the uniqueness of that particular organisation in the community:

Although Communities of practice develop naturally, an appropriate amount of design can be a powerful engine for their evolution, helping members identify the knowledge, events, roles, and activities that will catalyze the community’s growth. The organic nature of communities of practice challenges us to design these elements with a light hand, with an appreciation that the idea is to create liveliness not manufacture a predetermined outcome. (Wenger et al., 2002, p. 63–64)

Local meanings are connected to the global setting through organisational reifications, such as laws, curricula, guidelines, literature, etc. It can be tricky to decide exactly what those organisational reifications should entail because, while a public framework can help sustain and
validate a practice, it may also limit and constrain it. For those reasons, it is important to look carefully at what elements should be institutionalized. Institutional prescriptions and frameworks that fail to connect up with the practitioners or identify with the practice will not be effective.

3.4.2 Practices

A practice is constructed by its participants, who engage in collective activities. In some cases a CoP arises because of an institutional design, such as when an entrepreneur opens a business and hires personnel to manage it. The entrepreneur first develops the main framework and sets the agenda with certain prescriptions before inviting others to join in the process. How well the organisation succeeds will depend upon the community of practice that develops, and whether a strong CoP (or several of them) comes to exist. The capability of the organisation will also rely on the level of identification of the participants with its design and basic practice. Identification can strengthen the practice and provide opportunities for learning and development.

The interplay between an emergent practice and an organisational design affects how practitioners engage in practice. Organisational identification is always in a sense local, experienced through the lenses of a particular social practice. However, without some kind of institutional attributes the practice is likely to stay disconnected and too weak to mediate its knowledge to the global community. A certain amount of design is needed for the organisation to sustain and develop. Without an institutional framework, the after-school centre, as an institution in formation, achieves little validity in the global perspective.

3.4.3 Development of professional identity

Learning within the workplace is a situated activity that involves individuals engaging in practices and exchanging ideas, experiences, tools and histories (Wenger & Lave, 1991). Organisations and institutions usually foster various kinds of communities of practice as individuals participate in various social practices. Sometimes organisational units succeed in fostering sustainable and active communities of practice, and sometimes such practices are dissolved or undermined (see Wenger, 1998, p. 251). We have seen that the professional underpinnings of after-school care vary greatly between societies. In many countries, no specific education is required; but Sweden and Denmark stand out as countries where a profession of recreation pedagogues has developed. Leicht and Fennell (2008) identify a professional body as one:
• Whose work is defined by the application of theoretical and scientific knowledge to tasks tied to core societal values (including health, justice, financial status)

• Where the terms and conditions of work traditionally command considerable autonomy and freedom from oversight, except by peer representatives of the professional occupation, and

• Where claims to exclusive or nearly exclusive control over a task domain are linked to the application of the knowledge imparted to professionals as part of their training

In other countries, such as Iceland, where no specific educational requirements are made of personnel in such services, the personnel seem to form a semi-profession. A semi-profession exists when qualifications include few training hours, light emphasis on a specific knowledge base and where personnel have little autonomy with emphasis placed on administrative control and management by qualified personnel. To support professional development within after-school centres, it is crucial to investigate what shapes the experiences of the personnel and how they define their work and the relationship between the practice and the institutional framework within which it operates. Moreover, we need to look at what sources of identification keep the community together and promote progress.

3.5 Identity

We identify ourselves with the CoPs in which we are involved, although the sources of identification may vary. Individual identification transforms into ideas and actions, which contribute to the organisational identity of the practice. The main elements of identity are, furthermore, reflected in levels of both participation and non-participation. With regard to the study of after-school centres, the concept of identity becomes essential to understanding their roles and their nature. The social ecology of identity (Wenger, 1998) provides a conceptual framework for analyzing various elements of the identity of participants in a CoP. This framework includes an analysis of the modes of belonging, the social ecology of identity, and the ownership of meanings.

3.5.1 Identity through learning

Identity develops through learning, according to Wenger (1998). The concept of learning in the theory of CoPs focuses on social participation as a process of learning and identification. Wenger argues that participation and modes of belonging shape our understanding of ourselves, of others, and of the world. Thus, learning within a CoP is about developing
identities through participation and non-participation. In Figure 3-1 Wenger draws out the main elements of learning:

![Figure 3-1. Components of a social theory of learning (Wenger, 1998, p. 5)](image)

Wenger outlines, in a rather simple way, the complex character of learning: Learning as belonging, learning as becoming, learning as experience, and learning as doing. Again, it may be impossible to segregate these different learning processes in praxis; what we learn to do in practice affects what community we learn to belong to, which makes us identify with being or becoming certain persons, which leads to the creation of certain histories of experiences and meanings. Hence, the circle is the symbol for the holistic connection between different modes of learning.

### 3.5.1.1 Trajectories of learning

Identity is a ‘constant becoming’ and develops through various trajectories of learning. In that sense, identity is not a fixed object. It is temporal, ongoing, and defined with respect to “the interaction of multiple convergent and divergent trajectories” (Wenger, 1998, p. 154). Trajectories of learning within a CoP are not linear and foreseeable, but they reflect a continuous movement towards the future. However, what becomes significant learning is decided with respect to the past as well as to the future. Learning takes place through histories of experiences, past and present. Becoming a full-member within a community of practice can
thus take time, but it is also important to note however that not all trajectories lead to full membership. Such peripheral trajectories can still provide learning experiences that contribute to the formation of identity. In addition, some trajectories are outbound: for example, when children grow up and traverse through their lives, constantly forming new relationships and entering new communities. Trajectories of learning can also link different practices together and exist on the boundaries of communities. Those who operate on the boundaries do the challenging work of brokers, connecting and mediating between communities, as for example personnel who work in both the schools and in the after-school centres. Their job can prove difficult not least because they may experience a conflict of identities and a conflict of interests as they identify with various different practices. Thus, learning in a community of practice is a complex process which is never complete.

3.5.2 The social ecology of identity

Most of our activities involve a “combination of engagement, imagination and alignment” (Wenger, 1998, p. 183), and thus one element should not be considered more important than another in terms of learning. Taken together, engagement, imagination, and alignment reflect modes of belonging. Wenger maintains that identity formations happen through the dual process of identification and negotiability (p. 188). Figure 3-2 gives an overview of the components of the social ecology of identity, as developed by Wenger (1998, p. 190).

Here, Wenger provides an analytical tool for examining organisational identity by comparing how different participants identify through various sources and at different levels. Specific emphasis is placed upon the participatory and non-participatory aspects of our modes of belonging: Do the participants have a collective aim and share a sense of affinity? Do the participants share their experiences and exchange views? Can they bring about change in the practice? This is to mention only a few of the important questions to which this model gives rise. The two major processes, Wenger suggests, are identification and negotiability. Although, those processes may be interrelated and difficult to separate in practice, their distinction makes it possible to recognize the importance of being able to negotiate and have an effect, as well as to be a member of, and identify with, a group of people.

3.5.2.1 Identification

Identification is an essential element of our very being and determines how we understand and define or classify ourselves and how others define or classify us, in term of nationality, gender, age, occupation, attitudes,
etc. Identification is an integral part of our selves and can be both positive and negative, as it shapes both what we are and what we are not (Wenger, 1998, p. 191). It can, for example, be of equal importance to identify with being an academic on the one hand and on the other hand to identify with not being a poet. Furthermore, identification leads to different modes of belonging (or not belonging) to various CoPs. Identification with one’s work is always affected by other roles we have in life, such as our roles as parents, friends, lovers, etc.

![Figure 3-2. The Social Ecology of Identity (Wenger, 1998, p. 190).](image)

We have multiple memberships in multiple CoPs, and for practical reasons (such as time and energy) it may be impossible for us to be full members in all of those CoPs. Therefore, we have different levels of membership in each CoP in which we participate. Previous research tells us that the qualifications of personnel in after-school care vary greatly; and the personnel belong to different groups ranging from untrained workers, to semi-professionals, and
to professionals (EFILWC, 2006). Their backgrounds, previous experiences and social status affect how they engage in, and identify with, their work. Whether they make a long-term commitment to the practice or are simply transient members for a short period of time, influences their level of membership and identification with the work. In all, how we identify ourselves leads to different forms of membership.

### 3.5.2.2 Negotiability

Negotiability is the second process that takes part in shaping our identities. This concept “refers to the ability, facility, and legitimacy to contribute to, take responsibility for, and shape the meanings that matter within a social configuration” (Wenger, 1998, p. 197). Levels of negotiability determine whether the individual is located outside the community, at the periphery, or at the core. Involvement in negotiating shared meanings is reflected in both participation and non-participation. Moreover, negotiability is “defined with respect to social configurations and our positions in them” (Wenger, 1998, p. 197). A teacher is likely to have more say in the formation of a school curriculum than, for example, a parent. This is because the teacher is classified as an expert within the school community and thus has more authority than the parent. However, parents can find ways to be more involved and reach higher status of negotiation by becoming members of the school board or signing up for volunteer work within the school. Without establishing meaningful connections, negotiability diminishes.

### 3.5.3 Modes of belonging

Identity has to do with *modes of belonging*, how we view ourselves as members or non-members of different communities. What it *means* to be a recreation worker or a child within a specific setting varies. Individuals gradually learn how to act and what is important to know within the particular community of practice. Thus they move from the periphery to the core of membership. They develop modes of belonging within those communities of practice that they enter and the roles they identify with. They also bring their own knowledge and experience to the community and take part in producing the collective identity of that community.

Modes of belonging are reflected in engagement, imagination and alignment:

- **a)** engagement—through our direct experiences of the world, the ways we engage with others, and the ways these relationships reflect who we are.

- **b)** imagination—through our images of the world, both personal and collective, that locate us in various contexts.
c) Alignment—through our power to direct energy, our own and that of others (Wenger, 1998, p. 189).

Engagement within after-school centres is about what we do, how and why. It involves relationships, their sustainability and their endings, and the ways in which practices are organised. It reflects who is allowed to participate and who is not.

Imagination, however, allows us to respond to situations, people, or artefacts that belong to other communities that we might not know. Imagination allows us to deliberate on “new images of the world and ourselves” (Wenger, 1998, p. 176). It invites possibilities for change and development. Firstly, imagination allows us to see artefacts in a new way. The location of after-school centres in school buildings requires, for example, that recreation personnel look at alternate ways to use school facilities. Teachers, on the other hand, might look at the activities in the after-school centre and see new ways to develop their work for their students. Secondly, imagination can ground our source of belonging and the way we view ourselves and others. Sometimes people feel that they belong to certain groups, such as viewers of particular TV shows (“House”, for instance), without in fact any mutual engagement of practice taking place. However, it is questionable whether people who never interact but sit on sofas in separate buildings could constitute a community of practice. If, however, they would organise meetings, set up a website or prepare conferences together, a community of practice might form. Imagination cannot be the sole source of identification.

Alignment refers to the ways in which individuals place themselves and organise their activities and energy. We can, for example, align ourselves as specialists within a particular field or as enthusiastic football fans. We can align ourselves within after-school centres as those who assume responsibility or as those who simply do what they are told. Alignment is important for those who wish to participate in politics, as it calls for individuals to take a stance on every issue.

The social ecology of identity provides a framework to analyse the identities of various groups that participate in the after-school centre.

3.5.4 Participation and non-participation

How does one move from being an outsider to being an insider with knowledge and tools for making change happen within a CoP? The concepts of participation and non-participation are vital to understanding how individuals adapt and are accepted (or not) into a community of practice. This is because “[w]e not only produce our identities through the practices we engage in, but we also define ourselves through practices we do not engage
in” (Wenger, 1998, p. 164). Non-participation, as well as participation, can be a source of our identity. As students, we do not spend time in the teachers' lounge and are expected not to participate in a variety of activities in the school that are reserved for teachers and staff. Moreover, non-participation in some areas allows for participation in other areas: in this sense, non-participation is not necessarily a negative term.

Participation is an active process “which is both personal and social. It is a complex process which combines doing, talking, thinking, feeling and belonging. It involves our whole person, including our bodies, minds, emotions, and social relations” (Wenger, 1998, p. 56). Participation always involves mutual recognition, as “participants shape each other’s experiences of meaning” (ibid). This process does not intrinsically entail mutual respect or equality, simply that individuals engage in a process of negotiation.

Non-participation is an integral part of our lives, as we cannot possibly identify with every possible social context we come across in our lives. Even within a CoP, non-participation is an integral part of the processes that take place. Sometimes, non-participation is a prerequisite to participation, as when newcomers enter a CoP. To start with, a newcomer usually spends time in observing and follows the advice of old-timers or supervisors. As time goes on, the newcomer starts to rely on his own inclinations and new-found knowledge of how things work within the CoP and how he can make things happen. He would, therefore, start to participate more actively as he gains experience within the CoP.

3.5.5 Ownership of meanings

It is important to look at the ownership of meanings, that is, to consider where meanings are produced and who produces them. Wenger proposes that we acknowledge that

a) meanings have various degrees of currency

b) participants can have various degrees of control over the meanings that a community produces and thus differential abilities to make use of them and modify them

c) the negotiation of meaning involves bids for ownership, so that the social nature of meaning includes its contestable character as an inherent feature (Wenger, 1998, p. 200).

Meanings are produced within and between constellations of communities as a community of practice cannot operate in isolation from other CoPs. Wenger states that, in fact, practice “is about meaning as an experience of everyday life” (Wenger, 1998, p. 52). Meaning is situated in the process of negotiations
between individuals and defines how we relate to the world. People negotiate meanings through *participation* in CoPs. Objects do not negotiate meanings, but artefacts of certain practices are *reifications* of meanings. Reifications can be objects, documents, forms, and instruments used in CoPs, that reiterate certain meanings and ideas found in the CoPs.

Figure 3-3 shows how the negotiation of meaning takes place through the convergence of participation and reification.

![Diagram of participation and reification](image)

**Figure 3-3. The duality of participation and reification (Wenger, 1998, p. 63)**

Here, Wenger outlines how our experiences of the world, through participation and reification, enable us to negotiate meaning. This description of the elements that construct the negotiation of meanings has direct relevance to the ownership of meanings, previously described in the two right columns in Figure 3-2. Participation and reification are two sides of the same coin, so to speak, that produces meanings. Our ways of living in the world, mutual engagements, and memberships in CoPs are sources of experiences and histories of meaning. However, the artefacts and projections that are produced and experienced are reifications of certain meanings. In the case of after-school centres, a handbook for the personnel or a written agreement with the school reflect certain ideas and meanings that may or may not be shared by all participants. The two-fold process of participation and reification is essential, as each element makes up for what the other is missing. If the main sources of meaning are tied to instrumental artefacts, little room is left for active participation in the creation of meaning. If the main sources of meaning are left unreified,
there is not enough opportunity for “shared experience and interactive negotiation” (Wenger, 1998, p. 65). Thus, participation and reifications are equally important to enable the negotiations of meaning.

3.6 Practice as care, learning and leisure

Research reveals that the practices within after-school centres shift between the provision of care, learning opportunities and leisure activities (see section 2.7). The understandings about the practices are negotiated. Hence, care, learning and leisure are essential components of the practice within after-school centres. This section explores the concepts of care, learning and leisure as they have been defined and discussed by various theorists.

3.6.1 The concept of care

Care has historically been linked to the private sphere of the home, and even more often, to the act of motherhood and the provision of care of mothers to their families. Feminists have argued that mothers, and women in general, have assumed the caring responsibility for children, for the elderly and generally for those in need (Held, 2006). Changes to the social status of the family, and more importantly, the social status of women, has led to a change in the arrangement of care in society. In order to continue to explore the care provided in after-school centres, it is important to explore divergent understandings of the concept of care.

The concept of care has been discussed in different fields of study, such as psychology, ethics and education as well as more recently in social and legal theories. Care has been linked to the feelings of empathy and love towards people (Noddings, 2002), and it has also been defined as the act of providing services to individuals in need of care (Tronto, 1993). Hence, care can be understood both as practice and as value (Held, 2006).

3.6.1.1 Care as practice

The provision of care is intrinsic to society as care is one of the basic human needs (Daly & Standing, 2001, p. 3). Care work has through the centuries been provided by individuals, generally women, in their roles as mothers, housewives, daughters, neighbours and friends. Traditionally, the provision of care has been linked to private sphere, of family and social lives of individuals. However, social changes in Western societies transformed the status of the family, not least the social status of women and resulted in a silent, yet persistent, revolution in the provision of care for children, for the elderly, as well as for the sick, poor or otherwise disadvantaged persons. It is, in fact, possible to talk about the relocation of care as it has moved from the private sphere, to public, or at least semi-
public, spheres (Sevenhuijsen, 2003). Today, it is generally recognized that providing care to those in need is, at least partially, a public good which the government should take part in organising (Held, 2006).

Care as practice is, thus, the act of providing care to a person in need. From this perspective the care can be provided without a specific emotional bond between the carer and the recipient of care (Bubeck, 1995, in Held, 2006). The practice of care involves face-to-face interaction between the caregiver and the person in need and can be provided in a formal or informal context. However, others have argued that it is difficult to imagine the act of care without the caregiver responding to the emotional needs of the person in need. The attitudes of the carer are, for example, very important according to Nel Noodings (2002). The caregiver needs to be receptive and understanding so that the act of care can be adjusted to the needs and feelings of the recipient of care. The provision of care without empathy or understanding can thus be considered cold and distant. In fact, it is clear that there is more to care than just provision of a particular service.

3.6.1.2 Care as value

Care has also been defined as a value of its own, which links to our responsibilities and qualities as moral beings. Gilligan (1982) researched the moral thoughts and experiences of women and came to the conclusion that women weave an ethics of care on which they build their ethical judgments of right and wrong. According to Gilligan, women tend to rationalise their ethical choices differently than men. Women define ethical decisions about trust, honesty, and equity according to how their decisions might affect the persons with whom they interact and are responsible for. Men, Gilligan argued, tend to rationalize ethical decisions with reference to higher moral codes of justice, instead of contextualizing their decisions. Her book *In a different voice. Psychological theory and women’s development* raised many questions on the nature of ethics and of gender divisions. Although it is beyond the scope of this thesis to address those complex issues, the aftermath of Gilligan’s book is relevant to our understanding of care. Moral philosophers, particularly feminist moral philosophers, recognized the need for an ethics of care (Baier, 1993).

Sevenhuijsen argues that “the relocation of care enables a number of the values of the ethic of care to be transferred to the public sphere” (Sevenhuijsen, 2003, p. 182). Sevenhuijsen identifies the four main values of ethic of care as: Attentiveness (to care about), responsibility (to take care), competence (to give care) and responsiveness (to receive care). She maintains that the ethics of care needs to be taken into account in social policy and that it has to be recognized in public policy that “everyone needs care and commitment in the course of their lives, though this may
differ in nature and degree” (Sevenhuijsen, 2003, p. 183). Hence, care is an important moral and social value which cannot be overlooked in social practices, including educational organisations.

3.6.1.3 Care and education

The literature on after-school centres showed that governments are facing the challenging work of bringing care and education together. Generally, care is associated with social welfare and support to disadvantaged children and families, while education is connected with formal learning in compulsory schools. Bennett (2003) has argued that the dichotomy between care and education has delayed significant investment in early education services, including after-school care. The ideology of early education has two major strands: one has its roots in the social and welfare ideals of day-care and the other strand developed from the educational visions of the kindergarten (Bennett, 2003; Jónasson, 2006). Thus, the ideals of care on the one hand and education on the other, has shaped the visions and goals of early education services in various ways. Moreover, in most countries day-care institutions adhere under social and welfare ministry while pre-schools belong to the educational ministry (Bennett, 2003). This organisational difference creates a gap which may be difficult to overstep in practice. In the case of Iceland, pre-schools moved under the Educational Ministry in 1995 and have formally been declared the first stage of school, although not compulsory.

However, there is “real opposition within the education sector to taking on responsibility for the non-academic care of young children” (Bennett, 2003, p. 26). Teachers are reluctant to take on the organisation of after-school care. Care is thus generally defined as non-educational practice by teachers and administrators. The dichotomy of care and education traces back to traditional understandings of the social status of the family, of gender roles, of child-rearing, and of education. Specifically, the traditional understanding of learning reflected in the dichotomy of care and education deserves further scrutiny.

3.6.2 The concept of learning

Learning plays an important role within the CoP theoretical framework. For the purpose of this thesis the notion of learning is important to understand how participants, adults and children, develop their identities as well as learn in various ways during their time within the after-school centre. Learning within the community takes place through participation in a community of practice, when individuals negotiate meanings which mould their identities. However, the concept ‘learning’ has a diverse scope in the academic literature as it is rooted in different theoretical approaches, e.g. the behavioural approach, the cognitive approach and the constructivist—or the
socio-constructivist orientations (Biggs, 1993; Long, Woode, Littleton, Passenger & Sheehy, 2011). The classifications of different canons do not always agree but there is considerable overlap between these overarching approaches. The theoretical emphasis is also quite different when the discussion centres on development or learning of young children as opposed to adults. In the former case the emphasis is often on the contributions of Piaget and Vygotsky (1978), in the latter on the humanist, the experiential or the transformative (essentially constructivist) approaches (Bélanger, 2011). After-school centres are learning environments both for the children and for the adults and thus insights from both perspectives would enlighten the discourse on the practice being investigated.

The educational discourse has for a long time centred on schools, where 'learning' is often used more or less synonymously with the term ‘teaching’ (Illeris, 2007, p. 3). In that light, it can be seen that even when the learning discourse is opened up, its focus is nevertheless on school-based learning, see e.g. range of chapters in Sawyer (2006). For those reasons, Lave and Wenger (1991) consciously avoided the subject of schooling when developing their theory of situated learning. They explain that “the organisation of schooling as an educational form is predicated on claims that knowledge can be decontextualized, and yet schools themselves as social institutions and as places of learning constitute very specific contexts” (p. 40). This view is reinforced by Tuomi-Gröhn and Engeström (2003) who discuss the limitations of the traditional school-based approaches. This problem of treating learning as synonymous with schooling has lead a number of authors, especially those concerned with adult learning, out of school learning, or learning on the job, to emphasize the variety of settings in which learning can take place. In the present context, out-of-school learning applies both to the children and to the adults developing their skills and identities in the after-school setting. Thus, this section explores the emerging definitions of formal and informal learning with regard to the practices in after-school centres.

3.6.2.1 Formal learning

Formal learning is generally connected with learning that takes place within the structured educational system. Formal learning, broadly defined, has one or more of the following characteristics:

- A prescribed learning framework
- An organised learning event or package
- The presence of a designated teacher or trainer
- The award of a qualification or credit
- The external specification of outcomes (Eraut, 2000, p. 114)
Most of these characteristics apply to the primary school system in Iceland. According to the quoted context, formal learning has to do with the distribution of knowledge from the teachers to the student. It focuses on how the student acquires the skills and knowledge which have been deemed appropriate by the educational system. For example, a national curriculum sets the agenda for the compulsory schooling and structures the works of both the teacher and the student. However, in the case of after-school centres, there is increasing demand that authorities set a prescribed learning framework for such services. In most countries, the presence of a designated teacher or personnel is deemed necessary, although the credentials of such personnel vary.

3.6.2.2 Informal learning

Informal learning is most often associated with learning that offers “greater flexibility and freedom for learners” (Eraut, 2003, p. 247). Informal learning may be largely invisible and even learners may be unaware of their learning. Several characteristics on informal learning have been defined:

- No teacher involved
- Learner control
- Learning through daily life
- Learning is context specific
- No assessment (see Colley, Hodkinson & Malcolm, 2002)

This criteria may apply to varying degrees to informal learning settings, and some may even apply to settings that are largely formal, such as in schools that emphasize student autonomy, social curriculum and rely less on formal assessment of academic progress. Nordic researchers have found that the learning that takes place in after-school centres is mostly informal (Johanson & Ljusberg, 2004; Hviid, 1999). However, when explored further, the lines between formal and informal learning become blurred. In formal settings, informal learning may occur and vice versa (Colley, Hodkinson & Malcolm, 2002). In the case of the after-school centres, there are characteristics of both formal and informal learning processes. Bjerresgaard, Olesen and Sörensen (2009) state that children can learn different things in after-school centres and that the learning processes can be both formal and informal. Their study of the practices in three Danish after-school centres led them to conclude that within the after-school centre children could (a) learn to be, (b) learn new skills, and (c) learn to know (Bjerresgaard, Olesen & Sörensen, 2009, p. 73). These three types of learning can take place through both informal and formal
processes, which can be both adult- or child-initiated (Bjerresgaard, Olesen & Sörensen, 2009). However, the possibilities of learning are shaped by the resources for learning, such as the pedagogy, facilities, structure, values, time, economy, and competence of personnel (Bjerresgaard, Olesen & Sörensen, 2009, p. 75). Learning in after-school centres can, therefore, involve different types of learning, and the resources for learning are important.

3.6.2.3 Illeris’ theory of learning

Illeris’ theory of learning (2007) strives to explain how learning takes place in both formal as well as informal settings. Illeris is among those theorists who attempt to merge the different theoretical and practical perspectives from the vantage points of school learning, adult education generally and work based learning in particular. He defines learning as “any process that in a living organism leads to permanent capacity change and which is not solely due to biological maturation or ageing” (2007, p. 3). This definition applies equally to formal and informal settings as it is independent of any of the criteria mentioned above. Learning, according to Illeris, has three-dimensional processes, as illustrated in Figure 3-4, emphasizing the interaction between the dynamics of learning, content and the social context.

![Figure 3-4. Modes of learning according to Illeris (2007)](image.png)

Illeris’ theory captures both the *intrinsic* (internal to the individual) and the *external* elements of learning (features of the social surroundings). In every learning process, there is some kind of *content*, whether it is ability, insight or understanding, from which the learner will develop meaning. The psychological acquisition of such content is always affected by the learning dynamic: the incentive of the individual to learn. Motivation, emotion, and volition are the three signal words Illeris refers to in this
connection (Illeris, 2007, p. 26). Furthermore, Illeris emphasizes the physical as well as the mental processes of learning. He takes an example of a child who is learning division in school. Firstly, the child’s brain needs to have developed sufficiently to sustain the required kind of cognitive thinking. Secondly, feelings of hunger, tiredness, sorrow, or any kind of mental imbalance may obstruct the learning process. Thirdly, young children may feel the urge to ‘physicalise’ the learning, such as by counting on their fingers. Fourthly, success or failure in solving an assignment can influence the attitude of the learner (Illeris, 2007, p. 11). Illeris’ account of learning, thus, explains why learning processes can be different for different learners, as learning is always contextual and depends upon the individual’s prerequisites for learning.

Modern theories of learning apply to both formal and informal learning as well as to the learning that takes place in every day life (Wenger, 1998; Illeris, 2007). While Illeris focuses on the individual and his reciprocal relationship with the context, Wenger’s conceptual framework is first and foremost aimed at exploring how social learning processes mould the ecology of identities found within practice. Wenger’s theory helps us to understand that children, as well as adults, continue to construct knowledge and develop their instincts and capabilities in the informal after-school setting as well as in the formal school setting.

### 3.6.3 The concept of leisure

In Denmark and Sweden after-school centres have traditionally been referred to as ‘leisure-time centres’ (d. fritidshjem, s. fritidshem). Behind that phrasing lies the idea that after-school service should be viewed as a part of children’s leisure time, not as a part of their obligatory learning in school. Leisure-time pedagogy as developed in the Nordic countries is strongly rooted in the ideology of social pedagogy (see section 2.3.1).

Leisure is a concept that has a relatively short history. Generally, leisure is contrasted with work. Without work there would be no leisure! Within the traditional hunter-gatherer communities, separation between work and other activities was unclear (Hunnicutt, 2006). However, in modern society there is a clear distinction between work and leisure. Today, there is a whole culture of recreation and leisure activities aimed at children, youth and adults. Providing recreation has become part of the professional sector, with increasing public and private investment (Hunnicutt, 2006). Specific attention is given to the importance of recreational activities of children and youths and how these activities relate to other factors, such as academic progress, well-being, health, and delinquency. The system of schooling and the general removal of children from the public sphere of work has created opportunities for the provision of organised leisure activities. Furthermore, the discourse of the ‘dangerous’
urban environment has also called for a system that provides youth and children with safe places in which they can spend their leisure time. Additionally, the literature supporting the need for after-school service has stressed the dangers (or at least the unhealthiness) of children being at home alone (Strandell, 2008).

### 3.6.3.1 Definitions of leisure

Certain themes appear regularly in the literature of leisure, such as *free time, fun and being with friends* (Haglund & Anderson, 2009). The concept ‘leisure’ can convey different meanings when defined from the point of view of the individual (the subjective perspective), on the one hand, and that of society (the normative perspective), on the other. Haglund and Anderson (2009) introduced five different concepts of leisure and connected them to different aims of after-school centres. For clarity their analysis is described in Table 3-1, below.

#### Table 3-1. Definitions of Leisure

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Definitions of ‘leisure’</th>
<th>Purpose of after-school centres</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>A quantitative amount of time</em> characterized by <em>freedom from duties</em>, thus a time where the individual may experience a certain “state of mind”, doing what one wants to be doing.</td>
<td>With regard to after-school centres, the most important thing would be that the children experience freedom to choose activities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Residual time</em> as opposed to coerced time of work, learning and other practical assignments.</td>
<td>In this sense, after-school centres are seen as stations that take care of children between home and school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leisure can be understood as <em>time for activities</em> carried out for their own sake, mostly because they are fun.</td>
<td>After-school centres viewed in this light should offer activities that the children experience as fun and playful.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leisure can be seen as <em>functional time</em>, providing possibility for learning experiences beneficial for both the individual and society.</td>
<td>After-school programs, which formerly were seen as providing care and supervision, now become tools to facilitate learning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leisure can be seen from a <em>holistic perspective</em>, rather than as a segment of time. Participation is seen: “as a part of a whole, in which the individual explores his or her capabilities, and seeks ‘self-actualization’ in the sense of being creative, involved, expressive, and fully alive” (Kraus, 1984, p. 46, quoted in Haglund and Anderson, 2004, p. 125).</td>
<td>After-school centres and schools, seen from the holistic perspective of leisure, interact with, and influence, each other, both positively and negatively.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.6.3.2 Leisure and learning

Interestingly, the Greek word for leisure ‘σχολή’ is actually the etymological source of the modern English word ‘school’, and similar words in other languages (Hunnicutt, 2006). For Aristotle, leisure was the time that each individual could spend developing his own abilities, to educate himself. Thus, if one traces this understanding historically, learning and leisure are inter-connected. Even though the modern concept of leisure came into being in the 18th century following the development of industrial society, people for centuries have had free time which has been used for games, festivals, trips, and personal activities (Burke, 1995). People have engaged in practices in their free time that they believe enrich their lives and help to develop their personal capacities.

Haglund and Anderson (2009) compared after-school programs in the USA and leisure-time centres in Sweden and argue that in both countries the care provided tends to be rationalized within governmental policy by reference to learning rather than leisure. The importance of leisure has been undermined as emphasis is increasingly placed upon supporting learning skills and academic progress. Learning in schools, as Haglund and Anderson point out, is connected to “… formal learning while learning outside school is regarded as informal learning” (p. 116). Informal learning is often connected with un-structured activities, and the main reason for such activities is often to have fun, not to learn (Carlgreen, 1999, quoted in Haglund & Anderson, 2009).

Haglund and Anderson (2009) conclude that “leisure and learning should not be mutually exclusive in after-school programs and leisure-time centres” (2009, p. 127). In fact, from the holistic point of view, learning and leisure can be seen as interwoven. This perspective calls for a view of learning from both the personal and the organisational perspective. However, there is a danger that “… the subjective perspective and the normative functional perspective might come into a conflict” (p. 127). Emphasis on supporting academic progress as well as social development can of course benefit society, parents and children. At the same time, there is a risk that the elements of leisure: the free-time, the fun, and the importance of being with friends, will wither away. The normative perspective would then override the subjective perspective and diminish the experience of leisure.

In conclusion, the Nordic pedagogic model of the after-school centres has been established on the basis of providing leisure opportunities. Leisure is generally connected with concepts such as ‘free time’, fun, and being with friends. From the traditional point of view such unstructured activities do not support learning, at least not directly. However, researchers have argued that leisure and learning are intrinsically linked.
and should both be seen as contributing to the holistic development of individuals. How to import and relate the concept of leisure into the educational system as after-school service increasingly becomes a part of the school remains to be seen.

3.7 Social landscape of communities

Every community of practice is structured within a social landscape of communities. In fact, no CoP can be considered “in isolation from the rest of the world, or understood independently of other practices” (Wenger, 1998, p. 103). The after-school centre is closely connected to the school as well as other settings where children spend their lives. Wenger uses the concepts of boundaries, boundary practices, boundary objects, overlaps, peripheries, and brokering to explore the connections and dis-connections between different communities of practice. This section discusses those concepts and the apparent conflicts between practices of care, learning and leisure in the educational landscape.

3.7.1 Boundaries and brokering

A community of practice seeks to separate itself from other practices by establishing a boundary and at the same time it seeks to connect with other practices and to become recognized within a constellation of practices (Wenger, 1998). Separate CoPs can develop shared meanings and constant connections through a three-dimensional practice of a) engaging in joint enterprises, b) maintaining connections and c) building shared repertoires (see section 3.3). An organisation can, in fact, be composed of multiple CoPs that connect in various ways. Furthermore, these communities of practice can be linked both within and between organisations. Wenger identified three kinds of connections between communities: Boundary practices, overlaps, and peripheries (see Wenger, 1998, p. 114). Furthermore, individuals do brokering when they import and export meanings and artefacts from one CoP to another.

Boundaries refer to the edges of community of practice where distinction is made between practices that belong to the community and practices that do not belong (Wenger, 1998). The boundary is a venue where negotiation takes place and where changes are initiated. Wenger and Lave used the concept of ‘periphery’ to explain the nature of the boundary (Lave & Wenger, 1991). All new members of the community enter through the periphery before they can become full members, and some might even continue to stay at the periphery. The peripherality can “be a position where access to practice is possible, but it can also be a position where outsiders are kept from moving further inward” (Wenger,
In the case of the after-school centres it seems as if the tension evidenced between school-directed practices of teachers and the more socio-directed practices of pedagogues (see section 2.4.5) exemplify the boundaries between school and after-school centre.

**Boundary practices** become established when collective brokering between two (or more) CoPs becomes an integral part of practice. This is common in organisations through the establishment of cross-functional teams, such as school boards, that seek to resolve conflicts and address shared issues. The danger is that such a boundary practice becomes a practice of its own, isolated from the core community. An example of this would be if politicians organised a committee to strengthen the connections between schools and after-school centres but failed to include people that were full participants in one or the other community and hindered the possibilities for transferring experience and tools between the two communities.

**Boundary objects** are tools, artefacts, or concepts that are used by more than one CoP (Wenger, 1998). Boundary objects can either connect or disconnect practices, as members have different perspectives on their function and meaning. They carry with them a nexus of perspectives that individuals may or may not identify with (Wenger, 1998, p. 107). Boundary objects are important when practices need to be coordinated, as do schools and after-school centres. In the case of the after-school centres, there are a number of boundary objects—including premises, classrooms, arrangement of furniture, the school play-ground, organisational documents, and rules—that become boundary objects that either connect or disconnect the two practices.

**Overlaps** between CoPs happen when two (or more) CoPs share responsibilities for activities or for specific objectives. An example would be if a school organised help with homework in after-school hours that teachers would provide, but where the personnel in the after-school centre would at the same time be responsible for the children in those same hours.

**Peripheries** are the third venue for practice-based connections and involve communities opening up for outsiders without the possibility of the outsiders becoming full members. In fact, according to Wenger, communities of practice thrive on offering different levels of membership, from remote peripheral observation to full membership participation.

**Brokering** between CoPs takes place when individuals have membership to various CoPs (Wenger, 1998). Brokers connect CoPs by importing and exporting meanings, ideas, and experiences between practices. For example, if a school teacher would be hired in an after-school centre, it is very likely that he would incorporate his professional
knowledge and previous experience in his work in the after-school hours. Knowledge is constantly being negotiated between different communities of practice. Such knowledge can be explicit or tacit, and is often associated with competence in practice. Practitioners are not always aware of how they ‘know’ something. Although knowledge is always local, as it is created through practice, it is also global because it “depends also on the orientation of these practices within global constellations” (Wenger, 1998, p. 141). Brokers are important for organisations to make new connections, to enable coordination, and to translate knowledge between practices. Although every individual does brokering as he shifts between practices, often certain members choose to specialise in brokering, and put effort in connecting and negotiating different perspectives.

3.7.2 The educational landscape

Within educational organisations, different communities of practice are built on different discourses of care, learning and leisure with regard to work with children. The literature review on after-school centres revealed that the practices of care, learning and leisure can be recognized as essential parts of the after-school centres. Sometimes these practices are overlapping but at other times they appear to be conflicting, as when the emphasis on learning may override and exclude emphasis on care (Garey, 2002).

Evidence from previous research shows that after-school centres are connected to schools in various ways through boundary practices, overlaps, and peripheral connections. Furthermore, the way personnel and children engage in practice, maintain connections, and develop shared repertoires—thereby building a community of practice—affects their possibilities for connecting to other communities, such as the school or the home. The organisational framework (design) provides a platform, a venue for negotiations to take place between communities. Furthermore, the organisational design emphasizes the values and goals of the practice through reifications. Boundary objects are, for example, one sort of reification which can connect practices to the global community and to other constellations of practice.

The discourse of schooling is generally associated with learning as ‘teaching’ and with formal learning (Rogoff, 2003; Illeris, 2007). This traditional perception of learning permeates the understanding of learning within the educational discourse, even though theorists such as Illeris have argued that learning can take place everywhere and even without intentionality. The provision of care is generally considered outside the realm of the school, and is instead linked to day-care institutions and homes. But the boundaries are becoming more unclear. Leisure, which historically has been related to the free-time of individuals, is increasingly institutionalised, for
example, through the establishment of after-school centres. It becomes, thus, important to understand how these different educational organisations and the practices within them are connected (or disconnected).

3.8 Critique of the theory of CoP

Wenger’s theory of communities of practice has several drawbacks. This section deals with four lines of critique: Firstly, the concept of a ‘community of practice’ is, in some ways, unclear; secondly, the tendency to avoid the issue of power; thirdly, the neglect of ethical values; and fourthly, the undervaluing of the individual.

Firstly, the concept of a ‘community of practice’ is in many ways unclear. Even though Wenger’s elaborations of the concept of a community of practice responded to a growing need to explore the characteristics of workplace learning, and learning in social practices, a clear definition of the concept is not provided in Wenger’s book (Murillo, 2011). Hence, the reader is allowed considerable discretion when deciding which kind of social practice can be categorised as a community of practice. For the purpose of this thesis, the practice within after-school centre is considered a community of practice. However, within the centre, there may in fact be separate communities, for example, the community of the children versus the community of the personnel.

Wenger does not address issues of social injustice or the power struggles inherent in social reality (Murillo, 2011). For example, he does not address the difference between children and adults as participants in CoPs. Although Wenger argues that the ownership of meaning is connected to issues of power, he does not explore such connections in any substantial way. He does not pay special attention to the role of leaders and administrators, nor the inhibitory power of their status. His theory simply describes how some meanings gain more validity than others and create, in that way, marginalization of meanings (and of individuals or groups of individuals). Wenger’s theory of CoPs does not examine the power embedded in certain discourses or social structures but strives to remain ‘value-free’ in that respect. Here, his theory of CoPs needs further elaboration.

Thirdly, the theory of CoPs steers clear of any references to ethical values such as care, love, justice, or equality that are fundamental aspects of human nature and relate to our ways of being together. Wenger does not explore the moral values that affect and guide human behaviour and social interactions. Instead, his theory of CoPs can be seen as a technical abstraction of the ways in which communities of practice thrive, regardless of whether their domains of interest would be the organisation
of terrorist activities or working against hunger in the third world. Although his theory promotes cooperation and openness to learning, it still remains value-free with respect to the content of the activities. In this sense, Wenger’s theory does not give a very accurate picture of the world of ethical relationships that human beings weave together. Moral values, such as integrity and justice, are cornerstones of human society, but Wenger never directly examines their roles in communities of practice, even though he recognizes that CoPs always rely on shared notions of values.

Fourthly, Wenger’s theory of communities of practice has been criticized for not paying enough attention to the individual, even though it focuses on identity (Hodkinson & Hodkinson, 2004). This lack of focus on the individual has two major ramifications. Firstly, Wenger acknowledges that individuals are participants in numerous CoPs. However, there is little to be found in Wenger’s theory that deals with the tension created when individuals are struggling with levels of identity and loyalty to numerous CoPs. The theory of the CoP does not consider the nature of the self that generates internal conflicts in every individual. Membership identities are based on the structures and negotiations within a variety of CoPs and not simply in one practice. In this respect, the theory of CoPs does not provide material for understanding the individual process of identification.

Nevertheless, Wenger’s theory of the CoP introduces a framework for examining how the organisational identity of the after-school centre is constructed through the contributions of various participants and stakeholders. Although the concept of CoP may be unclear, and there are some problems with individuating CoPs, the theory is useful to shed light on the informal character of the communities in the after-school centre. And even though Wenger does not discuss the ethical aspects of daily practice, his theory promotes basic values of social interaction, such as cooperation and openness to learning. Furthermore, it has to be kept in mind that Wenger’s main interest is not to come up with a theory that analyzes the political power embedded in social institutions. He does not deny the importance of the “broader political and economic issues” (Wenger, 1998, p. 189), but his intentions are to show how issues of power are embedded in processes of negotiation and participation. Lastly, Wenger’s theory of CoP is meant to analyze communities of practice from the perspective of the social sciences—not of psychology or of ethics. To learn about individual identity processes and the moral development, one needs to turn to other accounts.

The theory of CoPs sets out to examine how learning processes take place within communities of practices. It explores how learning is facilitated when individuals engage in practices, share experiences, tools
and stories, and develop new ways to solve the tasks at hand. It is, therefore, a good tool for understanding organisations and institutions, especially educational institutions. To be able to explore the unequal power between children and adults, the values in work with children and the experiences of the individual child, the sociology of childhood brings in perspectives that the theory of CoP is lacking.

### 3.9 Images of childhood

The social landscape is shaped by current theory and practice. After-school centres are places specifically designed to oversee children while their parents are at work. In fact, the majority of those participating in the daily practice of after-school centres are children. Wenger’s theory of CoPs is not specifically directed at educational practices or work with children. Nevertheless, the theory of the CoP suits the task of unravelling the ways in which children participate (or do not participate) in creating the organisational identity of the after-school centre. A picture of the organisational identity of the after-school centre would be very incomplete were the views of children and their perceptions of the practice not taken into account. The following section examines the theories of the sociology of childhood (James & Prout, 1990) to help us position children as participants in CoPs.

In order to develop an organisational identity for after-school centres we have to examine the status of children in modern society and reflect upon our views of childhood. This section discusses important themes of the sociology of childhood, children as social actors, the institutionalization of childhood, and schooling.

#### 3.9.1 Children as social actors

Traditional social theory emphasized that children needed adult control and structure to develop appropriate habits and behaviour. In contrast, the sociology of children builds on the idea of children as agents in their own lives who take active part in their own education. The validity of meaning has traditionally been associated with the adult world, which has placed children on the periphery of society and even obscured their experiences and views. During the 20th century, the lives of children were managed through public schooling, scientific research and social theories. Children have become the objects of developmental, educational, and social research, thus creating a framework of childhood where developmentalism and socialisation theories have been dominant (Woodhead & Faulkner, 2008). The traditional developmental framework builds on ideas of children as vulnerable and immature individuals who need guidance. Furthermore, development is generally defined as a
universal phase in which children move from one stage to the next on their way to adulthood. However, critical psychology has in recent years pointed to the importance of the social context of development and that "... the personal processes of development must be placed in the personal life of a subject ..." (Højholt, 2008, p. 12). Højholt (2008) states that children take part in a social interplay with other important actors (peers, parents and professionals); and together they take part in the making of the social structure.

In the last decades of the 20th century an increased awareness of the rights of children and their social status led to a new way of thinking about children and childhood, a new sociology of childhood. Through the centuries, children have been defined as more ‘natural’ than adults, more ‘irrational’, more ‘vulnerable’ and as ‘becomings’ instead of ‘beings’ (James & Prout, 1990). Childhood researchers, on the other hand, emphasize children as active social participants who can be rational and who should be regarded as a contributing members of society, not as ‘future’ participants (James & Prout, 1990; Corsaro, 1997; Cohen et al., 2004). Thus, the sociology of childhood suggests that children as a group are generally neglected as active participants in society. Traditional social and psychological theory has overlooked the importance of the meanings and histories of knowledge that children produce through their participation in various CoPs. As a group, children have been marginalized and their voices have been largely unnoticed.

One of the essential contributions of the sociology of childhood is the awareness that children are in fact social actors who are specialists in their own lives and possess knowledge that adults do not possess. Thus, to understand the practices in which children participate it is important to include their perspectives in both practice and research. Furthermore, the international community has recognized children’s rights to be heard and valued (United Nations Convention of children’s rights, 1989). The U.N. Convention offers a vision of the child as an individual and as a member of a family and a community, with rights and responsibilities appropriate to his or her age and stage of development. Although the Convention in some ways builds on the idea of the vulnerable child that needs protection it also highlights that children are subjects in their own right. Article 12 states that “… States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.”

The second major contribution of the sociology of childhood is the acknowledgement that the child is not a fixed entity that can be clarified and understood once and for all. Childhood can have multiple meanings in a controversial and ever-changing world. Thus, childhood is, at least in
part, socially and culturally constructed (James & Prout, 1990). Researchers within the sociology of childhood have focused on uncovering the apparent dichotomy of children’s lives, as some live in underdeveloped countries and others in affluent Western societies. While taking the stance that all children should be entitled to equivalent human rights, it is important to look at the lives of children in different social contexts. Children contribute to society and take part in social activities in various ways: through work, child-care, schooling, industry, media, and pop culture (James, Jenks & Prout, 1998). Children belong to different social groups with respect to age, gender, nationality, and disability, among other dimensions. They have different experiences and perspectives making it difficult to assert generalized truths about children. A social framework of childhood should take into account that there may be vast differences in the developmental processes of children, both individual and cultural differences. Children lead very different lives, according to the culture and social context in which they are brought up, and are capable of assuming responsibility for a variety of social tasks. The idea of modern childhood in Western industrial societies is a product of its times and will continue to evolve and change in the future. Therefore, what it means to be a child will never be explained once and for all, but needs constant reflection and re-thinking. In addition, each child is an individual with a specific status and a distinct voice, worthy of being heard.

3.9.2 Institutionalisation of childhood and schooling

Childhood sociologists emphasize looking at the lives of children through their eyes and with their help. It demands that we look at how societal changes such as schooling, increased day-care, and changes in the economy, affect children and their lives. In Western societies, the rapid increase in the number of children in early education and care, in schools and in school-aged care, has been enormous and can be seen as a process of institutionalization (Cohen, Moss, Petrie & Wallace, 2004). The increased institutionalisation of children in Western societies may have unforeseen consequences and calls for further research on the lives of children within schools and after-school centres. In a way, children have been gathered together and confined (at least for a large period of their time) within the boundaries of institutions. They are supposed to engage in activities specifically designed to prepare them for the future instead of engaging in activities that are relevant to them here and now.

The institutionalisation of children has brought about the establishment of different professions that work with children in schools and day-care services. Moreover, professionals working with children do so on the basis of their professional knowledge which, by and large, is built on a
fundamental assumption about the nature of childhood that is rarely discussed or scrutinized. Usually, we do not recognize that "our original views are generally a function of our own cultural experience rather than the only right or possible way" (Rogoff, 2003, p. 24). Research has shown that in Sweden where recreation pedagogy is a professional sector, school teachers and recreation pedagogues may have problems collaborating, as they have different ideas about their work (Calender, 2000; Haglund, 2004). This dilemma represents a clash of various ideas about children and childhood; it needs to be brought to the surface and discussed.

As the oldest and most established institution, the school is the most powerful institution in the lives of children (Cohen, Moss, Petrie & Wallace, 2004). In fact, as childhood sociologists have claimed, being in school has become the main work of children in Western societies (James & Prout, 1990). The traditional Western school system came into existence in the 19th century, or in the early 20th century in the case of Iceland. This is a relatively short history relative to the history of mankind. Furthermore, it was not until very recently that children in the Western world began to go to school for so many years, so many months per year, and for so many hours per day. The traditional view is that schools are settings for formal learning (Rogoff, 2003). The main aim of schools has been to educate children, teach them the three R's of reading, writing, and arithmetic. The role of the teacher has been seen as that of instructing and guiding the pupil on his path to knowledge. But schools are also places where socialization takes place and where children are supposed to develop skills that prepare them for future participation in society at large (Rogoff, 2003). One of the overall public aims of the compulsory schools in Iceland is, after all, to support children in becoming independent thinkers and active participants in a democratic society (Compulsory School Law, 2008).

Interestingly, the worry that the schools do not encourage their students to be active and to take initiative is not new. In 1938 Dewey wrote when reflecting on the role of the traditional school:

The main purpose or objective is to prepare the young for future responsibilities and for success in life, by means of acquisition of the organised bodies of information and prepared forms of skill which comprehend the material of instructions. Since the subject-matter as well as standards of proper conduct are handed down
from the past, the attitude of pupils must, upon the whole, be one of docility, receptivity, and obedience. (Dewey, 1938, p. 3)

Although Dewey became one of the most influential thinkers in educational theory of the 20th century, it seems as if the schools are still not coping effectively with the social side of learning. There should be a balance between the technical, ethical, and political purposes of schooling; but, for some reason, that balance has been difficult to sustain (Skúlason, 1987). Every now and then, the school faces criticism for being detached from the experiences of their students. For example, in 2003, Gatto wrote that after 30 years of teaching in Manhattan he had become the expert in boredom: “Boredom was everywhere in my world, and if you asked the kids, as I often did, why they felt so bored, they always gave the same answers: They said that the work was stupid, that it made no sense, that they already knew it. They said they wanted to be doing something real, not just sitting around” (Gatto, 2003, p. 33). Although no studies suggest that such is the case in the Icelandic school system today, the above description of the perspectives of Gatto’s students seems to coincide with Dewey’s worries that schools might tend to suppress their students instead of empowering them.

New understanding and research on children’s experience and knowledge confirms that children are indeed active participants in communities of practice in school, in after-school programs, and at home. Corsaro (2005) demonstrates how children take part in the reproduction of meaning as they engage in relationships with their peers and adults in day-care settings. His research with children has involved extensive fieldwork in pre-schools, where he has entered the worlds of children as participant/observer. Corsaro (2005) argues that traditional developmental psychology has missed out on the elaborate understandings of, for example, friendships that children convey in practice even though they might miss out on conceptual analytical understandings. Even very young children may show extensive understanding of moral life and social relationships (Johanson, 2006). Rogoff (2003) has, in her work with schools, shown how collaborative meaning-making procedures between children and adults have largely been ignored in traditional schooling. She, amongst others, argues for a new kind of schooling where adults and children collaborate to build a community of learning together.

The voices of children are not always heard within institutions, and in fact, children are rarely regarded as equal participants (James, 2001). Childhood researchers agree with Dewey that children need to be involved in real activities that they find purposeful. Because the validity of meaning and knowledge is traditionally defined by adults, it can be difficult for children to negotiate and share their meanings and perspectives. Therefore, educational researchers and practitioners have to find ways to empower children so that others can learn from their experiences.
3.10 Conclusion

Organisational identities consist of a multiplicity of experiences and views of participants and stakeholders. Wenger’s theory of communities of practice is a social theory of learning that invites us to examine the modes of identification and negotiability within and between communities. The theory of the CoP provides a conceptual framework for analysing how workers engage in a practice by using the notions of participation, non-participation, and negotiation and how they define those joint enterprises in which they take part at work by invoking the concepts of meaning and identification. It is likewise a framework for examining the repertoire, concepts, and tools upon which practitioners rely to do the work. It also emphasizes that attention must be paid to situational factors, and it has been shown that this may be particularly important in the case of the after-school centre, as the formal constraints seem to be atypically weak (for educational institutions). In fact, the community of practice within each organisation defines the strengths and weaknesses of that organisation and is a key factor in driving organisational development. Thus, the importance of internal dynamics may be relatively great.

However, practices alone are not sufficient to sustain boundaries and to create meaningful connections to the larger community. A design or an institutional framework is necessary to establish a recognition of the practice and to ensure its sustainability. Increased understanding of the relationship between the design of a practice and the emergent practice is vital, particularly in the case of the after-school centres where the institutional framework is loose and underdeveloped. The social ecology of identity analyses the processes of identification and negotiation that shape the identities of the participants. Meanings are constructed through participation and reification, and it is important that organisational reifications allow room for interactive participation.

In order to understand the after-school centre more fully it is fruitful to examine how the organisational identity of the community can be seen as negotiated and shared through participation and reification by different stakeholders. It is also a helpful tool for examining how the professional identity of the personnel may be developed and promoted. The individuals working within the after-school centres need to learn what affects their experiences and motives within that community in order to be able to facilitate their professional development. Again, this is particularly interesting to investigate because of the lack of external institutional constraints in the case of after-school centres.

An exploration of the concepts of care, learning and leisure shows that they can be understood in various ways; mixed perceptions and
understandings lead to an unclear definition of the main function of the after-school centres. In many ways the support and provision of care, learning and leisure can be intertwined as such practices may overlap. Learning happens everywhere, even unintentionally, and is based on both internal and external factors. Learning is situated in specific social communities and takes place whether or not educational purposes are explicit (Illeris, 2007; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). Furthermore, learning within communities of practice is a multi-layered interactive process that involves learning as belonging (community), learning as becoming (identity), learning as doing (experience), and learning as experience (meaning). Learning is, therefore, also intrinsic to the activities of care and leisure. Most importantly, the learning processes that take place within the after-school centre need to be made explicit so that they can be discussed, analysed, and promoted.

The social landscape of the after-school centre reflects images of childhood. Childhood researchers have argued that the dominant framework of childhood is built on ideas of children as immature and vulnerable individuals who need guidance and supervision. Instead, they propose that children are capable and active participants in our community who develop new meanings and adventures that unfold in real-life contexts (Corsaro, 2005; Rogoff, 2003). It is important to look at the organisation of after-school centres and schools from the point of view of children. Childhood studies provide an important link between the lived experiences of children and the organisational frameworks of the institutions. By looking at children as social actors, we can gain understanding of how children experience the traditional learning processes of the school and the organised leisure activities within the after-school centre. We will, furthermore, gain deeper understanding of how children create and contribute to their own learning experiences. Within the dominant framework, the powers and possibilities of empowering them have been overlooked. In a way, children have been kept at the periphery of the practices in which they have been members, even though, in many practices, such as schools, pre-schools, and after-school centres, children are key participants and stakeholders.

The expectations and views of different groups, such as personnel, children, and parents, and in the implementation of public policy, all take part in producing the identity of the after-school centre. The after-school centre is an interesting entity to examine in order to understand how a community of practice develops, the experiences of personnel and children, and the inter-connectivity between two communities of practice, namely the school and the after-school centre.
4 METHOD

A study of the organisational identity of after-school centres as constructed in practice by different participants requires a qualitative approach. Here, a qualitative, multi-case study design was used in order to gather information on the operation of after-school centres. Two different after-school centres in Reykjavík were chosen as subjects of investigation. The two after-school centres that were chosen will be called the “North Valley After-school Centre” and the “Sunny Side After-school Centre”. These two centres were chosen to exemplify the issues that arise both in connection with our research questions and with issues arising from within the field during the research process.

This section describes the research design and methodology and discusses ethical considerations and formalities. The two centres that were selected for the study are introduced as well as the research participants and their involvement in the research. The section also addresses data gathering, analysis, and ethical considerations.

4.1 Research design

4.1.1 Collective case study

A collective case study involves studying two or more cases to inquire into a given phenomenon (Stake, 2006). In this study, two cases were chosen to represent the practices within after-school centres in Reykjavík and to gain access to the experiences and perspectives of participants. It is appropriate to use the case-study design to examine the role of after-school centres and the views of different stakeholders, because case studies constitute “a method involving systematically gathering enough information about a particular person, social setting, event, or group to permit the researcher to effectively understand how the subject operates or functions” (Berg, 2007, p. 283). However, as Stake (2006) maintains, the cases may be researched in-depth or more instrumentally to address the research questions which aim at describing or explaining the phenomenon. Therefore, I do not propose to offer a complete description of each of the after-school centres that participated in the study; rather, I will focus on those issues, patterns and themes that will help me answer my main research questions. The focus of the research is the organisation of after-school centres in Reykjavík as it is reflected in the voices and attitudes of the individuals in the two particular centres. On this basis I will be able to make an analytical generalization built
on information from the two different settings, from individuals, from groups, and from organisational issues.

Gathering data from two after-school centres provided diversity across context. By studying two cases, it became possible to compare the effects of different factors—such as facilities, levels of cooperation with the relevant school, and differences in daily schedules—on the participants. It was of interest to determine whether there was a difference in the organisational structure of these two centres and, if so, how that affected the experiences of different stakeholders. The cases studied gave strong indications of the patterns that would be found in other centres. The results of the study gave information on the participants and about the meaning they attributed to their after-school centres. Such information provided insight into the role after-school centres can play in the lives of children as well as the status of such centres within the overall educational system in Iceland.

Furthermore, the case-study method allows the researcher to obtain information on the perspectives of different actors who have an interest in, or are affected by, the field of study. Historically, case studies have been used by researchers to give voice to groups of individuals whose views and attitudes have been obscured or silenced. This method provides, therefore, a good opportunity to include the voices of children in the research. Ethnography has proven to be crucial in regard to research with children, and we have seen an increase in such research in the last decades of the 20th century (James, 2001). To be able to hear the views of children and gather knowledge about their experiences, it is important to use ethnographic tools, which can range from informal interviews to full participation of the researcher in the daily lives of participants (Einarsdóttir, 2006). Thus, diverse methods were used in this research when consulting with children in after-school centres, as is further described in the next section.

Each after-school centre has its own culture, traditions and ways of doing things. To be able to provide a realistic image of what children and recreation personnel experience within such a setting, the two after-school centres were studied with regard to the differences and variations in their structure and status. By interviewing personnel in each after-school centre, as well as teachers at the school and parents of children, I was able to achieve an understanding of the rationale and status of that centre from the point of view of the adults. My aim was also to discover how the children conceived the rationale and purpose of the after-school centres. Thus, multiple methods were employed to involve the children in the research and to gain understanding of the after-school centres from the children’s point of view. The findings of this study are supported by
evidence and data from both after-school centres. Although there were similarities in the perspectives of participants and the activities in each centre, there were noticeable differences in the daily organisation.

4.1.2 Researching the general and the particular

The research questions called for data on both the general frameworks of operation of the after-school centres and on particular practices. Collective case studies provide an opportunity to study the relationships between general frameworks and particular practices. The organisational identity of a given service can only be clarified in the light of its particular practices and from the points of view of the different stakeholders.

When conducting a case study, the researcher has to be aware of the multi-dimensional aspects of the case, including:

- The nature of the case (activity and function)
- Its historical background
- Its physical setting
- Its economic, political, legal, and other relevant contexts
- Other cases to which the case may be usefully compared
- Those informants through whom the case can be known (Stake, 2005, p. 447)

The general phenomenon being researched is the organisational identity of the after-school centres in Reykjavík. It was, therefore, important to examine their organisational development, historical background, and political context, as well as examples of the characteristic practices within the two centres studied. However, each after-school centre is a case in itself, with practices that are situated in a specific social context (Wenger, 1998). The experiences of individuals of the daily practice and the organisational design can only been understood by how participants describe their views, attitudes, feelings and modes of belonging.

4.2 Research methodology

Given the aim of this research— to shed light on after-school centres in Reykjavík and their purpose and identity within the school system as described by different stakeholders—a methodology is called for that will help us to understand the organisational status and development of these centres, will allow us to increase our understanding of the real-life context of children within after-school centres, will provide insight into the way in which recreation personnel define their work, and, finally, will help us
realize how parents experience the service provided by the after-school centres. Therefore, this study is qualitative in nature and applies methods characteristic of qualitative research, such as document analysis, interviews, and fieldwork.

4.2.1 The researcher as ‘bricoleur’

Human beings exist in a complex social reality. Social scientists attempt to grasp that reality through vigorous research where data is gathered, analysed, and interpreted. Wenger (1998) argues that, in social practice, individuals collectively create histories of meanings through collective engagement. The distinction between ‘right’ and ‘wrong’, ‘true’ or ‘false’ is inevitably linked to specific social contexts where knowledge of reality is produced by individuals living in a specific time, place and setting. Therefore, the researcher becomes an interpreter of the social world as it is experienced by participants in the particular research.

The social reality is complex and made up out of heterological opinions and values that are sometimes contradictory. Therefore, to understand it one needs to apply various kinds of tools and concepts. This study takes its departure in the notion of *bricolage*, which has been developed as a toolkit for educational and social science researchers (Kincheloe & Berry, 2004). Berry (2006) argues that the social science researcher becomes a ‘bricoleur’, a craftsman who uses the sources and means available to add to the knowledge on the subject at hand. ‘Bricolage’ in research means using different sources and applying a variety of methods. Moreover, ‘bricoleur’ researchers must acknowledge that plans may change and projects develop, because they may be faced with new situations and possibilities during the research process (Berry, 2006).

This study relies on theoretical bricolage. Firstly, the theoretical framework evolved during the later stages of the research process, as important themes and perspectives emerged from the data. Secondly, this theoretical framework as applied to the after-school centres draws on several other theoretical perspectives as points of analysis. Wenger’s theory of communities of practice is used and supported by theories of the sociology of childhood to provide a conceptual framework for the present analysis. Furthermore, theories and research from the literature on after-school centres provided starting-points for discussion and interpretations of the findings of this study. Lastly, multiple sources and cases were used to gather data, since different stakeholders took part in the research and the research was both historical and temporal. The overall aim was not to discover the truth with a capital “T” about how the organisational identity of the after-school centres should be defined, but
to *understand* the elements that influence the ways in which people see the organisational identity of the after-school centres in Reykjavík.

### 4.2.2 Children as participants in research

Initially, I set out to look at the after-school centres from an institutional point of view. After the first year of studying the history of the after-school centres, I realized that bringing the voices of the children into the research would provide an important insider-view of the centres. This study is, therefore, inspired by the discourse of the sociology of childhood, which has challenged the traditional framework of childhood. Traditionally, children have been considered vulnerable because of their lack of maturity and cognitive ability (Hill, 2005). Hence, they are considered incapable of giving informed consent to their participation in research or reliable information. Childhood researchers dispute this view and claim that children can make reasonable decisions for themselves and should be allowed to participate in research projects (Alderson, 2005; Dockett, Einarsdóttir & Perry, 2011; Christensen & James, 2008).

Dockett, Einarsdóttir and Perry (2011) argue that researchers who want to include children in research need to distinguish between methodology and methods. Methods can be used for diverse methodological reasons or simply for their own sake. It can, however, be useful to give them a choice of vehicles through which to express their views and experiences. The Mosaic-method developed by Clark and Moss (2001) in their research on services for children and families rests on similar methodological foundations as the Bricolage approach. Clarke (2005) defines six main elements of the mosaic approach: (a) looking at children as active members of the research process, not as passive objects; (b) a participatory perspective that looks for ways to involve children in research; (c) being reflexive in nature, so that children, practitioners, and parents are invited to reflect on meanings and possible interpretations; (d) being adaptive, as it can be used in a variety of settings; (e) being focused on children’s lived experiences; and (f) being embedded into practice (Clark, 2005, p. 30). These elements further supported my decision to turn to children as informants and guided my choice in using multiple methods.

More than 250 children were enrolled in the two after-school centres during the data-gathering period. I chose to focus on the experiences of children who were in grade 1 during the first years of the study. The reason was that in both centres children from grade 1 had separate facilities from the older children. As the number of my visits and interviews would be limited, I decided to select a group of children whom I could get to know and could follow over some time. Although most of the
children would at some point be aware of my presence in either the after-school centre or the classroom, the participation of individual children was voluntary. However, I was careful not to intrude on the lives of the children and took proper means to insure the children’s right to privacy (Alderson, 2005). For children who did not volunteer to participate, my presence in the after-school centre may have been somewhat of an intrusion into their lives. Therefore, I was concerned with not interrupting those who did not show any interest in talking to me or taking part in activities related to the research.

Listening to the voices of children through semi-structured interviews, informal conversations, observation, and drawings enriched my understanding of the role of the after-school centre in the lives of the children. I became aware of the varied experiences of children and of how they cope in different ways within institutions.

4.2.3 Research tools

4.2.3.1 Interviews

Human beings share experiences and histories of learning and meaning through conversation: by talking, listening, exchanging opinions, and even arguing (Wenger, 1998). The research interview can be an ideal setting for the researcher to get to know the views, feelings, opinions, and experiences of the research participants (Kvale, 2007). In the present study, the interview was an important tool for gathering information on how different stakeholders described their involvement in the after-school centre and their views on the practice and organisational framework.

A well-structured research interview can be a “construction site for knowledge” (Kvale, 2007, p. 7). The researcher strives to ask the “right” questions but still has to allow the conversation to be flexible and spontaneous as he or she interprets answers and responds by asking new questions. In this study it proved to be productive to arrange semi-structured interviews, and interview protocols were used with all participants (see appendix). I began each interview by explaining why I was interested in the after-school centres and in the views of stakeholders. I told my interviewees that I would preserve confidentiality and use pseudonyms when referring to institutions and participants in the research. I used a small dictaphone to record the interviews, which I later transcribed into text files. Here is an example how I started an interview with two children:

I would like to ask you about what it is like to be in an after-school centre. I have never been a child in an after-school centre, because such places didn’t really exist when I was little. I think it is
important that people know what children do in an after-school centre and how an after-school centre is different from school. (Interview in Sunny Side Centre, March, 2009)

The interviews with the children took place during the opening hours of the after-school centre. The children chose to be interviewed and usually they came in pairs, although on a few occasion I interviewed three children. The children seemed to feel more comfortable to be with their friends during the interview. Sometimes, however, there were nuances and even rivalry to get my attention and be heard. What follows is an example of an interview with three girls, Rósa, Hanna, and Una. It turned out that although the three of them were good friends, Rósa and Hanna had recently had an argument that came to light during the interview.

Kolbrún: What do you find most boring in the after-school centre, Hanna?

Hanna: When somebody pushes us around, and when my sister is boring and when Rósa is excluding me!

Rósa: I never exclude you!

Hanna: Yes, you just did earlier and started throwing pebbles at me.

Rósa: No!

Kolbrún: But sometimes you cannot play together; sometimes you have to play with someone else.

Hanna: Yes, you [Rósa] have also just played with Ásta!

Rósa: No, I invited you to be with us! (H. and R. talk agitatedly at the same time).

Una: I find it also boring ... (tries to be heard).

Kolbrún: Wait a moment, girls! Can I say one thing—because they started fighting a bit (to Una). I think you are lucky to be friends since preschool and then you have to be good at forgiving each other, even though someone makes a mistake...

Rósa: Yes, I did apologize already in the recess!

Interviewing children requires experience in handling conflicts. At the same time as my attention focused on resolving Hanna’s and Rósa’s differences, Una experienced being left out in the interview. The above incident is an example where the researcher decided to involve herself in the events instead of remaining impartial and distant from the realities of
the children. In this particular case, I felt that the girls needed help to settle their conflicts to prevent further conflict between them. Towards the end of the interview, I asked the girls if there was something they wanted to add about being in the after-school centre or in school:

Una: I never get to say!

Kolbrún: Well, now you can say what you want.

Una: Hanna said so much, she said almost everything. She said things I was going to say and talked about the “fives” and ...

Kolbrún: But you could tell me more about those “fives”? I hardly know anything because there was no such thing in my school. Can you tell me more about the “fives”?

Una: Yes, we get a “five” when we are good or when the teachers want to be good to us or let us choose what to do. (Explains it in more detail).

Kolbrún: What do you feel about this? Is it good to have the “fives”?

Everybody replies: Yes.

Una: I haven’t said what I think is most fun. No, when I get to decide. We get to choose what we do in the recess, as she said, and we get to decide in the ‘storage’.

It should be noted that Una used the word storage (i. gæsla) which is not uncommon for people in Iceland to use as a general term for after-school centres. Una was very straightforward in saying that she thought that she had been unfairly treated and that her views had not been heard. The higher the number of people that take part in interviews, the more likely it is that their voices will not be heard equally. My transcript indicates that I tried to include all three of them on every subject that came up. However, the rivalry between Hanna and Rósa, and the tension and competition that seemed to characterize the three girls’ current relationships, resulted in Una being rather unhappy about her part in the interview.

My interviews with the personnel, teachers, and parents were not as exciting as some of the interviews with the children. The adults were interviewed individually and the interviews ranged from about 30 to about 60 minutes. What follows is an example of how I began an interview with one recreation pedagogue:

I want to study the after-school centre from different perspectives, including the perspectives of the children and, of course, it is important to get the perspectives of the personnel; how they
experience their work, what they feel is important and, of course, their cooperation with the school. (Kolbrún, interview with Drífa, Sunny Side Centre, May, 2010)

I explained that I had worked in the after-school centres and that I was now doing this research as a part of my doctoral studies. As a former practitioner in an after-school centre and as a parent, it was easy for me to relate to the experiences of the recreation personnel and the experiences of the parents. I had also worked closely with a number of teachers when I was leader of a school day-care centre and was not unfamiliar with their work-conditions. This may have helped me ask the right questions and gain their confidence. But although my previous experience may have helped me gain some advantage, I had to acknowledge that my mind was filled with opinions and ideas on, for example, “best” practices in after-school centres, on the “ideal” cooperation between schools and after-school centres, etc. On some occasions, I had to take care to follow the thought and argument of the interviewee, rather than speaking my mind directly on an issue, such as the possibilities of increased cooperation between schools and after-school centres. All in all, the interviews were my main source of data and provided valuable information on the perspectives of different stakeholders. However, other methods proved valuable in supporting and validating that information.

4.2.3.2 Observations

Observations in the field are important tools in social research. By entering the field, the researcher becomes an “unconventional” member of the communities of practices (Wenger, 1998, p. xv). Fieldwork is “… the form of inquiry in which one is immersed personally in the ongoing social activities of some individual or a group for the purpose of research” (Wolcott, 1995, p. 66). Entering the field to observe the actions of others means that the researcher will be seen, heard, and noticed. He will become a participant in some sense whether he intends to or not. In fact, it can be hard to discern the point at which fieldwork begins. Does it begin when you first visit the field? Does it begin when you call and talk to the administrator to introduce your research and ask him to join the research? Wolcott (1995) maintains that doing fieldwork requires both the dedication of long-time, on-site presence and the rigorous reporting of data. The present research extended over two years and included follow-up work at both centres.

The case study took place over four terms (fall 2008, spring 2009, fall 2009, spring 2010). During that time I was teaching undergraduate courses at the School of Education and was a PhD-student taking part in courses and conferences. As I had chosen two cases to study, it was clear that the
time spent at each site had to be limited. During both fall semesters most of my fieldwork was done at the North Valley Centre; most of my fieldwork at the Sunny Side Centre was done during the spring semesters. During each semester, I set aside 3-4 weeks for fieldwork and went on 3-4 weekly visits to the after-school centre. Usually, I would arrive around 13:15, about the same time as the recreation personnel showed up for work. I stayed until about 16:00, when the children started going home. I entered the field as a passive observer. I tried to lie low and linger in the background of the activities rather than becoming a full participant. However, I saw that in order to blend in and not stand out, it was better in some cases to take part in certain activities, such as when the personnel were assisting the children during refreshment hours. At those times, the adults were all going about filling glasses for the children or serving food.

On occasion, I sat down with a group of children and used the opportunity for small-talk, to get to know them and to let them get to know me. I assisted when a child asked for my help, such as to tie a shoe, or zip a jacket. On a few occasions I felt the urge to act, such as when I noticed a six-year old girl, who was obviously very sad, since she was weeping unnoticed in the hallways of the school during transition time (when the children were going from the school to the after-school centre). The recreation personnel had not noticed her (or if they had, did not respond), and the teachers were not within sight. It turned out that the little girl didn’t know whether to go to the after-school centre or not and was confused and worried. I talked to her a bit and tried to calm her down before I directed her into the hands of one of the personnel.

I found it helpful to have a piece of paper to scribble down notes while observing. For example, when I was stationed in a particular room with a group of children and one or two staff members, I would sometimes write down keywords to remind me of the activities in the setting and the communication that was going on. In some cases, it was not convenient to be writing notes, for example in the playground where I walked around from time to time, interacting with children or personnel. Sometimes, if I did not have time to write down fieldnotes immediately following a visit, I would sit in my car and record into my dictaphone how my visit had gone and what I had found intriguing or interesting.

A small number of observations were done during school-hours, when the children were in the classroom. I found it important to experience first hand how the school activities differed from the after-school activities. It was easier to be a passive observer in the school than in the after-school centre. During all of my classroom visits, organised activities were arranged by the teachers, and I would sit in the back or at the side of the class-room. On one occasion, the classes in the North Valley School went outside to the playground to work
on a hands-on math project, and I observed as the children created the outline of a big whale, under the direction of their teachers, and counted how many children would fit within the outline. Once, I followed a group of children in the North Valley School to their home economics class and watched as they baked cookies under the direction of the teacher.

Observations were used to shed further light on daily practices within the two after-school centres. Although my full-time presence on site was not possible, my observations in the field provided valuable material. Through flexible participant-observation, I had the opportunity to gain first-hand impressions of the practices in these two centres. This brought me closer to the experiences of the participants, which was important for understanding what shaped and affected their identities within the after-school centres.

4.2.3.3 Documents

In this research, documents were an important source of knowledge about the history, organisation, and structure of the practice within the after-school centres. Policy documents, legislative material, media discussions, and organisational documents provided information on the variety of meanings that are related to the practices (Wenger, 1998). In some cases, researchers need to turn to written records to gather data, for example, when personal interviews, questionnaires, or observations do not prove helpful to the measurement of target phenomena (Johnson & Reynolds, 2005, p. 206). There are several reasons for including documents in social research: (a) they may be rich and detailed; (b) they can be effective and relevant; (c) they show what is going on without having to interview people; and, finally, (d) they are often available and easily accessed (Silverman, 2006, p. 157). In order to study the historical and institutional aspect of the after-school centres, different kinds of documents were used.

It is important to pay attention to the source of documents in assessing their validity and how they relate to practice. There were mainly three kinds of documents that were used in this research: policy documents, media documents and documents produced in the field. Policy documents can be descriptive of how politicians or administrators see the organisation of a particular practice. Three kinds of policy documents were used in this study: (a) laws, regulations, city agreements, and contracts; (b) historical documents, such as statistical data, reports, and minutes from meetings; (c) handbooks created for personnel. A thematic analysis of their content established the main elements of the public policy at both regional and governmental levels.

Media reports that relate to the operation of after-school centres are rare. However, they emerge under two circumstances: (a) when
organisational changes have been noteworthy and (b) when there have been waiting lists for children to get into the after-school centres. The content of these documents provides evidence about the function and status of the after-school centres, mostly from the perspectives of parents and politicians. Very few media documents stem from the personnel or the professional sector.

Few documents are produced within the daily practice of the after-school centre. The recreation personnel do not work much with documents on a daily basis, except for the leader who is responsible for daily operations and has office hours in the mornings. Examples of documents produced in the after-school centres are: weekly activity plans, work division of personnel, news on web sites, and leaflets for parents. Quotations from, and references to, written documents are provided, where appropriate, in the findings chapters of this work, to provide evidence concerning particular perspectives.

4.2.3.4 Drawings

Drawings can be used effectively to gather data on the views and experiences of children and have been used in research with children in a variety of settings and for various purposes (see, for example, Einarsdóttir, 2005; Jackson & Cartmel, 2010; Klerfelt, 2006). In the present research, children were invited to draw pictures of themselves, both in school and in their after-school centre. The drawings were generated in three ways, (a) at the time of the interview (only in the North Valley Centre); (b) in the after-school centre before the interview (in both after-school centres) and (c) in the class-room (only in the City School). During the first year of the study, the children produced drawings both during, and prior to, the interview with the researcher. I found that many of the children became focused on creating the picture during the interview and, therefore, less interested in the conversation. Also, in some cases, the children started comparing their drawings during the interview. In one case, for example, three girls were being interviewed. One of the girls started her drawing, and the two other girls, after looking at her drawing for a few seconds, started their own and imitated her version. Of course, this is something that could also have happened when the children made their drawings before the interview, in the after-school centre or at school. Those who draw will always be influenced by others, and this influence is a part of the meaning-making process. The conversation during or following the making of the drawing constituted an important part of the data, since the child therein describes his intentions, thoughts and feelings with regard to the drawing. During the second year of the study, children were invited to draw pictures before participating in the interview. I decided to do an experiment where, instead of asking the children to make drawings in the after-school centre, I approached the children in the City School while they were in their second-grade classrooms and asked
them to produce drawings of themselves, both in the after-school centre and in the school. When I had approached the children in the after-school centre, many of them chose not to produce a drawing. However, when approached in the class-room, all of the children responded. The teachers explained to the children that I had a special request, which I then presented. The teachers were present during the 20 minutes that I had been allotted for this experiment. I am convinced that the children experienced my request as a directive. Only one girl said she didn’t want to do what I had asked, and I told her she was free to draw whatever she wanted.

There are several reasons for using drawings in research with children. Einarsdóttir, Dockett and Perry (2010) have, in their research with children, identified five main reasons for using drawings:

1. to provide a context where children had some control over the nature of their engagement in data generation activities;

2. to establish a non-confrontational basis for interactions, where children can draw and are not forced to maintain eye contact with researchers [...];

3. to provide familiar tools and materials to encourage children to engage in conversations about school or preschool in a meaningful way for them;

4. to encourage children to take time to respond to questions or engage in discussion as they take the time to draw, recognising that co-construction of meaning takes time and is a transformative process; and

5. to recognise that some children prefer to convey their perspectives and experiences through a combination of verbal and non-verbal means. (Einarsdóttir et al., 2010, p. 220)

These five perspectives were relevant in the current study in the following way: Firstly, the children that chose to draw seemed to enjoy the process of making their pictures and telling me about their content. I felt that this empowered them to become a part of the research process. Secondly, in some cases, the drawing was the tool that connected me with a child. I felt that many of the children were more open to talk with me after they had made their drawings. For some children, it seemed to become less intimidating to approach me with a drawing than without it. Thirdly, there is always an opportunity to draw in the after-school centre. In the main facility of both centres, there was access to paper and crayons every day and a place to sit down to draw. The majority of the children liked to make drawings on a regular
basis. In that sense, the drawings were a very convenient way of providing information for this research. Fourthly, the drawings encouraged the children to think about themselves in the after-school centre and in the school. For some children, the making of the drawing took considerable time. In cases where I was present, it created a venue for informal discussion and exchange of ideas. As mentioned earlier, it did not work well in this study to conduct a formal interview during the making of the drawing. Lastly, although the children in this study could all communicate verbally, the drawings gave the children an opportunity to share their perspectives through an alternative medium.

The drawings were used in this study to better understand the meanings children connect with their lives in their after-school centres and their schools. Thus, the drawings became a secondary source for appreciating the experiences of the children. Not all of the children who produced drawings in this study were interviewed, and not all of the children interviewed produced drawings. Conversations about the drawings took place in many of the interviews and helped me to formulate questions and to relate to the children. However, no holistic analysis of all of the drawings was performed. Nevertheless, the children gave valuable insights into their experiences through their drawings, and therefore a number of these drawings are included in the findings chapters.

### 4.2.4 The reciprocity of the research process

Figure 4-1 outlines the multiple sources of the research and the reciprocity of the research process. In spite of the linear presentation, the research process turned out to be non-linear as the researcher moved among layers of data sources at different times in the research. Two or more types of data could also be gathered simultaneously, and analysis was an ongoing process throughout the data gathering and the writing of this thesis.

![Figure 4-1. Multiple sources of knowledge and reciprocity of the research process](attachment:image.png)
Reciprocity refers to the interconnection of different data sources and the mutual dependency involved in how the data was analysed and understood. Throughout the research process and writing there was an interchange of meanings as the researcher connected themes and related concepts into the story-line of the thesis.

4.3 The two after-school centres

In this section, I describe the rationale for the selection of cases and introduce the two after-school centres that participated in the research. The after-school centres were run by the Council of Sport and Recreation. Their finances were separate from those of the school, and they had their own administrations, even though they were located at the schools. Information about the schools will be included here, as one of the purposes of the study is to gain understanding of the cooperation between the schools and after-school centres.

4.3.1 Selecting cases

When choosing the after-school centres for this study, I kept in mind that it is important to choose cases which will maximize what can be learned within the time-limits of the study (Stake, 1995). I chose to confine my research to Reykjavík, as I already knew that within Reykjavík there had been some major developments in the organisational framework. Furthermore, I decided to choose after-school centres which had established a reputation for solid and good work and where the leaders had at least two years’ experience. Thus, the choice was made after a theoretical evaluation which might be called “purposeful sampling”. I consulted department leaders of after-school centres at the Council of Sport and Recreation and explained the goals of my research, specifying that I wanted to study at least two after-school centres which would have to be different in respect to the facilities (inside and outside school), the number of children, the emphases in daily work, etc. Furthermore, the two after-school centres were to be located in different areas of Reykjavík, thus presenting geographical and demographic differences.

4.3.2 Administration

Reykjavík is divided into six neighbourhoods, each with a recreation service centre that organises youth centres, after-school programs, and various recreation activities, mostly aimed at youth. A department leader at each centre is responsible for the after-school centres in the neighbourhood and hires leaders to administrate the daily work. The leaders are responsible for the day-to-day management of the after-
school centres and have full time jobs, whereas other personnel have part-time jobs ranging from 30–50 percent. Each recreation centre provides support and administrative services, concerning both practical issues and policy, for the after-school centres in the area.

Each after-school centre operates in conjunction with an elementary school. The two that participated in the study are the North Valley After-school Centre, which operates in conjunction with the North Valley School, and the Sunny Side After-school Centre, which operates in conjunction with the City School. Table 4-1 presents an overview of the number of children and personnel in each of the two after-school centres, describes the main characteristics of the daily schedule, the facility and the associated school.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 4-1. Overview of the two After-school Centres that participated in the Study and Information on the Associated Schools</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sunny Side After-school Centre</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>North Valley After-school Centre</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The next sections describe the after-school centres and the associated schools in more detail.

**4.3.3 The North Valley After-school Centre and the North Valley School**

The North Valley After-school Centre is associated with the North Valley School which serves about 330 students in grades 1–10. In the school year
2008–2009, approximately 75 children were registered at the centre. The after-school centre has about 60 m² of space for its own use within the school premises and has access to a second classroom on a daily basis and to other areas, such as the gym and the computer room. The canteen is also used on a daily basis to serve refreshments and can likewise be used for play or organised activities. An outdoor area surrounds the school building, but although there is a green area behind the school, the children are not allowed to go there without supervision; and since there is often only one instructor accompanying the children outdoors, they can only play in the area in front of the school. The North Valley After-school Centre is run by Helen, who has a degree in pre-school education. There is a clear division of labour among the staff, and for each weekday there is a schedule indicating where each staff member should be stationed. The leader is responsible for making this schedule, but it is discussed in staff-meetings and everyone has a say on how things are organised.

The North Valley School is a newly established school, located in one of the suburbs of Reykjavík. In this school, emphasis is on teachers working as a team with groups of children instead of the traditional class system of one teacher with 20–25 students. For example, in the school year 2008–2009 the children in grade 1 numbered 34. They shared one big classroom and two teachers worked with them. The room was so big that the teachers used microphones to make sure everybody heard them loudly and clearly. The schedule for each day and week was highly structured, leaving little space for spontaneous activity. The class was also divided into smaller groups, that rotated between art, craft, and sport sessions. As a result, most of the time the children did not decide what to do in school, and in fact free-time (time where they are allowed to decide what to do themselves) was a rare reward. The North Valley School has recently implemented a special school-wide behaviour management system to improve school culture and guide students. It encourages teachers to praise students for positive behaviour and gives clear guidelines for preventing negative or inappropriate behaviour. Individual students get small tokens for positive behaviour; these are put in a collective jar that the whole classroom shares. When the total number of tokens has reached a specific target, the class is rewarded in some way; for example, the children may decide together with the teacher to have a “party”, to watch a movie, or to have some other favoured activity.

4.3.4 The Sunny Side After-school Centre and the City School

The Sunny Side After-school Centre is located close to downtown Reykjavík and works in conjunction with the City School. The City School was founded about 50 years ago and serves about 300 children in grades
1–7. In the school year 2008–2009, about 100 children attended the after-school centre; however, the number rose to 130 in the school year 2009–2010. The leader is Anna, who has an extensive experience of working with children in after-school programs. The after-school centre has premises both within and outside of the school, due to the number of children. Since its establishment, the main operation of the centre has been in a three-storied house located next to the school. According to Anna, this building has, following some renovations, turned out to serve the after-school centre quite well, with cosy areas for recreation, play, and art-work. Furthermore, Anna has her office there which also serves as a kind of personnel room, where personnel keep their belongings and can prepare their work or use the computer when necessary.

The City School is known for its emphasis on individual learning and encourages teachers to use a variety of teaching methods. In the school year 2008–2009, there were 44 children in grade 1, divided into three classes, each with its own teacher and 14–15 children in each class. Children spent most of their time in their classroom, but were also split into groups that went to the gym, the library, or other special classes. Three times a week, the children got the chance to choose among different activities: play, reading, math, computer use, etc. and to mix with

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 4-2. Overview of Participants in the Study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>North Valley After-school Centre</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Leader: Helen, 36 years old, preschool teacher | Leader: Anna, 41 years old | Two formal interviews with each leader
Informal conversations, observations |
| Three recreation personnel: Margrét, 54 years old  Heiða, 23 years old  Magnúss, 22 years old | Four recreation personnel: Christie, MA in fine arts, 31 years old  Drífa, 26 years old, BA in psychology  Sólveig, 24 years old  Veiga, 22 years old | One formal interview with each recreation personnel
Informal conversations, observations |
| 34 children (b. 2002) 6-7 years old | 42 children (b. 2002) 6-7 years old | One interview with each child, as well as informal conversations, observations, and drawings made by some of the children |
| Two teachers: Herdis, 48 years old  Ásta, 45 years old | Two teachers: Lilja, 38 years old  Halla, 32 years old | One formal interview with each teacher |
other classes. All the classrooms in the school as well as other areas were used, and teachers took turns in supervising the various areas. This was the only time children could decide for themselves where they wanted to be in the school building. Apart from that, the timetable was structured, and it was planned beforehand where and with whom the children should be, and what they should be doing.

4.4 Participants in the study

Participants in the study were: the leaders of both after-school centres, the recreation personnel in both centres, children born in 2002 enrolled in the two after-school centres, as well as four teachers working in the two associated schools. Pseudonyms are used, and some information altered to ensure anonymity. Table 4-2 gives an overview of the main participants in the study:

4.5 The research process

4.5.1 Data gathering

Data included texts derived from public documents, policy documents, documents related to the field (newsletters, announcements); visual data such as drawings; text from interviews; and texts from my field notes. Table 4-3 provides an overview of the methods used in seeking answers to the research questions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research questions</th>
<th>Data gathering methods</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What is the purpose of the after-school centres in Reykjavík, and how has public policy reflected that purpose?</td>
<td>Analysis of policy documents&lt;br&gt;Analysis of public debates&lt;br&gt;Interviews with recreation personnel, leaders of after-school centres, teachers, and parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do recreation personnel experience their role, and to what extent do they emphasize care, learning or leisure?</td>
<td>Interviews with recreation personnel&lt;br&gt;Notes from observation&lt;br&gt;Public documents&lt;br&gt;Interviews with parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do children view the daily activities in the after-school centre, and how do they experience the difference between their school and their after-school centre?</td>
<td>Interviews with children&lt;br&gt;Drawings by children&lt;br&gt;Notes from observation&lt;br&gt;Interviews with recreation personnel&lt;br&gt;Interviews with parents</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The research began with an historical analysis of archives and documents relevant to the development of after-school centres in Reykjavík. Table 4.4 gives an overview of the timeline of data gathering as well as the main sources for each period. After preliminary analysis of the historical data, I
moved on to gather data from the lived experience of children and recreation workers. I interviewed 43 children from two after-school centres, aged 6-7 years, on their views on their schools and after-school centres, focusing on their possibilities for taking an active part in their work day by, for example, deciding what should be done or how. Drawings were used to give children an opportunity to express their views and to get supplementary data on how they experience the after-school centre setting. Furthermore, I interviewed recreation personnel in the two after-school centres, along with four teachers working with the same children in their schools.

Table 4.4. Data gathering Timeline

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Data</th>
<th>Sources</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2007–2008 Whole year</td>
<td>Public documents, policy documents</td>
<td>The Reykjavík Municipal Archives, newspapers, the Reykjavík Sports and Recreation Department, the Reykjavík Pre-school Department and the Education Department</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009 January–March</td>
<td>Fieldnotes, interviews with 4 recreation personnel and two teachers, interviews with 23 children, drawings made by children</td>
<td>The North Valley After-school Centre and the North Valley School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009 May–June</td>
<td>Fieldnotes, interviews with 5 recreation personnel, interviews with 16 children</td>
<td>The Sunny Side After-school Centre and the City School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009 September–December</td>
<td>Interviews with 8 children (from the group previously interviewed)</td>
<td>The North Valley After-school Centre and the North Valley School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010 January–May</td>
<td>Drawings by 39 children and interviews with 8 children (previously interviewed)</td>
<td>The Sunny Side After-school Centre and the City School From both after-school centres</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.5.2 Data Analysis

I applied a series of recursive processes to the data, drawing on qualitative-oriented techniques as well as quantitative when appropriate. The number of children enrolled in after-school centres can tell us something about the need that parents have for after-school service for their children. The frequency of meetings can tell us something about the collaboration of recreation personnel with teachers and with parents. However, even though such data will be taken into account when appropriate, the main emphasis is on interpreting qualitative data, as explained earlier: both texts and visual documents.

Analysis of the data was undertaken both during the period of data gathering and afterwards. I used coding categories, searched for regularities
and patterns within different texts and images, looked for the ways in which words and phrases appeared and reappeared, searched for connections and themes within and between texts, and examined situations and contexts as well as the relationships between individuals and groups.

Wenger’s concept of the social ecology of identity was used to analyse the ways in which the personnel and the children conceived their roles within the after-school centres and to identify their sources of belonging (see section 3.5.2). Two themes are central to the formation of identity according to Wenger: participation/non-participation and modes of belonging. For those reasons the data were analysed with regard to themes that constituted either participation or non-participation. Participation involves being able to take part in the negotiation of meanings and to engage in activities and shared experiences. It was thus important to examine the ways in which children and professionals take part (or not) in creating the institutional setting and the level at which they engage in, and identify with, the activities in the after-school centre. Non-participation is reflected in experiences of not being heard, of individuals or groups being marginalised, and in not having access to the validation of meaning. Furthermore, it was essential to be able to identify what constituted modes of belonging. Therefore, the study analyses how participants engaged in the practices of the after-school centres, how they interpreted their participation, and where they situated themselves subjectively within these practices. Specific emphasis was on understanding the key purposes of the after-school centres from the points of view of the different participants.

First, I identified the main themes that came up in each field of study: the organisational framework and the views of different groups of stakeholders. Then, when the main themes had been identified, I worked through the themes and data again, to see how the themes could be translated into Wenger’s conceptual framework on the social ecology of identity. This last step provided a theoretical perspective on the ways in which participants identified with the after-school centre and how they visualized its organisational identity.

4.6 Credibility of the study

The credibility of this study relies on different factors, such as the research design and the use of multiple sources and multiple methods to acquire data. During the research process, preliminary findings were regularly communicated both to practitioners and to the academic community (see appendix I). Peer review and critical comments made by practitioners encouraged re-thinking and re-evaluation of the study on a regular basis. Furthermore, through reading and re-reading interviews, fieldnotes, and other data, I have striven to present a sound and holistic picture of the
practices within the after-school centres in Reykjavík and an estimation of their current and likely future status in the education of children.

4.7 Ethical considerations

When working with people in a social research setting, many ethical considerations arise concerning matters of privacy, harm, and equality. Anonymity and confidentiality are important so that the participants can freely express their views on their workplace and their daily work without becoming targets for public criticism or discussion, for example within the workplace. It is important to find ways to include children as participants in research and to invite them either to accept or to decline participation (Alderson & Morrow, 2004; Alderson, 2005; Einarsdóttir, 2006a). This section introduces the ethical formalities of this study and addresses the issues of access of consent, anonymity, the status of the researcher, and the limitations of the study.

4.7.1 Ethical formalities

The research proposal for this study was approved in December 2008 by the Ethics Committee of the Social Science Faculty at the University of Iceland (see appendix A). Furthermore, the Icelandic Data Protection Authority was informed of the study in December, 2008. A letter of consent was obtained from the adult participants in the study (see appendices B and C). The children received written and oral information about the research, and it was considered sufficient to obtain their oral consent (see appendix D).

4.7.2 Access and consent

Individuals have the right to either accept or decline to be involved as subjects in research. It is, therefore, necessary to seek the informed consent of participants in educational research (American Educational Research Association [AERA], 2011). Researchers should provide their prospective participants with detailed information on the research process, the level of involvement expected of participants, and the possible consequences for the participants. Otherwise, people will not be able to give their informed consent. There are exceptions to the rule of informed consent, such as (a) when the research involves only minimal risks and (b) when it would be practically impossible to carry out the research were informed consent required (AERA, 2011). Although it can be said that this study involved minimal risks for the participants, I found it proper to seek consent from all parties involved.

I contacted the leader of each centre, and after they had consulted with their personnel, I was invited to come for a visit. I also contacted the
school authorities and asked for permission to observe groups in grade 1. When both the recreation personnel and the teachers working with children in grade 1 had agreed to participate in my study, I sought not only the consent of the children but also permission from their parents. In general, it is legally required to seek the consent of legal guardians of minors for participation of the minors in research, although there are exceptions, as explained above (AERA, 2011). Since parents are responsible for their children’s well-being and are key persons in guarding the children’s interests, I considered it important to get their permission before I invited the children to participate in the research.

First, a letter was sent home to the parents with information on the research, and they were told that they would receive an email in which they would be asked to send in their consent by return email. In the North Valley School, all of the parents agreed except for the parents of two of the children. One of these children was at the time not registered at the after-school centre, while the other child was coping with disability, and the parents did not want the child to take part. In the Sunny Side After-school Centre it took a longer time to get the parents to respond to the letter and the email; but in the end, only four parents withheld their consent. Since I did not have direct access to mailing lists, I had to rely on the help of the leaders of each centre in acquiring the consent of the parents.

For my research, it was important to have the children understand the aims and methods of my study (AERA, 2011). In my first visit to the schools, I introduced myself to the children and gave them a leaflet with information about the research. I told them that I wanted to know what it was like to be a child in an after-school centre, because I thought it important for people in general to understand the nature and function of such centres. I explained that I would be coming to visit the after-school centres and would stay there from time to time. Because my data gathering was to stretch out over two years, there would sometimes be months between my visits. I took care to explain these things to the children more than once, at various times during the extended period of research, and to secure their continued assent.

4.7.3 Anonymity

Reykjavik is a small community of about 120,000 inhabitants with only 32 after-school centres. Anonymity was important for building trust between the researcher and the participants so that they could express themselves freely on matters that might have affected their co-workers or supervisors. The two after-school centres that participated in the research have been given fictional names here, in order to protect the anonymity of all of the participants. Furthermore, some information about the two
after-school centres and the participants has been withheld or changed in order to ensure anonymity.

4.7.4 Status of the researcher

The social scientist operates in a social world which moulds his opinions and interpretations. Thus, social research can never be value-free or neutral. Having worked within the after-school centres can be seen as both an advantage and a disadvantage for me as a researcher in this study. I knew the organisational structure of the after-school centres quite well and held a variety of opinions as to what worked well in practice and what did not. I had also been the leader of an after-school centre and was thus familiar with some of the issues that the participants in my study wanted to discuss. Certainly, this affected the way in which I conducted the research and the relationships that I was able to build with the participants, both children and personnel. I believe that the participants recognized that I had a genuine interest in the operations of after-school centres and that I could relate to, and understand, their experiences and feelings.

4.7.5 Limitations

The study takes the after-school centres in Reykjavík as a point of departure in order to understand their operation; it does not offer an account of the after-school arrangements in all areas of Iceland. Furthermore, two after-school centres were selected to participate in the study as being representative of the after-school centres in Reykjavík. It is possible that certain modes of operation or characteristics in the Reykjavík system do not emerge in this study because only two cases were chosen. Furthermore, time spent on data collection was limited, and the study does not provide a complete account of the two after-school centres that participated. However, the study sheds light on the opinions of the children, personnel and parents who were interviewed, and I believe that this is of considerable value for understanding the nature and operations of after-school centres and may suggest ways of improving them.
5 THE ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE AFTER-SCHOOL CENTRES IN REYKJAVÍK

To shed light on the organisational identity of the after-school centres, a multilevel analysis was used. The after-school centre was examined through the lenses of the theory of CoPs (Wenger, 1998) and the sociology of childhood. In fact, the after-school centres exist within a constellation of communities: the global community—including the school, the home, the administrative context, and the political system—the community of the staff, and the community of the children. Together, these stakeholders take part in creating the organisational identity of the after-school centres (see section 1.5). The following chapters introduce the main findings of the study: This chapter outlines the organisational development of the after-school centres in Reykjavík, Chapter 6 addresses the pedagogy of the recreation personnel and how they perceived their roles, and Chapter 7 introduces the perspectives of the children who took part in the study, and how they experienced and interpreted the identity of the after-school centre, specifically regarding their experiences of the school.

The aim of this chapter is to examine the connection between the design of the after-school centre as an organisation and emergent practices within the setting. This will be done by examining, firstly, the historical development of the services in Reykjavík and looking at the ideas and concepts that have been used to rationalize the provision of these services in policy documents and media reports. Secondly, the current framework of the after-school centres in Reykjavík will be discussed along with their status in the school system as it appears in (a) websites, leaflets, and handbooks for personnel, (b) the City Council’s agreement on the operation of after-school centres in Reykjavík (Reykjavík, 2010) and in (c) the Contract about the management of after-school centres in schools (Reykjavík, 2006a) made between the Sports and Recreation Council (SRC) and the Educational Council. Furthermore, the emphasis in public policy with regard to the after-school centres provides evidence concerning different ideas of childhood in society.

Politicians are, in many respects, distant from practices at the local level. Still, they decide public policy and develop the framework for public

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1 I have already presented some of the main themes of the following argument in Pálsdóttir (2009), see also Pálsdóttir and Ágústdóttir (2011).
institutions and organisations, thus affecting each and every community of practice operating in specific social contexts. The political community in Reykjavík has repeatedly reviewed its decisions concerning the operation of the after-school centres. In my analysis, I argue that this development can be divided into three periods, each with its defining characteristics. I maintain that in the first period of the operation of after-school centres the main emphasis was on providing care for children of single parents or children who came from impoverished households. A survey from that period shows that the object of most centres was to provide a home-like base where children had considerable freedom of activity and could even visit friends and places in the neighbourhood. The second period was characterized by an initial emphasis on learning, as the schools started to provide extended services for their students. In the third period, the focus shifted from learning to leisure, as the responsibility for the services was transferred from the schools to the Sports and Recreation Council. Thus, the first could be called the period of care, the second the period of learning, and the third the period of leisure.

5.1 History of after-school centres in Reykjavík

On the basis of an analysis of documents on after-school centres (Pálsdóttir, 2009), I have divided the history of after-school centres within the municipality of Reykjavík into three periods. This division facilitates a description of the main characteristics of each period with respect to the administration of the service, its main purposes according to policy, and the alignment of the professional responsibility.


The need for day-care for school-aged children arose in the second half of the twentieth century, as mothers increasingly became part of the general workforce. The first period is marked by the establishment of the first after-school centre in Reykjavík in 1971 and came to an end when schools started to offer extended services for all students in 1993. During this period, a total of 14 after-school centres were operated by the municipality. The Independence Party (i. Sjálftæðisflokkur) had governed the city for half a century when two other political parties formed an alliance and took control in 1978: the People’s Party (i. Alþýðubandalag) and the Progressive Party (i. Framsóknarflokkur). In 1978, the city took over the operation of the day-care centres which a grass-root organisation Sumargjöf had been running for several years with a grant provided by the city. The formal acceptance of responsibility for the service harmonized with the social ideals of the welfare society that has characterized Nordic
politics, where providing day-care as a part of the public services has been seen as an important element of the welfare society (Eydal, 2005).

The Day Care Services in Reykjavík were responsible for providing the after-school centre. The aims and structure of the after-school centres during this period were in many ways well defined, partly by law, and partly by the *modus operandi* that was gradually developing. The first after-school centres established in Reykjavík came under the laws on the operation of day-care centres, which were aimed at providing children with care that “enhances their personal and social development” (The law on the role of the state in constructing and operating day-care institutions, 1973). It was required that personnel should be educated as pre-school teachers, and the aim of these institutions—to create a healthy and nurturing environment for children—was made clear. Furthermore, public regulations governing housing facilities, the ratio of personnel to children, and guarantees for child safety, were operative. Regulations also required that the environment suit the needs of the children and the daily activities in the centres. But the downside during this period was that this service was only available to a very limited number of children, mostly those from single-parent families. Parents could in fact only apply for a child to attend an after-school centre through the social service sector. Only 5 to 6 percent of school children aged 6 to 9 years attended after-school centres during this first period (Reykjavík, 1991). 58 percent of the personnel, including primary and pre-school teachers, of whom a third were pre-school teachers, had tertiary education. The remaining 42 percent had no tertiary education (Eggertsdóttir et al., 1982).

At that time compulsory education started at the age of seven in grade 1, but the schools had already begun to offer six-year-olds places in pre-school classes (i. *forskóli*) within the elementary schools. A report from the Ministry of Education in 1981 stated that huge pressure was exerted by parents on city authorities for the operation of pre-school classes. One of the reasons was said to be the general lack of day-care services and the increasing participation of both parents in the labour market (Menntamálaráðuneyti, 1981). Furthermore:

The pre-school committee believes that educational authorities should take a responsible stance in this matter as the majority of parents are working out of necessity. It has to be decided whether the provision of day-care is to be left to the working parents alone, or whether the government and local authorities will assist, either through:

(a) the educational authorities, with longer school hours (as in the UK, for example, where children from the age of five are in school from 9:00 am to 3:30 pm, or
In 1991, a new educational law was passed that extended compulsory schooling to six-year old children. However, the majority of the six-year old children were already attending pre-school classes in their local schools (Jónasson, 2008). But these classes only covered a small part of the working day, about 2–3 hours, and parents still had to use a variety of other solutions—including relatives, friends, nannies, etc.—to get the child safely through the day. There were no quick responses to the above call for public policy on day-care for school-aged children. Two BA-theses were written on the topic of school-day-care at the School of Education during this period, one in 1982 and the other in 1992. In 1982, eight school-day-care centres were operated by the city of Reykjavík, three more were operated by the City Hospital for the children of hospital staff, and an additional three were operated in towns outside of Reykjavík (Akureyri, Hafnarfjörður, and Kópavogur). A survey was carried out in all school-day-care centres operating at that time seeking information about facilities, children, personnel, daily activities, and cooperation. Most of these centres were operated in older housing apartments rented or owned by the city, although one was located on compulsory school premises. Three of the centres in Reykjavík were operated in new buildings that were specially designed to meet the needs of this service. Only two of the centres had written pedagogical goals. The personnel at the Auðarstræti school-day-care expressed nine specific goals:

1. To encourage children to be independent.
2. To encourage children to take initiative.
3. To teach children to work together.
4. To urge children to be responsible.
5. To provide emotional safety for children.
6. To meet the physical needs of children.
7. To teach children to know the community.
8. To emphasize the creative abilities of children.

A variety of ambitious goals are stated in their policy reflecting both formal and informal processes: These include the provision of care, the encouragement of development, and the teaching of certain skills.
However, few of the after-school centres had adopted such policy documents.

Interestingly, the survey showed that at most of these centres, children were allowed to move about freely in the nearby neighbourhoods provided they informed the personnel about their comings and goings. At most centres, children participated in daily chores such as preparing lunch, or even, in some cases, running errands such as going to the store to buy groceries. The personnel said that they strove to create a home-like atmosphere, supporting both the social development of the children and their overall well-being (Eggertsdóttir et al., p. 58). The program was loosely structured and the children could choose between various activities and play-areas. In some centres, specific group-work was organised, and in all the centres children could get assistance with homework if the parents requested it. However, the emphasis on homework varied: in some centres, all children finished it on the premises; while in others, only a few children would do their homework. Some of the children participated in other recreational activities such as dance, swimming, or music lessons. Depending on the location, children might go alone or be escorted by parents or personnel. The report stated furthermore that there was a wide gap between the number of places available and the number of children in need of care (Eggertsdóttir et al., 1982). The authors concluded that Reykjavík would need to open six new centres each year for the next ten years. However, a report from 1992 showed that only six new centres were established in the period 1982–1992 in Reykjavík (Pálmadóttir & Rútsdóttir, 1992). The majority of children were staying at home alone or with a sibling for many hours per week during this period. This latter report led to a public outcry calling for immediate action, as the general opinion was that children aged 6–9 years should not be left unattended for so many hours each day. Due to budget cuts, the Reykjavík Day Care Services had been unable to provide the facilities necessary for school day-care (Eggertsdóttir et al., 1982; Pálmadóttir & Rútsdóttir, 1992). As a result, there was a demand that schools offer after-school services for every child in need of such care.

5.1.2 School-Day Care: Period II (1993–2002) – the learning period

The second period started when every compulsory school in Reykjavík began to offer school day-care (i. skóladagvist) and ended in 2002 when these services were placed under the Sport and Recreational Council. Árni Þór Sigfússon, a member of the Independence Party, initiated the move of these services to the Educational Council in 1992. He argued that all schools should offer extended services to meet the needs of parents and industry for day-care. He maintained that the schools should offer
“extended education, assistance with homework, and healthy recreational activities” (Sigfússon, 1992, *my translation*). His arguments included equality of access and efficiency, as the services of schools needed to respond to societal changes, including the increasing need for day-care for the youngest school-children. Sigfússon also envisioned that it would be possible for the schools to organise after-school activities in collaboration with other recreational and cultural organisations. Every school in Reykjavík was to offer a holistic service to children and parents that should extend throughout the day (Jónasson, 1989). This goal was to be achieved by the year 2001. Gradually, the amount of time children were spending in school was increasing.

Furthermore, the Coalition Party (i. R-listinn) that came into power in the 1994 election promised to ensure that all parents of children one year and older would have access to public day-care within four years. Although it proved impossible to keep that promise, the availability of day-care for young children increased enormously during this period. From 1998-2004, the percentage of one-year old children in Reykjavík attending pre-school more than doubled, rising from 15 to 39 percent (Hagstofa Íslands, 2011). Being able to offer every school-aged child a place in an after-school centre was thus important for the politicians.

Educational authorities stated that school-day-care should build on the general educational and pedagogical aims set out in the laws on compulsory schooling (Skólaskrifstofa, 1995). In the beginning, school teachers were hired to manage and provide the school-day-care. There were those who maintained that teachers were professionals in providing care for school-aged children and should, therefore, offer extended care in after-school hours (Sigurðardóttir, 1994). The project of incorporating school-day-care was initially introduced as the whole-day school (i. heilsdagsskóli). Thus, the authorities saw the organisation of after-school centres as a service which was closely linked to the overall project of the school.

However, reports show that terms such as *extended-care* (i. lengd viðvera) and *school-day-care* (i. skóladagvíst) soon took over and were used instead of whole-day school (Fræðslumiðstöð Reykjavík, 1997, 1998, 1999). The project did not seem to fit very well with the work of the teachers. Within a few years, the service was mostly provided by personnel without professional training who had originally been hired to do cleaning, supervision during school-recess, or work as assistants in the classroom (Birgisdóttir, 1998). There was little coordination between the centres, and the services they provided could thus be very different (Birgisdóttir, 1998). The activities in the majority of the centres at that time involved play, both indoors and outdoors, as well as assistance with
homework. Only a few places managed to organise extensive recreational activities (Birgisdóttir, 1998).

Two main reasons can be seen behind this development. Firstly, the project had from the very beginning been highly debated within the teaching profession (Jón Freyr Pórarinsson, personal communication, May 30th, 2008). The professional identity of the teachers was linked to the classroom, not the after-school centre, and thus not to the extended aims of education demanded by the law on compulsory schooling. The Teachers Union was at that time working hard to get teachers full-time jobs, instead of just part-time jobs as classroom teachers. This was achieved in 2001 and meant that teachers no longer needed the extra hours that work in the after-school centre had provided. Secondly, it was more expensive to hire teachers to work in after-school centres than persons who had not received special training. The Teachers Union made sure that if teachers took on extra work in the after-school centres they were to get the same wages as in their teaching, and that definitely mattered to the school management (Jón Freyr Pórarinsson, personal communication, May 30th, 2008). It was much cheaper to hire unqualified personnel to work in the after-school centres.

Reykjavík was, from the beginning of this period, criticized for not providing quality care in the after-school centres, which lacked funding and were sometimes located in unsatisfactory facilities (Sigurðsson, 1994). It proved difficult to provide quality care because of a lack of professional personnel and for financial reasons. This led administrators and politicians to reconsider the organisation of after-school services. At the end of the nineties, authorities were looking for an alternative way to provide day-care for school children.

Thus, during this period, the emphasis was clearly on learning in the traditional sense, i.e. the centres were meant to supplement the learning taking place in the schools. Even though the centres also had other functions, this period may be characterized by the term learning, even school learning, to disassociate it from the more informal learning that was the prevalent emphasis during the first and the third periods. However, the project was not prioritised by authorities or the teaching profession in general and thus did not become an integral part of the school curriculum.

5.1.3 Leisure-time centres: Period III (2002–2011) – the leisure period

The third period began in 2002 when the professional responsibility for the after-school centres was moved from the Educational Council to the Sports and Recreation Council (SRC). The main emphasis during this period
was on the organisation of leisure activities for children, and not on school-related activities, such as assistance with homework. The Coalition Party was still in power when the decision was made that the SRC was to take over the administration of the after-school programs. The representatives argued that it was sensible to make a clearer distinction between school and leisure-time activities and that knowledge concerning how to organise leisure activities was to be found among the personnel working for the SRC. They looked for models in other social welfare societies in the Nordic countries, such as Sweden, where leisure-time centres (s. fritidshem) were organised and a group of professionally trained leisure-time pedagogues were responsible for the services. The Reykjavík City authorities set out to create after-school centres that would not only provide care for children but would also offer a variety of recreational activities, such as sports, music, and other extra-curricular activities. It can be argued that the changes to the school system, the extended school-day, and the changes in the teaching profession (where teachers now could fulfill their teaching load by teaching a single group of students) facilitated the decision to make a clear cut distinction between the school and after-school programs.

The City Council decided in June, 2002, that the after-school centres should be managed by the Sports and Recreation Council of Reykjavík; but the services were to be provided in the school buildings. This was a significant change in policy, as it was no longer considered to be the responsibility of the school system to provide after-school services. School leaders were no longer in charge of these services. Instead they became co-workers of the leaders of the after-school centres and other centre supervisors, namely department leaders and the managers of the local Recreation Centres. The City Council’s agreement on the operation of after-school centres in Reykjavík was concluded in 2002 (Reykjavík, 2002a). The name school-day-care was dropped as a name for the after-school activities and the centres became known as leisure-time centres (i. frístundaheimili). The main aim of the leisure-time centres was that children should “be able to enjoy themselves and develop in an environment characterized by caring, security and respect” and that they should enhance “social skills through play and different activities” (Reykjavík, n.d.). The new terminology symbolized the importance of leisure and reinstated the idea that these centres were substitutes for the home. A Contract about the management of after-school centres in schools was made between the SRC and the Educational Council concerning the operation of after-school centres in schools (Reykjavík, 2002b, updated in 2006). It addressed the formal collaboration between the schools and the after-school centres (see section 5.3.3).
It was argued that emphasis should be placed on recreation rather than academic progress during after-school hours and that the SRC would be best fitted to organise the recreational activities of children (Reykjavík, 2002). The Recreational Centres had supervised summer activities for school-aged children for many years, organised recreational courses in cooperation with elementary schools, and were responsible for running youth centres for teenagers. Only a few of the personnel had completed a degree in leisure-time studies from Swedish Universities but many had extensive experience in working with children in their leisure time. The professional identity of this group was strongly linked to leisure and recreation—not to formal classroom education.

One of the main ideas was that children’s participation in sports, music, and other leisure activities should be organised within the parents' working day between 8:00 am and 5:00 pm. The SRC was considered best fitted to coordinate the organisation of such leisure activities and set up cooperation between the after-school centres and other recreational bodies, such as sport clubs, art and music schools, scouts, etc. This, however, proved hard to implement. In Reykjavík, the availability of leisure activities for children varies between districts. Many sports clubs have difficulty providing trainers during working hours, as trainers often are volunteers who have other, full-time jobs. Taking children to and from leisure activities also requires additional personnel and, in some cases, transport, which was not included in the budget. Thus, while cooperation with other leisure centres is available to some extent, the after-school centres have focused mainly upon providing activities within their own settings.

The administrative structure also changed when the services were placed under the Sports and Recreational Council. Recreation Centres operate in all six areas of Reykjavík and supervise youth centres and youth work in close cooperation with childrens' and youth services in the various neighbourhoods. Each Recreation Centre collaborates with the elementary schools in its district, which range in number from three to nine. A new position of Department Leader for after-school centres was established at each Recreation Centre, supervising the initiation and the work of leaders in the after-school centres. The author of this dissertation held the position of department leader in the Tónabær Recreational Centre, from 2004 to 2007. As well as administrating weekly meetings of the leaders, the department leaders would meet and discuss issues every month. This provided an opportunity for leaders, as well as department leaders, to share ideas and create a repertoire of tools which could be applied in various settings. Steps were taken to enhance the quality of care offered in leisure-time centres by setting the aforementioned shared goals, which have been presented in leaflets, in handbooks and on websites.
A professional manager was hired to implement and oversee the developmental phase. He set up meetings with school leaders and managers of the Recreation Centres, where future collaboration was discussed as well as housing arrangements and other practical issues. The professional manager also directed regular meetings of all department leaders. This initiated the emergence of a community of practice where the professional development of the after-school centres was discussed and developed. Experiences and histories of successes and failures were shared through meetings and project work. The department leaders functioned as mediators as they arranged weekly meetings with the after-school leaders in their area, introducing new ideas, routines, and practices from other areas.

Educational programs for personnel were organised by the SRC, including an introductory course for incoming personnel every fall and courses on safety rules, child development, and the arrangement of recreational activities for children. The purpose was to strengthen professional dialogue between leaders and personnel and to ensure that personnel would be conscious of the policies of the SRC and be able to apply them in their daily work. The courses also provided opportunities for personnel to exchange ideas and to compare experiences and settings, thereby creating a common knowledge base. The Recreation Centres took turns organizing meetings, where leaders and personnel would introduce the various projects they were organizing within the after-school centres to personnel from other centres.

Figure 5-1 provides an overview of the historical development of the after-school centres in Reykjavík, tracing the milestones in their operation and their changing position within the public framework. It shows that, during the past years, several city agreements and policy documents have been produced that clarify the institutional status of the after-school centres. However, a new period has already begun, with possible changes that are still to unfold.

In 2008, Iceland experienced a financial crisis when the Icelandic bank system collapsed. Subsequently, communities have been struggling financially, which has resulted in cutbacks within the educational system as well as in other areas. In 2010, a new political party, the Best Party (i. Besti flokkurinn) came to power in the city along with another party, Samfylkingin, that had been in and out of power for a long time. The Best Party, originally introduced as a joke, set out to shake up the traditional political environment. Their spokesman, the comedian and actor, Jón Gnarr, became mayor, making it possible for him to realize his election promises, one of which was that he would break all his promises. Understandably, the political agenda of the city government has been rather unclear since 2010. In 2011 the city council introduced a plan to
Figure 5.1: Timeline showing the historical development of after-school centres in Reykjavík

1975
Increasing need for school-aged day-care
Laws on the regulations of day-care centres established in 1973

1980
Children from socially deprived homes have access to after-school centres

1985
Worries of the safety of 'latch-key' children
Schools allowed to operate after-school care according to compulsory school law in 1995

1990
All children from grade 1–4 have access to after-school centres

1995
The school day has lengthened considerably
City Agreement on the operation of AC, 2002

2000
Increased emphasis on leisure and recreation
City Agreement on the operation of AC, updated 2010

2005
Cutbacks due to financial crisis
Contract concerning the operation of AC between SRC and the Educational Council, 2002, updated 2006

2010
Policy on holistic services
Requirements for after-school centre’s facilities issued in 2006

2015
New Department of Education and Youth is established
increase interdisciplinary cooperation between professionals working with children and make better use of resources by merging schools and pre-schools, whenever possible, and to put the after-school centres once again under the school administrations (Reykjavíkurborg, 2011). A committee proposed that schools and after-school centres should merge in autumn 2012, partly returning to the situation during the second period discussed earlier. The arguments for this new proposal were several, such as: to increase the continuity of services for children and parents; to enhance cooperation between different professionals (now accepting that every task requires professional attention, but that the specializations might vary); to offer holistic services in schools by intertwining recreational activities with teaching; to make better use of the facilities; and to develop better support services for children with special needs (Reykjavíkurborg, 2011). Accordingly, a few months later, Reykjavík launched the operation of a new council, the Department of Education and Youth (i. Skóla og frístundasvið). This body oversees services aimed at children and youth, such as the operation of schools, pre-schools, after-school centres, and youth centres (Skóla- og frístundasvið, 2012). The after-school centres and the schools have, however, not merged at the local level (i.e. school/after-school level), but the upper echelon administrative units, i.e. the SRC and the Educational Council, have merged. At the present time (autumn 2012), it remains unclear how the new administrative structure will change the practices and the administration of the after-school centres.

5.2 Conflicting discourses

Our historical overview sheds light on the conflicting discourses concerning the operation and main functions of after-school centres in Reykjavík. Those conflicts concern (a) the main purposes of the services, (b) conflicts over the ideas of children as either vulnerable or capable and, (c) the unstable administration which leads to an unclear professional sector.

5.2.1 Purpose of after-school centres

The organisational development of the after-school centres in Reykjavík shows that although a main underlying factor in all periods has been the provision of care for young school-children, there has been a shift of emphasis between care, school learning, and leisure. The overriding rationale in the beginning was to provide care to underprivileged children. Then, moving into the second period, the rationale became that of offering extended educational services as a part of schooling. And during the third period, the most prominent rationale was that of arranging various recreational activities for children and empowering them to
participate in a democratic fashion. Nevertheless, care, learning, and leisure cannot be separated fully in practice. Firstly, the overall goal of the politicians has been to create a service that would meet the social need for increased day-care. From the point of view of the society, the main object of the after-school centres has been to provide day-care. The element of care is thus integral to the three different types of after-school centres. Secondly, the educational element in after-school service was recognized by practitioners right from the start. Children were encouraged to take the initiative, to be responsible, to learn about the environment, and so forth. Since 1993, the majority of the centres have been operated on school grounds, or in close proximity with a school. Increasing emphasis has been placed on supporting the overall development of children in the after-school centres, which is also one of the legislative aims of elementary schools in Iceland. Thirdly, in all periods, the practice of after-school centres has taken account of the fact that they serve children in their leisure time. Leisure has been valued as time where individuals are free from everyday chores and able to choose what to do and to have fun. Providing an opportunity for free play has been a significant part of the practice, but the emphasis has also been on enabling children to create and sustain friendships with their peers. Thus, even though it is argued that each period has its focal emphasis, from which its name is derived, all of the characteristics are nevertheless present in all three periods.

5.2.2 Images of childhood – vulnerable and capable children

Changes in child-care policies reflect different images of childhood and children. The institutional development of after-school centres in Reykjavik represents two contrary images of children: children as vulnerable and children as capable. In the first years of school-day-care in Reykjavik, only a small number of children, who were assumed to be at greater risk than other children, were offered places in school-day-care centres. Those were the children of single parents, or children from other socially underprivileged homes. The day-care setting for school-aged children at that time was meant to provide a home away from home, a secure and caring environment where the needs of children were met (Eggertsdóttir, et al., 1982). In later years, that argument was widened to include all children, not only children with special needs. Even though the recreational and developmental value for children of participating in after-school programs has been discussed at the local level, the organisational requirements are much simpler: that children can be enrolled and safeguarded in after-school hours. The general view is that the youngest school children are not mature enough to spend many hours at home
alone. Furthermore, there has been a growing fear of children being left unsupervised in after-school hours, as is reflected in the increasing number of children in care. This fear of the potential dangers that children may face if left on their own is also evident in the changes in the practice itself. In the first period, it was not uncommon for children to be allowed to travel around the local neighbourhood by themselves. They could run errands to the local shop and visit friends that lived close by. However, during the second and the third periods the children were not allowed to travel alone in the local neighbourhood. In the third period, the practitioners had, furthermore, developed regulations concerning trips with the children outside of the school playground (Reykjavik, 2006b).

However, within the practice itself, a discourse of children as capable has also been emerging, especially if we look to the first and the third period. It is reflected, for example, in the pedagogues’ emphasis on children’s choice and that they should take part in deciding their activities within the centre.

Table 5-1. Views towards Children as reflected in Policy

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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Children required care in after-school hours, as their homes were lacking</td>
<td>Children were allowed to travel by themselves in the local neighbourhood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Period of Learning: 1993–2002</td>
<td>Children required supervision and care, because parents are working Children required extended education and assistance with homework</td>
<td>Emphasis on free play within the boundaries of the after-school centres</td>
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The images of childhood reflected in the policy on after-school centres provide evidence of the attitudes taken towards children as social actors and towards their social status. The society at large has deemed it important to provide services for young school children. However, it has been unclear what activities they should offer children or what kind of results should be expected with regard to the children themselves. From the point of view of the system, the main purpose of after-school centres has been to protect the children. Nevertheless, the after-school centres have also been recognized, at least rhetorically, as potential partners in the education and empowerment of children as social actors.
5.2.3 Unstable administration

The frequent organisational changes of the after-school centres have limited the trajectories of learning of the adult participants. Trajectories of learning develop over time when CoPs gather experiences and knowledge into histories of learning that are shared and transmitted between generations of participants. Organisational change that involves moving services from one department to another is likely to involve a certain amount of uncertainty, both for providers and beneficiaries. Since the first after-school centres were established in 1971 there have been three top-down mandates that have moved the services from one group of practitioners to another. These changes brought about a certain level of uncertainty for all groups within the after-school centre: the personnel, the children, and the parents. The personnel in the after-school centres has had to respond to top-down decisions that have brought about considerable changes. The first change was the most drastic, as it entailed that all school-day-care centres were closed between 1994 and 1997 and the services moved completely into the schools themselves. There was a change of professional leadership, as elementary school teachers were considered specialists in taking care of, and providing education to, school-aged children. However, the teaching profession did not think it appropriate to take on that assignment, and there is no clear evidence that school administrators initiated professional development within the centres.

When the school-day-care homes operating in the first period were closed down and the services moved to the schools, the personnel, both pre-school teachers and untrained workers, did not follow the services into the schools. The professional development of pre-school teachers as organisers of after-school centres came to an end. In the years 1990-1994 the Association of pre-school teachers repeatedly discussed the issues of school-aged day-care and tried to initiate a collaboration with the Teachers Association and the Ministry of Education (Harðardóttir, n.d.). However, these attempts were met with little interest, and no formal collaboration between pre-school teachers and school teachers was established. Most pre-school teachers continued to work in day-care institutions for younger children, under the supervision of the Day Care Services (i. Dagvist Barna, later Leikskólul Reykjavíkur). The accumulated knowledge and experience of the pre-school personnel concerning what was important for children in the after-school centres was not utilized in the schools. In fact, one of the arguments for schools providing this service was that teachers were specialized in educating school-aged children, whereas pre-school teachers were specialized in educating and providing care for younger children. Moreover, in this sense, the conflict was about what kind of services should be offered to children in the after-school
centres. The pre-school tradition emphasized the holistic development of children and informal play, while the teacher tradition emphasized formal learning opportunities (Fóstrufélag Íslands, 1990).

Change was initiated by politicians and administrators, not by the personnel in the school-day-care centres or teachers in the schools. Both groups did in fact strongly oppose moving after-school services from day-care centres run by pre-school teachers into the schools, arguing that once in the schools, after-school services could not provide quality service with proper facilities and professional direction. The administrators did not manage to build a bridge between the school-day-care centres and the new services provided within the schools.

Interestingly, there was a different response to the second change, when the services were moved from the schools to the SRC. The majority of the leaders previously hired by the schools quit, and new leaders were hired to manage the centres. This time the opposition was weak and went almost unnoticed. During the second period, both the organisational framework and the communities of practice within the centres were weak. CoPs flourish only if the participants identify strongly with the practice and are able to negotiate and develop connections of reciprocity with other communities. The majority of the personnel in the second period were, in the beginning, teachers who took the job on the side, additional to their main job as teachers; and when they no longer needed the side job they quit. Untrained instructors took their place. Many of them worked in the schools as assistants who cleaned or supervised the children during recess periods and lunch hours. These people did not have an authoritative voice in the development of the service, although they were the ones that provided the service and connected with children and parents. Many of them made only short-term commitments to the work, and turnover was high. The implementation of the service varied between schools, but the overall lack of investment from the School Council shows that the service was not prioritised.

School leaders who were responsible for the after-school centres at that time seem to have had their hands full in developing and providing, during school-hours, the education mandated by law. The supervision of the after-school centres was left in their care without further incentives to develop and strengthen the quality of the work that took place in them. In addition, the school leaders could, in general, not rely upon the diligence of the personnel or their dedication to finding ways to enhance quality in the service, for the personnel also lacked the incentives and the tools.

Table 5-2 outlines the three periods of the after-school centres in Reykjavik and their main emphases as determined by policy, indicating the differences in the institutional framework. It shows clearly how the professional responsibility has shifted, as the service has been moved
Table 5-2. Periods in the History of After-school Centres in Reykjavík

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Main activities in the after-school centres</th>
<th>Main policy characteristic according to policy</th>
<th>Main policy characteristic for coordination with school with regard to</th>
<th>Service provider</th>
<th>Legal framework for administration</th>
<th>Daily administration</th>
<th>Cooperation with school with regard to</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1971-1992 About two decades</td>
<td>Play, Groupwork, Out-door activities, Assistance with homework</td>
<td>Provide day-care in a home-like setting to children in need from grades 1-4</td>
<td>Law on Day-care Institutions</td>
<td>The Day-care centres</td>
<td>The Day-care Services</td>
<td>The Day-care Services</td>
<td>Out of the schools (period of care)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992-2002 About two decades</td>
<td>Play, Groupwork, Out-door activities, Assistance with homework</td>
<td>Provide day-care in a home-like setting to children in need from grades 1-4</td>
<td>Law on Day-care Institutions</td>
<td>The Day-care centres</td>
<td>The Day-care Services</td>
<td>The Day-care Services</td>
<td>Inside the schools (period of learning)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002-2011 About one decade</td>
<td>Play, Groupwork, Out-door activities, Assistance with homework</td>
<td>Offer organized leisure activities for all children in grades 1-4</td>
<td>Law on Day-care Institutions</td>
<td>The Sports and Recreation Council</td>
<td>The Sports and Recreation Council</td>
<td>The Sports and Recreation Council</td>
<td>Inside and outside the schools (period of leisure)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

from outside the schools (period of care), inside them (period of learning) and then, at least in terms of administration, out of the schools once again (period of leisure). However, the table also shows that actual coordination with the schools has been limited during all periods, and that the activities in the centres have not changed significantly, even though there have been structural changes in the administration:

The overview of the history of the after-school centres, provided in Table 5-2 shows that the service has been moved between organisational
departments within Reykjavík, with communities of practice for organizing after-school centres initiated and then shut down. The main rationale for this service has also changed during these three periods, from being a matter of care, to one of learning, and finally to one of leisure. The main object in the first period was to meet the needs of children from deprived homes and to make up for what the homes couldn’t provide. Providing care for those in need was the key word. During the second period, the aim was to offer day-care to children of all parents in need of such services. After-school service was seen as a part of schooling. In the third period, the recreational value of the services was emphasized, as the time children spend in after-school centres was seen as part of their leisure. In that sense, the domain of the service has changed, as have the rules of the game.

5.3 The current framework of leisure

The current framework of the operation of after-school centres in Reykjavík has been developed in the most recent period, the years 2002–2011. It should be noted that the administrative framework changed considerably after the Educational Council and the Sports and Recreational Council in Reykjavík merged into one Educational and Recreational Council in 2011. However, it remains unclear whether any substantial changes will be made to the organisational framework of the after-school centres, and thus the term ‘current’ describes the situation until any changes are implemented. The current framework consists of administrative recommendations, contracts made between the Educational Council and the SRC, and directives from the SRC on aims and activities, personnel, and cooperation with the schools.

5.3.1 Aims and activities

In recent years, Reykjavík has published websites and information leaflets on the aims and activities of the after-school centres, as described in the SRC handbook for personnel. The intention is

- To ensure that children feel secure and cared for in the after-school centre;
- To support children’s social skills and positive self-identity;
- To offer a variety of activities and make sure the needs of all children are met;
- To arrange organised leisure activities, such as group work, play-areas, and clubs. (Reykjavík, 2006c, p. 32, my translation)
In all centres, the emphasis should be on care, social learning, and organised leisure activities, to meet the needs of every child (Reykjavík, 2007). Homework is not done in the after-school centres, as it is considered the role of the schools and the parents to oversee the child’s academic development (Reykjavík, 2006b). After-school centres are meant to be a part of the child’s leisure time and, as such, areas of free play and places where children can take part in creative activities, under adult supervision. In each centre, children can choose between different activities, engaging in free play in different areas, both indoors and out, or participating in more organised group work led by adults. The declared goal of the after-school centres is to enhance democracy when working with children; hence, each centre is encouraged to find ways to incorporate the views and preferences of children when organizing daily work.

These aims reflect a vision of after-school centres as arenas that can contribute to the social development of children. No specific reference is made to learning in the sense of supporting academic skills. But the special, or distinguishing role of the centres is gradually being clarified. The emphasis is on empowering the individual child to be an active and able participant in a democratic community.

### 5.3.2 Personnel

As stated above, requirements for the personnel in after-school centres are not stipulated by law. According to the City Agreement, however, the leader of the after-school centre, the assistant leader, and the leisure pedagogue should all have tertiary education in the field of education or recreation (Reykjavík, 2010). The following requirements for other employees are described in the handbook for personnel:

- University degree in education or pedagogy, or equivalent education and/or experience in working with children.
- Good organisational skills and communication skills.
- Leadership skills and independence (i.e. stjórnunarhæfileika og sjálfstæð vinnubrögð). (Reykjavík, 2006c, p. 32, my translation)

Thus the aim clearly seems to be to hire personnel with the knowledge and professional competence to undertake organised work with children, though the requirements are fairly wide as no specific education is required. Moreover, experience in working with children can substitute for the educational requirement. In fact, although many of them are university students, the majority of the personnel have not finished a university degree (Pálsdóttir, 2008). The organisational and communication skills of the prospective personnel, as well as their leadership skills, are of primary importance.
According to the job description provided in the manual for personnel (Reykjavík, 2006c) personnel should:

- Encourage activity, responsibility, self-esteem, and independence of children;
- Organise daily schedules with other employees;
- Oversee particular activities, group work, or clubs;
- Be responsible for orderliness in the facility at the end of the day. (Reykjavík, 2006c, p. 32, my translation)

Thus, the above job requirements and job descriptions for the personnel in the after-school centres suggests that they undertake various assignments that require knowledge about children and good communication skills. It clearly makes professional pedagogical demands and also requires administrative competence. Personnel are expected to encourage the activity and independence of children, emphasizing the leisure character of the service, rather than particular learning experiences (in the academic, or school, sense of the term). The demand for professional competence by the municipal authorities seems also to be clearly in place.

5.3.3 Cooperation with schools

Two public documents describe how the cooperation between the after-school centres and the schools are to be organised. Firstly, the after-school centres are organised on the basis of the *City Council’s agreement on the operation of after-school centres in Reykjavík* (Reykjavík, 2010). Secondly, a *Contract about the management of after-school centres in schools* was made between the Educational Council and SRC to facilitate the cooperation between the two departments (Reykjavík, 2006a).

The former agreement, the *City Council’s agreement on the operation of after-school centres in Reykjavík*, is set forth in 16 articles and addresses formal cooperation between after-school centres and schools. It states that the after-school centres are open from 1:30 pm for children in grade 1, but from 1:50 pm for children in grades 2–4. The after-school centres close at 5:15 pm. During school holidays, such as the Christmas and Easter breaks, and on teacher preparation days, the after-school centres are open all day and parents pay for extra hours. However, on non-standard school days (days when school closes earlier than usual), no changes are made to the opening hours of the after-school centres, but the school is to take care of children in need of supervision until the after-school centre opens. According to the compulsory school law, such days can amount to as many as 10 days of the school year (Compulsory School Act, no.
School leaders make different use of this possibility, but this means that if the school closes before the after-school centre opens, the school has to provide supervision for the children.

The agreement further stipulates that children from grades 1 and 2 should be offered to participate in organised sports once a week in cooperation with a local sports club. The after-school centres should seek cooperation with other youth organisations in the local area, within the opening hours of the after-school centre. The staff-child ratio should be 1/12 for children in grade 1, but 1/14 for children in grades 2–4.

The last two articles of the agreement indicate that the school and the after-school centre should aim for a shared pedagogical vision. Article 15 says that there should be an emphasis upon hiring personnel who can work both in the school and in the after-school centre. Article 16 states that “schooling, rest, recreation, sports, music and after-school centre activities form a holistic work-day for children from grades 1 to 4” (Reykjavík, 2010, my translation). While the policy encourages increased collaboration between school and after-school centres by suggesting that the work-day of the children should be organised holistically, it remains unclear how the holistic service is to be organised and how it should be implemented. Even though the agreement says that the leaders of after-school centres should be invited to take part in meetings concerning specific children with special needs, there is no indication of how collaboration concerning pedagogical content of the holistic work-day of the children should be carried out. It is clear that the document acknowledges many of the issues that were in need of clarification and takes a very clear step in the direction of formalizing the status of after-school centres in the formal pedagogic enterprise.

The Contract about the management of after-school centres in schools made between the two city councils, explicates in more detail than the City Council’s agreement the practical issues concerning the cooperation between the schools and the after-school services (Reykjavík, 2006a). The director of the Recreational Centre in each area of Reykjavík is responsible for the overall management of the after-school centres in that area. The leader of the after-school centre is responsible for its daily operation. The contract deals mostly with matters of practicality such as the nature of the facilities, the number of square meters per child, and the cleaning arrangements, as discussed in more detail in the next section. The leader of an after-school centre and the principal of the associated school are supposed to make an agreement on the use of facilities. Cleaning is provided by the school; however, the personnel in the after-school centre are responsible for making sure that the facilities are ready to be cleaned. Article 7 of the contract states that the personnel of the after-school centres should "follow the same rules on communication, orderliness
and work as the school rules stipulate, unless otherwise agreed” (Reykjavík, 2010, p. 2, my translation). As the contract in general does not address pedagogical content or collaboration, it seems strange that it contains a directive of this kind, subjecting the after-school centres to school rules. It is thus accepted that rules need to be set, but from the administrative perspective, the after-school centres are evidently seen as an annex to the school system.

Even though the after-school centres and the schools are to provide holistic services according to the City Council’s agreement, the contract between the two organisations does not provide incentives for pedagogical or practical coordination between the two services.

5.3.4 Premises

Since the beginning of the second period in the history of the after-school centres, the policy has been that the centres should share premises with the schools, (see section 5.1.2). Nevertheless, it has been pointed out that in many cases necessary facilities have been ill-suited or lacking. A report from the SRC from September 2008 showed that many after-school centres have not got suitable facilities (Íþrótta- og tómstundaráð, 2008). Still, only a few after-school centres are operated in facilities outside of the schools. In order to make sure that the requirements of the after-school services are recognized by school authorities, another document was produced by the SRC in 2006, namely the Agreement on the facility requirements of after-school centres (Reykjavík, 2006b). This agreement states that each after-school centre should have a special facility which is referred to as ‘the centre’ or ‘the heart’, which is to have an area of approximately 1 m² per child but never less than 60 m². Efforts should be made to make ‘the heart’ a cosy and welcoming area, where children can feel at home. To meet basic requirements and to be able to offer a variety of recreational activities, an after-school centre should have access to other areas in the school, such as classrooms, gym, computer room, and arts and crafts areas. Preferably, there should be access to specific areas for smaller groups, in order to accommodate children with special needs. After-school centres should be able to make use of the school playground and should have access to storage rooms for both indoor and outdoor equipment, as required. Finally, the agreement underlines the need for personnel facilities. The leader of the after-school centre should have an office, preferably in the vicinity of ‘the heart’. Furthermore, the personnel should have lockers for personal items and access to personnel restrooms. It is clear that the substantial effort has been made to clarify the administrative and physical division of labour and the standing of the after-school centres vis-a-vis the schools. It is nevertheless still the case that the standing of the after-school centres is weak in this relationship, and further clarification is needed.
5.4 Conclusion

On the basis of the analysis of the historical development of the after-school centres in Reykjavík, four main observations are made. Firstly, the main rationale for after-school services from the point of view of the larger community has been to provide supervision for young children in after-school hours. However, there has been a shift in policy between the emphases of care, learning, and leisure. There has not been consensus at either the political or the professional level, on what the main aims of the services should be. Legislation has changed dramatically. The first after-school centres operated as part of the day-care system, and legislation addressed the goals and conditions of the after-school centres. The current framework, set by the SRC, underlines that after-school activities should not be considered as extensions of the school day. The emphasis is upon enabling children to participate in various recreational activities, and it is considered important that the children can choose activities and assume responsibility for their actions. In that sense, the aim of the services is educational and involves strengthening children’s capabilities for participating in a democratic society. Nevertheless, the social status of children is unclear. Although the main rationale for the after-school centres has been to protect and provide care for vulnerable children, there are strong indicators that the service is also supposed to educate and empower them as social actors. How the personnel in the school and in the after-school centre are to work together to achieve those aims is uncertain.

Secondly, there is an increased interest in the organisation of holistic school and after-school services for children. The after-services have moved from outside of the schools (period 1), to inside of them (period 2) and then to outside of them once again (period 3). By moving the service from the schools to the Sport and Recreation Council, the aim was to enhance the quality of the services by improving cooperation with other recreation organisations. At the time of the transfer, the SRC was already operating youth centres for teenagers and summer programs for younger school children. It was, therefore, logical at that time to assume that the necessary knowledge base and professional support needed for after-school services, conceived as recreational, would be found within the SRC. But, in the process, potential problems were created, especially by formalising the gap between the different services. The gap was both administrative, which may turn out to quite significant, and pedagogical, especially in the sense that a non-holistic stance was favoured.

From a formal perspective it may be said that a fourth period began in 2011, when the new Department of Education and Youth was established and the after-school centres were defined in policy as part of the educational system. Again, employees are faced with the possibility of
important changes, although these remain to be seen. The after-school centres and schools are supposed to ‘form a holistic workday’ for the children (Reykjavík, 2010). After all, according to compulsory school law, the school should support the social skills of children and prepare them to become active citizens in a democratic society (Compulsory School Act, no. 91/2008). Hence, the after-school centres have taken over a part of the objectives of the compulsory schools: that of supporting the social skills of children and introducing to them the idea of democracy. Current policy in Reykjavík seems to entail that a new kind of school, incorporating both learning and leisure activities, should be organised.

Thirdly, the main social actors who have affected the development of the after-school centres have been politicians and administrators, not professionals. The professional sector, whether it be pre-school teachers, teachers or recreational personnel, has been largely left out of the decision-making process with regard to the organisational changes. On the political level, decisions have been made with attention to efficiency, including cost, and general practicality. Politicians have mainly been occupied with finding ways to meet the society’s demand for increased day-care. During the past 40 years, all political parties in Reykjavík have prioritised day-care for working parents; but no political party has emphasized creating a public framework covering day-care for school-aged children. By making the schools responsible for the extended care for children of working parents in 1993, politicians managed to offer solutions for the majority of the population in need of such services. The politicians were responding to the needs of the workforce, as well as reflecting the principles of liberalism, according to which individuals should have equal rights and equal access to public services. Leaving after-school services to operate without a regulative framework, a specialized body of staff, or professional support, however, reflects a rather unrealistic optimism.

Fourthly, the current institutional framework (Reykjavík, 2006a, 2006b & 2010) indicates the dependency of the services on the school community, especially on the school principal. The use of facilities has to be agreed upon by a school principal, and how much access the after-school centres have varies accordingly among the schools. As stated in the contract between the two institutions, even the rules in the after-school centres are subordinated to school rules. It seems strange to put this into a contract about the practical management of after-school centres, even if they utilize school buildings. This is the only indicator that there should be some kind of an pedagogical agreement between the two services, and it encourages the precedence of the school community over the after-school community. The limited cooperation between schools and after-school centres provides additional support for the view that after-school centres
do not have a strong position in the educational system, even though their position is gradually being strengthened through the reference to aims, the demands of professionalism and the formal contracts that are being made. This development has taken a long time, the progress has been rather slow, and there is still some way to go, given the importance attached to the service by all the stakeholders.

In short, the institutional status of after-school centres in Reykjavík today can still be described in terms of uncertainty. Even though the administrators and the personnel seem to be working towards specific goals, they are not getting coherent, unequivocal support from the local authority, from policy makers, or from the school system.
6 THE PEDAGOGY OF THE PERSONNEL

6.1 Introduction

This chapter provides insight into the views of the personnel at two of the after-school centres that participated in this study (see overview in section 4.3). The current framework of leisure and social learning, described in the previous chapter, shed light on the goals and management of these services and also their organisational structure. This chapter focuses on how the recreation personnel organised the daily activities in accordance with their perception of their roles. Specifically, this chapter addresses how the organisational identity of the after-school centre is interpreted by the recreation personnel as evidenced by their practices. It analyzes the essential elements that define their work, and it examines their sources of belonging through engagement, imagination, and alignment in the after-school centre. The concepts of participation and non-participation become crucial to understand how the personnel perceive of and contribute to the formation of their practice and the design and status of the organisation within the school system.

This chapter addresses, firstly, the characteristics of, and the differences to be found between, the work of the leaders of each centre and their recreation personnel. The division of labour and daily structure in each centre is described. Secondly, the chapter analyses the multiple organisational identities that can be discerned as the personnel discuss the main purposes, that is, care, learning, and leisure, of the after-school centres. Thirdly, this chapter discusses cooperation between recreation personnel and teachers in the schools, and in particular, how the lack of cooperation affects the recreation personnel’s sense of professional identity.

6.2 Modes of belonging

It is important to note that a clear distinction could be observed between the views of the two leaders in this study and the other recreation personnel. The leaders were much more committed to their work than the other personnel, the majority of whom were part-time staff, with only short-term commitment to their jobs. The next two sections examine the scope of the work of the leaders and the recreation personnel, and the differences to be seen in how they related to the practices within the after-school centres.
6.2.1 The leaders

Anna and Helen, the leaders of the two centres, took responsibility for the daily operation of services. Their role, as leaders, was to administrate and manage, as well as to take part in daily activities. In the North Valley After-school Centre, Helen was the only staff member who had allotted preparation time in the mornings, between the hours of 8:00 and 13:00. Preparation involved not only administrative work and office work (work on the website and the newsletter, e-mail communications, book-keeping) but also hands-on work, such as preparing the facilities and the activities of each day (providing materials, buying supplies, etc.). At the Sunny Side After-school Centre, attended by more than 100 children daily, Anna had a full-time assistant, Drífa, to help with this work. Drífa also, during the centre’s opening-hours, provided personal support for a special needs child attending the centre. Anna and Helen showed a strong commitment to the work of the after-school centres, and visualized themselves working in this setting for a long time. Their commitment to their work, in fact, seemed to be much higher than that of the other staff. They were key informants, decision-makers, and brokers, connecting the personnel to the children and parents.

The leaders were responsible for taking key-decisions in regard to the agenda and organisation of the work within the centres. However, decision-making was generally not done in a top-down manner. Anna and Helen both emphasized that decision-making was a collaborative effort, with peer-support a contributing element; however, each of them used different strategies to effect this process. In personnel meetings, the leaders would direct the discourse by asking questions: How can we control the noise in this area? What can we do to make transitions go faster so children don’t have to wait before activities start? They would promote discussions about how to cope with various problems that arose, such as behavioural issues or support for individual children. They would encourage the personnel to work together to find solutions to the practices of the centre.

Anna and Helen undertook administrative work as well as working with the children alongside their employees. They trained and guided the recreation personnel, working on the floor during opening hours of the centres, visible to children and personnel. They also took the initiative in collaborating with the school. They had a number of assignments, as shown in Helen’s description below:

In the mornings you do all kinds of preparation. I take care of buying everything: I do the book-keeping and I buy food and all of the toys, I do work-reports for staff, I attend meetings and collaboration meetings on behalf of the Recreation Centre about
different things, such as the first day of summer and the neighbourhood festival day. So there is always something going on; you can hardly say that there comes a morning when you cannot find something to do. (Helen, North Valley After-school Centre, interview, March 2009)

Anna and Helen also provided information to parents and handled complaints or any problems that came up in communication with parents. They both seemed to maintain relaxed and positive communication with their personnel while being at the same time “in charge”. They saw themselves as the ones with answers and solutions to all kinds of questions pertaining to the operation of the centres. Anna talked about her staff, the majority of whom were university students and had limited experience working with children:

This is in fact only their extra work. They are students, and that is number one. They are here and they do well, but you can also sense that sometimes they are lacking in passion. But maybe you should not expect too much, I don’t know. And I think that if we were to get more educational programs, and they were to receive education on child development [they would be more interested], because these kids do generally not have children. So there is a lot for them to learn, and many things make them insecure. So it would be extremely good if they would get more guidance. But as I say, this is a very good group that I have, and they are extremely good to the children. (Anna, Sunny Side After-school Centre, interview, March 2010)

There is a trace of ambiguity in Anna’s words. On the one hand, she said that the personnel needed more training and education; on the other hand, she maintained that she had a “very good group.” Anna acknowledged that her personnel considered the job secondary to their university studies and that most of them did not have experience of child rearing and needed guidance to develop their practices in this area. She here presents her expectations of what defines good recreation personnel and does not restrict her praise to those who have knowledge of children or a professional qualification. Instead, Anna emphasizes that being friendly and able to connect to the children was a valuable quality which she found in many of her current personnel. Helen added that providing support to her personnel was an essential part of her work. She interviewed each staff member in the fall, and they talked about their practices with the children and ways to improve their skills. When I met Helen in the second year of the study, she had incorporated a mentoring plan for staff. An experienced worker would guide a new worker for the first months at the centre.
In many ways, the leaders worked at creating tools to support personnel in engaging in the practices required in an after-school centre. They encouraged pedagogical dialogue in personnel meetings, and generally strived to encourage the personnel to critically reflect on their practices and, if things were not going very well, to try out other ways of handling a situation. However, Anna considered each day brought something unexpected that could only be solved “here and now”, whereas Helen felt that the best way to cope with the unexpected issues was to have a solid structure and clear division of work. Their different approaches were reflected in the ways in which their personnel organised and handled the work in the centre.

6.2.2 The recreation personnel

The majority of the other recreation personnel said that working in the after-school centre was convenient for the time being but that they had other aspirations for their future careers. This perspective was in contrast to the commitment of the leaders. The personnel had a variety of roles in the after-school centres, including that of ensuring that the children felt cared for and were safe. The personnel took part in various activities, such as collecting children from the school and bringing them to the after-school centre, doing outdoor supervision, helping out in the canteen, and overseeing various play-areas. They also undertook more specific work, for example, organizing group-work that would continue over a period of a few weeks, working with children in arts and crafts projects, going on field trips, directing plays in which children took part, and preparing exhibitions with the children for parents to view. Personnel had considerable freedom to decide what they wanted to be doing with the children, as shown by Sólveig’s words:

You have a lot of freedom. If you are interested in something then you can mediate that with children, like, there is one singer here, and she has a choir, and there are art clubs, and sometimes I offer dance, because I am taking dance lessons. You have a lot of freedom in the work. This I find a huge benefit. (Sólveig, Sunny Side After-school Centre, May 2009)

Most of the personnel interviewed said that the flexibility in the work and positive atmosphere were among the things that they valued and that motivated them to keep working in the after-school centre. The flexibility at work allowed them to engage in activities on their own terms. The fact that the personnel could easily take part in deciding in which activities to participate enhanced their sense of belonging, fostered a sense of participation and being a valued member of the community.
However, some personnel assumed more responsibility than others. Christie, who worked in the Sunny Side After-school Centre, had a masters degree in fine arts. She had responsibilities in the arts and crafts area and guided both children and other personnel when working with paints and various other media. On a regular basis, the centre held exhibitions of the artwork which the children produced in the after-school centre. Christie was in charge of the overall preparation. She worked very independently in organizing these projects, deciding which materials to use and how to explore the creative process with the children. She involved the other recreation personnel who were working with the children in the arts and crafts area. From time to time, she would tell Anna what resources were needed, and Anna would purchase paint and obtain other necessary materials.

As the majority of the personnel had not made long-term commitments, they did not spend much time in reflection. They were not very critical towards their work but enjoyed the relaxed and playful atmosphere. In many ways the personnel did not have to assume responsibility for the work provided in the after-school centre. Most of the recreation personnel accepted the fact that the information they received about, for example, children with specific needs, was on a need-to-know basis. They also did not feel that they needed to cooperate with the teachers or the school in general. The general ‘laissez-faire’ attitude of the recreation personnel and their lack of involvement in the organisation of their work stems from the fact that they do not perceive themselves as full-members of the community. They did not define themselves as professional recreation personnel but as part-time personnel under the supervision and guidance of more experienced workers, such as the leaders, Anna and Helen.

6.3 Daily routine

In both centres, the daily schedule consisted of a mixture of free play and group work with children. Table 6-1 compares the time-schedule activities for personnel working with children in grade 1 in the after-school centres in 2008–2009.

By and large, the daily routine in both centres was similar, as shown in Table 6-1. During opening hours the after-school centres were buzzing with activity, and the personnel were occupied with the children. On a normal day, there was little time for personnel to consult with each other or to prepare activities. Personnel meetings, held every other week in both centres after opening hours, were opportunities to discuss the practicalities of operating the centres. In the afternoons, the majority of the personnel at both centres came to work approximately 30 minutes before the children arrived, that is, at around 13:00. Those 30 minutes were used to exchange information and prepare the day. There were differences in
how the work-schedule was decided and how the system of choosing activities was organised.

The following sections describe the similarities and differences between daily routines in each centre and provide a detailed description of each.

Table 6.1. Daily Routine at the Sunny Side After-school Centre and the North Valley After-school Centre

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Sunny Side After-school Centre</th>
<th>North Valley After-school Centre</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>13.00-13.30</td>
<td>Play time</td>
<td>Registration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.30-14.00</td>
<td>Play time</td>
<td>Choice-time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.00-14.30</td>
<td>Refreshments in the canteen</td>
<td>Refreshments in the canteen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.30-15.00</td>
<td>Refreshments in the canteen</td>
<td>Circle-time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.00-15.30</td>
<td>Play time</td>
<td>Play time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.30-16.00</td>
<td>Play time</td>
<td>Play time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.00-16.30</td>
<td>Play time</td>
<td>Play time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.30-17.00</td>
<td>Play time</td>
<td>Play time</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6.3.1 Preparation

The personnel had about 30 minutes of preparation time each day. This was used in various ways, such as in discussions about the activities to be offered to the children, preparing resources for group work, and general discussions with co-workers. However, in the North Valley Centre, this time was also used to prepare refreshments, for instance, in making sandwiches and cutting fruit.

6.3.2 Registration

Children were registered as they came to the after-school centre to make sure that everyone who was expected to attend had arrived. If a child was missing, a staff member would search in the vicinity. If the child was nowhere to be found, the personnel would call the parents and ask if the child was on leave from the centre.
6.3.3 System of selection

Children in the two after-school centres could choose from a variety of activities. However, the centres had different ways of organizing the selection process. The North Valley After-school Centre had an Activity Board on which the children indicated their choices by putting their names under an activity. Activity cards illustrating each activity in pictures and words were lined up on the upper half of the table. In the Sunny Side After-school Centre, the children would choose during circle time, using special activity cards. The systems of selection are described in more detail in the sections about each after-school centre (sections 6.4 and 6.5).

6.3.4 Play time

The majority of the time in both after-school centres was play time, which was a time that the children would have for free play. A variety of play areas had been set up in both centres, such as areas for Lego construction, role-playing, and drawing. The children from the Sunny Side After-school Centre had more space during the first year of the study than the children in the North Valley After-school Centre. This included more rooms to accommodate play areas. However, in both centres, hallways and canteen areas had to be used as play areas. An outdoor play area was available in both centres, and the children could use the outdoor area daily, even on snowy and rainy days.

6.3.5 Group work

In both after-school centres, the personnel organised group-work ‘clubs’. They invited children in grades 2–4 to participate in a variety of activities, each with a specific focus and individual adult group leader. In Sunny Side Centre, these clubs met once a week for a month. This arrangement, Anna stated, provided possibilities for the group to finish a particular assignment, and for the personnel to plan ahead with a specific group of children, instead of having random groups of children coming to different activities each day. In both centres, the personnel and the children initiated ideas for these clubs and the personnel negotiated in personnel meetings who would be responsible for each club. The children signed on to these groups, although they were not obligated to do so. However, organizing and maintaining the group-work could be challenging. For example, it was not until the spring semester of 2010 that the personnel in the Sunny Side After-school Centre launched the weekly group work and started a drama club, an adventure club, a French club, and a Spanish club. During the fall of 2009, no specific clubs were running, mostly because the
majority of the personnel were new, and it took time for Anna to train the personnel to be able to take on added responsibilities.

6.3.6 Refreshments

Refreshments, such as bread, fruits, milk, and water were served at both centres in the school canteen. In the North Valley After-school Centre, refreshments were prepared by the recreation personnel. The service had its own refrigerator in the ‘heart’ facility and prepared the refreshments there. In the Sunny Side After-school Centre, the school personnel prepared the refreshments. In both centres, recreation personnel supervised the children during refreshment time and cleaned up afterwards. They cleaned the tables and swept the floor, (sometimes assisted by the children). In both centres, the children were divided into groups in order to limit the number of children in the canteen during the refreshment period. Children from grade 1 would come first, followed by children from grades 2–4.

6.4 North Valley After-school Centre — boundaries and flexibility

In the North Valley After-school Centre, the schedule was structured. Helen, the leader, worked out a weekly schedule, which was placed on an information board for the personnel. The schedule showed the tasks to which each person was assigned on specific weekdays, for example, refreshment preparation, outdoor duties, and supervision of children from Grade 1. Helen was determined to establish an organised environment where both personnel and children had simple and clear guidelines to follow. There were a few rigid rules set by the adults, but the emphasis was on creating an environment in which children could play together, be cared for, and enjoy themselves with their peers. The schedule was regularly discussed in personnel meetings and the personnel had a say in the distribution of work. In the North Valley After-school Centre the personnel used most of the daily 30 minutes of preparation time to make the refreshments for the afternoon snack, including slicing fruits and making sandwiches.

The system of choosing activities was organised in such a way that the daily activities in which children could participate were advertised on a special board, the Activity Board. This was a large board hanging on a wall in the main facility of the centre. On the upper half of the board the personnel would put several activity cards which showed the activities that were available each day. The children in the North Valley After-school Centre were split into groups according to age: Grade 1 had separate
facilities, while grades 2–4 shared facilities. Twice a week, the grade 1 children could choose play-areas which were located in the facility for the older children. Special emphasis was placed upon creating a stable environment for the first grade children as they adjusted to this new setting. These children used a classroom next to their school classroom in the after-school hours, while the older children were located in the main facility of the centre. The after-school centre had primary use of that classroom, although it was shared with the local pre-school which used the classroom for group-work for five-year-olds in the mornings. The room was organised in such a way that there was a corner with sofa and seats, three round tables, and several play areas created by floor mats. The children came directly from the classroom to the playroom and sat down, and the three workers assigned to the group welcomed them. The day began with one of the personnel reading out the names of every child and marking their presence in the register. The personnel were very strict about getting the children to be quiet and not to disturb the procedure. If there were any special events planned, the personnel would describe them for the children. As soon as the role-call was complete, children in small groups were allowed to go to the Activity Board and choose an activity. The following field notes provide a description of the arrival and registration of the first grade children in the North-Valley Centre:

All the children have arrived except one boy who is on leave today, and the children are sitting both on the floor and in the seats alongside the walls. Magnús reads out their names and marks them in the register. The children are very quiet and the roll-call takes only a few minutes. Magnús praises them for good behaviour. “And now you should clap because you are so well behaved and good at this!” he says, and the kids and the other workers applaud with a smile. “Now, who is wearing blue socks?” Magnús asks. “Those who are wearing blue socks can go and choose.” (Fieldnotes, North Valley After-school Centre, March 2009)

When the children had moved to second grade the role-call was eliminated. Helen and her personnel had decided to organise the arrival and registration of the older children differently. A staff member sat next to the entrance of the main facility, and as the children arrived they registered with the staff member. Instead of waiting for everybody to arrive, each child could go straight to the Activity Board located in the main facility and choose an activity or play-area. This procedure avoided long periods of waiting-time for the children. According to both Helen and her co-worker, Margrét, these waiting periods could be stressful and unpleasant for both children and staff.

Each child had his/her name on a plastic sticker and could put this onto the Activity Board below the activity he/she chose. Some activities were
restricted to a limited number of participants, and the children could see how many were allowed as the number was specified on the Board. The Activity Board was a central point for both children and adults in the North Valley After-school Centre. It enabled everyone to see what was going on and who was where. The Board was in use every time that the present researcher visited the centre, and there seemed to be no exceptions. The use of the Activity Board meant that children did not have to wait for all children to arrive before they started playing. On arrival, children either went to the Board, chose, and started playing, or went to have refreshments in the canteen next door. Helen wanted her personnel to be ready at every station as soon as the children began to arrive. The personnel with outdoor duty would commence at the same time as the children went outside to play. The personnel arranging the arts and crafts session at the table had everything prepared so that the children could start as soon as they arrived. Only the children going to the computer room or the gym would have to wait until the other children that were signed up for that activity had arrived. These sessions started a little bit later than the other activities and also finished before 16:00.

When asked, the recreation personnel in the North Valley After-school Centre said that the structured schedule was very convenient and that it made their work easier to know precisely what was expected of them. “Helen is on top of things, so she has worked out the framework, and you kind of just fit into it, so it is very, very simple” (Magnús, North-Valley Centre, March, 2009). Thus, the personnel in North Valley After-school Centre relied on Helen’s experience and knowledge to organise their work and deal with various matters that arose, such as how to respond to behavioural issues, or conflict between children, or frustrated parents. Together, Helen and her personnel seemed to have created a system that was working well, to judge by the generally positive attitudes of both parents and children using the service.

6.5 The Sunny Side After-school Centre – creativity and flexibility

Anna had 120 children in her care, divided among three main facilities on the school grounds. She had to make sure that the personnel were organised, but at the same time she emphasized that the personnel were to take responsibility for the arrangement of the activities. During the spring of 2009, the work-schedule at the Sunny Side After-school Centre was flexible, and planning occurred daily as the workers discussed and decided during the daily preparation time what was to be offered that day and where each worker was to be situated. When I visited again in spring 2010, the daily schedule was organised in advance so that each worker
knew their responsibilities, such as outdoor duty or the play area in which they were to supervise the children. Anna said that the increase in the number of children and the recruitment of many new and untrained personnel in the fall of 2010 had called for a stricter schedule.

At the Sunny Side After-school Centre, the school prepared the refreshments so the personnel in the after-school centre used their 30-minute preparation time to make arrangements for the session. The quote below describes one such preparation time at the Sunny Side After-school Centre.

Anna is talking to the group of four staff members who work with the children from second class today. The group consists of two men and two women between the ages of 20 and 25 years. Anna asked what fun activities they have arranged for the day. One of them says that nothing has really been decided. Anna says that bingo has been very popular lately, but that, for practical reasons, it might be best to offer bingo only to the third graders today. Two of the personnel agree, but the others do not respond. Anna adds that she has bought the ingredients to make coconut cookies if somebody would be interested in baking with the kids. Veiga says she would like to do that, and they agree on that. Then Anna says she has to run and check on the first grade children. It is now 13:30, and the second graders finish school at 13:45. The group continues to sit and talk about a concert that was held last weekend. Five minutes later Anna returns and asks if the activity cards have been prepared. It turns out that they have not been prepared, and two of the personnel started collecting the appropriate activity cards, which they took out of a box. (Fieldnotes, Sunny Side After-school Centre, May, 2010)

As this shows, it was critical for Anna or, in some cases, her assistant Drífa to make sure that preparation was carried out before the children arrived, as the personnel did not appear to understand that effective preparations reduced the potential for problems to arise. If Drífa was not present (she was usually with the first grade children), Anna would go from one facility to the other during the preparation time to make sure that there were sufficiently many staff members at each place and that activities had been properly organised. In a centre that accommodated over 100 children at a time, it was challenging work for one person to assume responsibility for preparing and deciding activities for the whole group, spread across the three sites that constituted the after-school centre.

The system of selection was organised differently at the Sunny Side After-school Centre than at the North Valley After-school Centre. When the children arrived at the Sunny Side After-school Centre, they all had to go outside to play for about 20 minutes. This, Anna explained, was an arrangement similar to the school recess period. While some children hurried with their belongings to the
after-school centre in order to get some play time outdoors, others took their
time and lingered in the hallways before going outside. After play time, the
children gathered to have refreshments in the canteen. Once they had eaten
and chatted, they went back to the after-school centre (which was in a separate
building, see section 4.4). There they were split into groups, with one or two
adults supervising a session called circle time where the children would choose
activities. The circle time lasted between 10 and 20 minutes. The children sat in
a circle on the floor, and in the middle of the circle there were small boxes of
activity cards that showed by letter and picture the various activities or play-
areas which were available that day. During the first year of the present study
(2008–2009), when the children were in grade 1, there were two groups. In
November, the personnel decided to experiment by splitting the children along
gender lines. The girls had their circle time in one room, administered by the
personnel, while the boys had their circle time in another room. It proved to
work out well to have gender-segregated groups during the choosing time, so
this was kept for the rest of the school year. Furthermore, the personnel
decided to use tape on the floor to mark out a square with numbers marking
the place of every child. In that way the circle became an organised square
where everyone had their designated place. The numbers were also used to
control who got to choose first each time.

During the second year of the study (2009–2010), the children, now in grade
2, were divided into three groups according to school classes (they were in
three classes at school) during the circle time. All three groups made choices
from the same pool of areas and activities so that the grade 2 children mixed
completely in the after-school time. The facilities had also changed, as they
were no longer situated in the big house. The facility for the grade 2 children
was a temporary house that contained one classroom, a toilet, and an
entranceway, where the children could hang up their overcoats and school-
bags, in addition to one classroom in the school building which was used for
music-lessons in the mornings. It was not possible to leave any items in the
music classroom, but the temporary house was primarily for use by the after-
school centre. The procedure of the circle time had changed considerably, as it
now took place immediately after school was over (instead of the outdoor
break), and the gender-segregation and taped square were no longer being
used. In fact, most of the personnel working with the grade 2 children were
new, so there was little continuity from the previous school year. Anna
explained that they had to be practical, and it was more convenient to use the
classroom groups. There was less confusion for the children and things went
more smoothly. The number of activity cards for each activity depended on
how many could share the same resources. For example, almost an unlimited
number of children could choose the outdoor play area, while only 6-8 children
could choose the cooking activity. Usually, two or three staff members would
administer the group sessions in which activities were chosen. Drífa, the assistant leader at the Sunny Side After-school Centre described the circle time:

We try to have a quiet moment, and often before they choose we talk together or kind of have a meeting. And if it is somebody’s birthday we sing, and we talk about how the weekend was, and so on. We try to stop and have a quiet moment during circle time, try to hear how they are and talk together. (Drífa, Sunny Side After-school Centre, June 2009)

In this way the circle time was used to foster a sense of community and belonging and to make sure that everybody was properly informed and had a chance to participate. Sometimes the children were impatient and agitated, and in some cases this period was far from being a peaceful venue as this excerpt about circle time in the second year of the study describes:

Four girls are already sitting on the floor, waiting for the other children in the group to come and sit down. Veiga and her co-worker, Ásta, have prepared the activity cards and have been in the hallway, saying hello to the children as they were coming out of their classrooms, and inviting them to go and sit down on the floor. More children come in and sit down, they start talking and three boys go to the window, climb on chairs and are looking outside. After a while, all 18 children that are supposed to be in this group have arrived. Veiga has been marking their names in the registration calendar as they entered the room. Now, she sits down in the circle, and Ásta goes and asks the boys at the window to come and join the others. They are laughing and giggling and trying to escape as she walks over to direct them. They run to the others and sit down next to each other. “Ok, kids” Veiga says, “how about we have some quiet time, so that you can choose”? The three boys are kicking each other and rolling to the side, crashing into their seat partners. One of them kicks a girl in the back as he rolls on the floor, kicking his legs in the air. She gives out a cry, and starts crying: “Stop, you are hurting me”, she says. Her friends yell out to the boy that he should say sorry and stop. Veiga goes over and sits herself next to the boy and orders him to sit up straight and to apologize, which he does. Ásta is sitting at the opposite side in the circle and is asking the children next to her to be quiet. Veiga puts the activity cards in the middle of the circle and invites one of the girls to start choosing. She immediately takes a card. The next girl cannot decide what to choose and starts talking with her friend and asking what she should choose. The boys start annoying each other again, and the children start talking to their seating partners. There is a lot of commotion and noise in the room. “Please, hurry,” Veiga says to the girl who is next in line, “You
have to choose something.” “Be quiet!” Ásta yells out to the group. (Sunny Side After-school Centre, Fieldnotes, May 2010)

Afterwards, Veiga told me that sometimes the circle times can be challenging, especially when some of the children are misbehaving and it is difficult to get them quiet. She said that often things run smoothly but that sometimes it is as if ‘hell breaks loose’ (Interview, May, 2010). In this case, the experience was far from comfortable for either the children or the personnel. The circle time was also used to make announcements to the children and sometimes to praise or reprimand the group for its behaviour. However, the circle times were often skipped at the Sunny Side After-school Centre during the spring term, for example, when the weather was good, and the personnel decided that everybody should be playing outside. This was partly because it was time-consuming and sometimes it was difficult to get all the children inside to sit down in a circle.

The personnel decided what activities were available each day and some activities were almost always available, for example, the outdoor playground. Occasionally, children could choose computers, cooking, or play-station, but these activities, which required special facilities (computer room, home economics room) could not always be made available. Other activities that usually were available included arts and crafts and various play areas with different materials such as Lego.

We try to offer activities that they like. For example, if no one chose the pearls yesterday we won’t offer it today. And we try to find something, like Lego, they like Lego. And if the popular activity cards are finished, we offer them to choose something else and then change a little bit later. That is no problem. Maybe they like to do something else, than we try to find something. If they want to draw they can draw in the play corner. You try not to be very rigid, and sometimes you adapt the rules. (Sólveig, Sunny Side After-school Centre, interview, May 2009)

Flexibility was an important aspect of how the personnel at the Sunny Side After-school Centre characterized their work. It allowed the personnel to employ their own ideas at work and to feel valued for their capabilities. The positive atmosphere, the creative work in the centre, and the flexibility of the personnel was reflected in the perspectives of the parents who, according to the annual parent survey, were generally satisfied with the service provided and said that their children were happy being in the centre.

6.6 Identities of participation and non-participation

The recreation personnel and the leaders who participated in this study experienced participation and non-participation on different levels in their work in the after-school centre. Figure 6-1 provides an overview of
different elements of their identity in the light of Wenger’s theory of the Social Ecology of Identity. In the next two sections, the experiences of the recreation personnel are clarified through the concepts of participation and non-participation.

Figure 6-1. The identity of the recreation personnel within the after-school centre

**6.6.1 Participation**

The recreation personnel were connected through their work, as they were all hired to work in a particular after-school centre. Most of them had
participated in introductory courses at early stages in their work and/or workshops for personnel organised by the Sport and Recreation Council. Therefore, they recognized that the policy regarding the after-school centres emphasized free play, friendship, and democratic methods in the daily practice. The personnel also said that they liked working with children and that they enjoyed the positive atmosphere in their workplace. In fact, one of the advantages of the work was that the personnel could implement their ideas easily and, therefore, felt empowered and appreciated. Sólveig set up dance-lessons, Margrét organised the play, and Christie invited the children to participate in various art projects. Flexibility was thus an important part of being an effective worker. The personnel needed to be flexible, as they took turns, assisted each other, and switched assignments if required. The personnel talked about and shared their experiences at work in regular staff-meetings, and informally during work-hours. Due to cutbacks, the Sport and Recreation Council offered fewer workshops for the personnel, but still new ideas were regularly broadcast and implemented. Websites and conversation with colleagues from other after-school centres stimulated new ideas and the setting up of new projects. The personnel enjoyed initiating projects that involved parents and the local community, such as organizing an open house or an art exhibition. They organised field-trips with the children and strived to remain visible and connected to the local community.

The participation of the recreation personnel was essentially confined within the practices of the after-school centre. With regard to the broader community, the organisational framework, and the educational system overall, the recreation personnel perceived themselves as non-participants.

6.6.2 Non-participation

In many ways, the recreation personnel felt marginalized and powerless with regard to their interactions with the broader community, both the school and the municipality at large. Their general feeling was that their work was often seen as not belonging in the school. Their use of facilities within the school depended on what was available and the absence of conflict with school operations, which always took priority. Sometimes plans needed to be changed, even on short notice, to adapt to the needs of the school. Moreover, the personnel did not feel that the school community at large showed any special interest in the work they were doing with the children, even though these same children were pupils in the school. The recreation personnel did not feel that they could influence or affect the organisational framework that had been set for the after-school centres. The leaders felt that their expertise was not recognized or valued in their co-operation with the school. Occasional consultations between recreation personnel and teachers or experts from the school
usually involved instructions or advice being given to the recreation personnel, not vice-versa. Furthermore, the recreation personnel made a clear distinction between themselves and school teachers. They saw teachers as experts in teaching children in the academic sense, while their job was to make sure children felt safe and to support the social development of the children. Most of the recreation personnel were university students with no special qualifications to work as recreation personnel. Thus, they submitted to the guidance of the leader in the after-school centre and felt that she knew best on most occasions. The personnel adapted to the organisational structure and did not fight for changes to be made in their working conditions.

Thus, the recreation personnel perceived themselves as non-participating social actors in the educational system. Even though the leaders sometimes initiated dialogue with the school teachers, the recreation personnel did not take steps to make themselves heard in the broader community, nor did they recognize it to be part of their work to connect up with other practices existing within the educational system.

### 6.7 Multiple identities of care, learning, and leisure

Through the interviews with personnel from both the North Valley After-school Centre and the Sunny Side After-school Centre, multiple identities of care, learning and friendship became evident.

#### 6.7.1 Providing care

The recreation personnel were aware that parents in full-time employment entrusted them with their children. Indeed, parents enrolled their children in after-school centres in order to ensure that the children were safe while the parents were at work. Thus, most of the recreation personnel found it important to create a safe and caring environment. The concept of care was twofold: (a) physical care and (b) care for the emotional well-being of children.

Firstly, the personnel said that it was important to provide physical security and physical well-being. Veiga underlined the issues of security and physical safety of the children in her statement:

> It is our job to take care of them while their parents work. We have to make sure that all children have arrived, register them when they come, and if somebody is missing we have to find him or her. We observe the children throughout the day and guide them, making sure that they are secure. (Veiga, Sunny Side After-school Centre, interview, April 2010)
Her description of her work focused on the physical care provided by the personnel as they observed the children while they played or participated in the various activities. The role of the personnel, from the physical care perspective, is first and foremost to supervise the children and to intervene only when there is the possibility of harm. To ensure the physical safety of children the personnel would, for example:

- Make sure that all the children, who were registered, had shown up at the centre
- Make sure that children did not leave the premises without permission
- Intervene if children were participating in activities that could be harmful, such as throwing stones, climbing high fences, or physical fighting
- Respond to children who were not feeling well (e.g. headache, stomach ache)
- Respond if children hurt themselves

In both centres, there was an emergency response plan that addressed how to respond in emergencies such as a serious accident, fire, or a missing child. Anna informed and reminded her personnel of the response plan and asked them to use their preparation time to review and memorize the emergency procedures. All the personnel were supposed to participate in a first-aid course at least every other year. However, those who were hired in the middle of the year often missed the initial courses, as they were usually held near the beginning of the school year. The personnel used the following procedures to respond to a missing child: If a child who was supposed to come to the centre did not register, the personnel would, after making sure the child was not in the area, call the parents. In some instances, the parents had forgotten to inform the leader about the child’s absence. On rare occasions, children, usually from grades 2–3, would go home, even though they were supposed to remain at the after-school centre. In these cases, the personnel took part in searching for children, and it was always taken seriously if a child had gone missing. After-school care leaders reported that, in all the cases that had occurred, the children had been found in a safe place, usually at their homes or with a friend. The personnel were also aware that the adult-child ratio was supposed to be at least 1:12, or 1:8 on field trips, to ensure the safety of the children, and those rules were generally followed.

Secondly, the personnel perceived that one of their roles was to care for the emotional well-being of children, not only to provide physical
security. Margrét, who was one of the few personnel over fifty years of age, said that she considered it important to “create a home away from home” for the children. In her view it was important that:

the children feel warmth and feel that they are coming to a place which is fun and welcoming, that they can trust the people that work here and know what they can and cannot do. [...] I don’t want this to be just a “storage” (i. gæsla) but rather like a home, where they come and feel good, they are fed, and get the help they need. You know, that this is like mom and dad, without being mom and dad, or as close to it as possible. (Margrét, North Valley After-school Centre, Interview, March, 2009)

Similarly, Anna, the leader of the Sunny Side After-school Centre, emphasized the provision of care with regard to the purpose of the work.

Our goal here is to make them feel good and that they like being here and feel secure. (Anna, Sunny Side After-school Centre, interview, March, 2009)

The underlying personnel perception of the organisational identity of the after-school centre was that the children should enjoy the activities there. Thus, the emotional well-being of the children was a major factor in deciding whether or not the recreation personnel were doing their job properly. Several unwritten procedures could be identified in the practices of the personnel in both after-school centres, as they supported the emotional well-being of the children. They said it was important to:

- Be respectful, kind, and fair towards the children
- Respond if a child seemed to be struggling emotionally, socially, or otherwise
- Create an opportunity for every child to participate in activities
- Intervene if a child was being excluded from the group
- Organise the activities so that the number of children in each activity was limited
- Enforce rules on proper conduct

Those norms involved both individual and collective initiative, as each staff member had to be responsible for his or her own actions towards the children and the group as a whole. They were responsible for providing opportunities for every child to be active and to prosper. An important part of supporting emotional well-being was to create a framework in which the children would be comfortable. Sólveig said that “the children
need a framework and discipline so that they won’t be exhausted at the end of the day” (Sunny Side After-school Centre, Interview, March, 2009).

The recreation personnel were facing several obstacles in the provision of care, amongst those were the lack of facilities, the workload and, sometimes, inexperience. For example, the grade 1 children who started in the North Valley School in the fall of 2008 were a group of robust and energetic individuals. It had taken a few weeks for the after-school program to run smoothly. The facility for those 30 children in the after-school hours was a medium-sized classroom which in school hours would accommodate 18–22 students. On most days, a number of children would choose outdoor activities, and the hallway was also used as a play-area. On rainy days the room could get rather crowded, with children playing and chatting in every corner. Under such circumstances, it could be difficult to get peace and quiet; consequently, if a child was tired or not feeling well there was in fact no place to go. Thus, providing the effective care to which many of the personnel aspired could be challenging, and the setting was in many cases nothing like home. Often, if someone was in need of care (a kind word or a healing hand) they would sit on the sofa next to Heiða or Magnús for a while.

The facility for the first grade children in the Sunny Side After-school Centre was very different from the crowded playroom in the North Valley After-school Centre. Their base facility in the after-school hours was a building that had recently been renovated. It contained a kitchen and eight different rooms where play-areas were organised. The facility also had a spacious crafts area, building-brick area, and a special room for role-playing, where costumes were kept. Smaller groups of children could be in semi-private areas or even rooms that could be closed off by doors. In 2008–2009 the children in this group numbered 44, as compared to 30 in North Valley, but the quarters were much larger. It is difficult to decide what effect the differences in setting had on the care children received. However, when the children in the Sunny Side After-school Centre came back next school year, they had one classroom as a base for 50 children and shared another classroom with the school. When asked how the changes affected the children, Anna responded that, although the children seemed to be adjusting fine, it was obvious to her that there were more conflicts because of the large number of children in an open facility.

Furthermore, the workload was considerable, especially when the centres were understaffed, and often the recreation personnel were multi-tasking, for example observing children in several different play-areas and supervising children who were travelling from one area to the other. It was not unusual that several children at a time were trying to get the attention of personnel. For example, one afternoon Veiga, who had
been working in the Sunny Side After-school Centre for a few months, was in charge of the main facility of the second graders:

Veiga was arranging paints and materials for six girls who were working on projects in relation to the upcoming art exhibition. Three boys were involved with Lego at the far end of the classroom. Two boys and one girl were playing a card-game on the table next to the arts and crafts area. During the 90 minutes of the observation, Veiga responded to a variety of requests and situations that came up in the group of children: The painting group needed a lot of assistance, and Veiga was constantly handing out paint, pencils and new pieces of material. Two of the girls started fighting and put paint on each other's paintings to destroy them. The three children in the card-game were debating about the rules; the two boys in the back were yelling and playing loudly, disturbing the others, so Veiga was constantly moving to the back, asking them to be quiet. Simultaneously, for the final half-hour, children were coming every few minutes from the outside playground into the classroom, sometimes to use the bathroom and sometimes to see what was going on in the classroom. A girl came inside and wanted to join the children playing cards. After a bit of negotiation, the girl sat with a sour expression at the table as the other children did not allow her to join them. Veiga was focusing on resolving the conflict between the girls in the painting group. Two girls came inside and joined the painting team; one of the girls involved in the fight went to the outside play-area. A teenage girl came to fetch one of the boys playing with Lego. He protested against going home, and started yelling and crying that he was always fetched too early. Veiga intervened, talked to the boy and assisted his sister in getting him ready to go. Meanwhile, paint had spilled over the table, ruining some of the girls' work. (Fieldnotes, Sunny Side After-school Centre, May 2010)

The importance of the above passage is to underline the multi-tasking that the recreation personnel had often to undertake. In this case, there were several disputes that Veiga was unable to see to, as she was busy responding to others. Although the recreation personnel had a clear vision of the type of care they wanted to provide, it was sometimes difficult because of the conditions of the work, the number of children, the lack of facilities, and the inexperience of personnel. Had Veiga been a more experienced staff member (this was her first semester), she might not have undertaken the elaborate painting-project under these circumstances, or she might have tried to arrange for another worker to come and assist. In conclusion, it was fairly easy for the recreation
personnel to ensure the physical security of the children but more difficult to ensure the children's emotional well-being.

6.7.2 Strengthening children’s social skills

All of the recreation personnel interviewed expressed the view that the after-school centre should enhance children’s social skills. There were differences in the descriptions given by the personnel of these social skills, as some had more extensive ideas than others. The following list is an overview of their ideas about the social skills considered important for children in the after-school centre. The children should be able to:

- Participate in activities, for example, play or groupwork
- Make sustainable friendships
- Treat others well
- Know the difference between right and wrong
- Choose an activity and be responsible for that choice
- Speak their mind
- Learn to solve conflicts

Fundamental (ethical) concepts are included in the above definitions of social skills, such as participation, friendship, respect, difference between right and wrong, and responsibility. The personnel were keen to stimulate the children’s understanding of these concepts and organised their work practices with these goals in mind. There were three main aspects to the practices that the recreation personnel used to organise their work aimed at stimulating social skills.

Firstly, the majority of the personnel emphasized the importance of the peer-group. They considered it important that every child be connected with the group and not be excluded from activities. There was a fundamental view that children were active participants in the practice. Sólveig said that the children “develop their social capabilities by being around their peers and, yes, interacting with them” (Sólveig, Sunny Side After-school Centre, interview, May 2009). In her view, the children learned communication skills by participating in the activities of the after-school centre. Notwithstanding this belief, the recreation personnel did not focus on gaining knowledge about how the peer-groups were coping in school or in the classroom, even though the children had spent a considerable amount of time together before coming to the after-school centre.

Secondly, the personnel considered themselves to be role models: “They look to us”, Sólveig said, “… and we have to be good role models, how we talk
to each other and the children, and how we solve conflicts” (Sólveig, Sunny Side After-school Centre, interview, May 2009). In fact, there was emphasis on constructive and positive communication amongst the personnel group. The atmosphere in personnel meetings was generally relaxed and friendly, an atmosphere where people were unafraid to speak their minds and exchange opinions. It was also important that personnel were fair in how they treated children, showed affection and interest, and solved conflicts between children. The specific role of the personnel was to set standards by showing the children how to respect and treat others well, how to be responsible, and how to solve conflicts.

Thirdly, a concrete example of a social skill in both centres was that of choosing activities or tasks. In both centres there was an emphasis on allowing children to choose among a variety of activities and on the personnel developing democratic ways of working with the children. Although children were occasionally directed into specific groups and told what to do (for example, to go outside to play, participate in gym, or participate in dance lessons), on a normal day the children were able to choose the activity in which they wanted to participate. In both centres, leaders implemented democratic ways of working with the children. In the North Valley After-school Centre, the older children (from grades 2–4) were encouraged to choose representatives to a children’s council that had monthly meetings with the personnel. At these meetings the representatives proposed ideas about activities. Each council operated only for one month and got the chance to plan activities in cooperation with the personnel. However, it proved to be difficult to arrange meetings, as some of the children that had been chosen to be in the council were frequently not in the after-school centre. Sometimes only one or two of the five children in the council would be there on the scheduled day, and meetings had to be postponed. However, the personnel used a variety of methods to find out what the children wanted to do. They used informal discussions and special meetings arranged to discuss specific issues. Furthermore, Helen installed an opinion box where children could submit ideas about what they would like to do in the centre. In both centres, the older children took part in deciding the weekly group-work to be organised. For example, the children in the Sunny Side After-school Centre proposed an adventure group that went on outings once a week to various places in the local neighbourhood. The system of selection, as well as the establishment of children’s councils and opinion boxes, were deliberately designed to encourage the social skills of the children.

Curiously, the personnel did not make connections between the activities of the group during the school-day and its activities during after-school hours, even though in most cases the children had been together in
the same group for many hours before coming to the after-school centre. In addition, Helen was the only one who referred to the connections between the social pedagogy of the pre-school, which emphasises social skills, and the work in the after-school centre (see section 2.3.1). In this sense, the pedagogy of the recreation personnel with regard to the stimulation of social skills was loosely constructed. By and large, the recreation personnel did not intervene in the social activities of the children during the play-time unless there was a specific need. The organised group-work was sporadic and, sometimes, there was a lack of a continuity as there was a turnover of personnel, and the membership of the group of children changed.

In conclusion, the emphasis on social skills and development introduced in administrative policy documents was reflected in how personnel described the main aims of their work. The recreation personnel took part in creating a setting where children could take part in social activities and in deciding their activities to a significant degree. The personnel believed that social skills developed primarily through participation in play and activities with other children; thus the participation of children in the peer-group was considered especially important. The majority of the recreation personnel in both centres were effective role models, and they facilitated the participation of the children in social activities. They did not perceive the after-school centre as a place for formal learning. Their undertaking to support the social development of children as a first priority involved the organisation of a setting that stimulated social activities.

6.7.3 Leisure – informal social learning

Organizing leisure activities that promoted social learning was an important priority for most of the personnel interviewed. The after-school centre was seen as providing opportunities that were essentially different from those provided within the school program. Most of the personnel considered the time children spent in the after-school centre ‘their leisure-time’ in contrast with the scheduled school-day.

This is their free-time and it is important that they experience a certain amount of freedom and that they have a choice of activities, but not that they simply can do whatever they want. (Sólveig, Sunny Side After-school Centre, interview, May 2009)

As Sólveig said, the children can experience ‘a certain amount of freedom’ in the after-school centres, and they can make choices from a range of activities. Although it may be controversial to define the time children spend in the after-school centre as their ‘free-time’—since they are placed in this setting by their parents and their activities are
constrained by the framework—the recreation personnel in both centres regularly stated that the after-school centre was different from the school because it operated in the children’s ‘free-time’. However, the daily activities were sometimes highly organised. The personnel distributed the work among themselves and had different assignments. For example, Margrét in the North Valley After-School Centre saw the high point of her practice in working with the children on the Christmas play. She had been responsible for this project for the past three years. For her, this was a special project because “... it gives me an opportunity to work with a specific group of children and to see what they have and build on that. That they can do things themselves.” Preparation for the play began as early as September, when children signed on to the group. One year, almost everybody wanted to participate, so a choir and musicians were added to the play. Everybody got a role. Margrét created the screenplay from fairy tales and stories and wrote down the script for children to take home. Once a week during the fall the group met for preparation. They needed to prepare the costumes, the sets, and all other production aspects for the show. Margrét believed that this was a learning process for the children. They learned to take responsibility, find solutions, and work as a group. It was not only the outcome of the performance that mattered but all of the processes associated with the production. However, according to Margrét, the show and the celebration with the parents were also very gratifying for all concerned, including staff, children, and parents.

Thus, the personnel believed that informal learning took place in the after-school centre, was different from the learning that took place in school settings. Helen, the leader of the North Valley After-school Centre, was educated as a pre-school teacher. She maintained that children were learning many new things in the after-school centre:

We are evidently teaching them many things, even though it is not learning through books or by the book. In other words, they are learning to handle their environment and taking responsibility, and they are also learning to count and to write. We provide settings that stimulate these things. (Helen, North Valley After-school Centre, interview, March, 2009)

Helen’s vision was inspired by her former experience as a pre-school teacher, and she considered elements of the work in the pre-school and the after-school centre to be essentially the same. She perceived formal learning as something that happens in schools and as equivalent to academic learning through books. Helen was aware of theories of social pedagogy for pre-schools, which she applied to the after-school centre. She said, however, that the facilities and framework for the after-school centres were far less developed than those of the pre-schools in Reykjavik,
where she had worked previously. Helen described how the social settings of the after-school centre and the material available to children, such as clay, blocks, and card games, to name a few, support the overall development of children. In her view, the after-school centre is a setting for learning that can be organised, albeit using different methods than those meant for the school classrooms.

Lastly, but not least, the recreation personnel emphasized the informal character of the social learning that took place in the after-school centres in contrast with the formal learning of the schools. They made a clear distinction between the work in the after-school centres and the work in the schools: “We do not teach in the after-school centres. We do not want this to be a extended school day”, Heiða said. For those reasons, the majority of the activities in the after-school centre were not obligatory for the children, but optional. There were exceptions, such as organised gym-lessons for the children from grade 1, which were held twice a week. Unless parents did not want their children to go, all the children were expected to take part. The informal character of the learning in the after-school centres was also reflected in the way the recreation personnel generally situated themselves in the background, rather then in the foreground of the various activities. Thus, the recreation personnel did not often take an active part in the activities of the children. There were, of course, exceptions to this, as when recreation personnel took the initiative in organizing group work. Thus they were sometimes actively involved in teaching children certain skills, such as dance, arts and crafts, and languages.

In conclusion, the recreation personnel perceived the organisation of leisure-time activities to be one of their main roles and responsibilities. They said that, in contrast to the school, the after-school centre focused on the social skills of children. Furthermore, recreation personnel did not see themselves as doing the same kind of work as school teachers. In fact, their vision of the teachers' role was rather simplistic, and perhaps prejudiced, suggesting that teachers only ‘teach’ in the traditional sense and do not support informal learning in any way. In contrast, the recreation personnel looked at themselves as facilitators who could create settings that supported the overall development of children. The activities of the individual child and his or her relationships within the group of children were seen as the main driving forces of an intrinsic and natural development, placing adults on the sidelines rather than in the forefront.

6.8 Views towards children

A recurrent theme in the data was the way the personnel talked about the children and how their views reflected certain ideas about children and childhood. Children were generally seen as active and capable, while at the same time as lacking competence in certain areas. Many of the
participants in this study also discussed the friendships that evolved between themselves and some of the children.

**6.8.1 Children as active and capable**

There was a general feeling amongst the personnel that the children should be allowed to choose among activities and that the time they spend in the after-school centre should be considered their free-time. Heiða, a recreation staff member in the North Valley After-school Centre said, when asked about the role of personnel: “You are not telling them [the children] to do this or that. You are simply trying to be on their territory or level and trying to support them and to make them happy” (Heiða, North Valley After-school Centre, interview, March 2009). This child-centred view was reflected in many of the ways in which the personnel organised activities and communicated with the children. The children were in this sense seen as capable of making decisions for themselves. In many ways, the daily schedule and the framework for the overall practice presumed that children were responsible and capable within the limits set. The playground and the indoor facilities were not locked, and children could leave unnoticed at practically any time if they had their minds set on it. There is a general agreement in Iceland that school-aged children should be responsible enough to know that they should not worry their parents or the personnel in the after-school centre by strolling off unnoticed. Many of the children from grades 2–4 did, however, walk home by themselves between 16:00 and 17:00.

During the 2009–2010 school year, the personnel at the Sunny Side After-school Centre organised activities in connection with the United Nations Declaration of Children’s Rights. The aim was to empower the children to become aware of their rights (Sunny Side After-school Centre, Annual Report, 2009). The personnel introduced the main themes of the Declaration by reading them with the children and discussing their meaning, for example the rights of children to have parents, to have a name, to have a home, to be secure, and to receive an education. Anna thought that bringing the Declaration of the Rights of Children to life through discussions and artwork had been a productive project which was informative and creative for both children and personnel.

The personnel in these two after-school centres were aware of children’s rights and took steps to empower the children accordingly. Many of them did also express the view that children had qualities that many adults would like still to possess. Margrét, for example, said:

We have a lot to learn from these kids. I think it would be a good idea to give us some time to sit down and just look at the children
and their ways of being. See what we can learn from them too. Their easy-going characters and freedom. (Margrét, North Valley After-school Centre, interview, March, 2009)

Helen also talked about the qualities of children and their ability to adapt:

They have this quality to just go on and take whatever comes next. That is my experience. Most of them do not have the anxiety and worries, and unnecessary worries, that we, the grown-ups, have developed. (Helen, North Valley After-school Centre, interview, February, 2009)

Viewed thus as lacking inhibitions, the children were generally considered capable, and indeed, in an important sense, experts in the ongoing activities, in participating in play, and in fostering friendships.

6.8.2 Children as lacking competence

In certain respects, children's capabilities were conceived as limited, in the after-school centres. The framework of the daily practice was generally decided by the adults, such as what activities were on offer, when the children could switch between activities, when outdoor play time was over, when the children could have refreshments, when the children got praise and rewards, and so on. The personnel had more power than the children, and the children were in many ways considered to lack competence, although the personnel emphasized cooperation with children in daily practice. When asked about the qualities recreation personnel should possess, Margrét replied:

Patience, caring, and love. Understanding that children are children and adults are adults and you cannot demand the same from them [...] And a certain light discipline, a natural discipline. And just a willingness to cooperate. (Margrét, North Valley After-school Centre, interview, March, 2009)

Her words reflect the intrinsic differences between children and adults: children and adults cannot be expected to react the same way in all circumstances, or assume the same kinds of responsibilities. The difference lies, amongst other things, in the fact that children are in many ways considered to be lacking in experience and reason.

The highly controlled organisation of the choosing time in Sunny Side Centre, described in section 6.5, does also diminish the capacities of children as social actors: the children had no control over where they sat, next to whom, and they had little control over their possibilities of choice. They had to wait, sometimes anxiously, to see if there would be enough activity cards so that they could choose what they wanted to. In many
ways, the Activity Board in North Valley Centre, empowered the children as social actors as they could come and choose either one by one, or in pairs as they often did. The use of the Activity Board transferred the responsibility of the choosing from the personnel to the children. The children learned that it mattered, for example, that they came quickly to the after-school centre if they wanted to make sure that all activities were still open. Those who were more relaxed and did not have their mind set on a particular activity could take there time, knowing that there would always be some options open.

Furthermore, the use of predefined activity cards and play-settings developed by the personnel can hinder the creativity of the children and their initiative. Children are very imaginative and often create their own kinds of play-activities. It would have been very interesting to allow the children themselves to create activity cards, and to allow the children to take part in the discussion how the organisation of choosing should take place.

Thus, cooperation with children took many forms in the two after-school centres. Sometimes little or no cooperation seemed to be taking place. There were times when the personnel were trying to supervise circle-time in the Sunny Side After-school Centre and the children were noisy and not listening to the adults. There were also times when personnel would order individual children to participate in activities against their will. In both centres, the children from grade 1 got one gym lesson per week, which was organised by the school gym-teacher in accordance with an agreement between the two institutions. The children did not have a choice as to whether they should participate, although their parents could choose not to send them. Generally, the children would not resist participating, and many seemed to enjoy these sessions. However, there were occasions when a child had to be talked into going or even forced to go. Helen argued that it was necessary to have structure and not to give into every whim, such as when a child would want to skip the gym. Anna also said that she wanted the children to try out new things, so when she introduced a weekly dance lesson for the six-year-olds, everyone was to try the lessons at least once. This arrangement reflects the idea that the children are not always considered capable of making their own decisions about what was congenial to them. It also reveals that children could not decide what to do all the time in the after-school centre.

6.8.3 Children as friends

Relationships may develop between children and their care-givers within the after-school centres. Heiða emphasized the friendships that evolve between the personnel and the children:
What surprised me was that when I meet the kids outside work we
are just as good friends as in work. We are not just some personnel
that are there, but we are people that count, and they talk to us.
And if we meet in the Mall they say: "Hi, what are you doing?'
which I really like. (Heiða, North Valley After-school Centre,
interview, interview, March 2009)

Her co-worker, Margrét, said she developed affection for the children
in the after-school centre:

I like to think about it that after some years I might meet one of
these kids on the street as teenagers or adults and they might
come and say hello and I might not know who they are, because
they have changed and I have not! And it will be just lovely. I have
been with some of these kids since grade 1. And I just love it. And I
can feel that they care. Sometimes they come knocking on my door
because I live nearby. (Margrét, North Valley After-school Centre,
interview, March 2009)

For Margrét, building a caring relationship with the children was an
important part of her work in the after-school centre. In her view, it was
necessary to cooperate with the children, not just impose rules upon them
or coerce them to behave in certain ways.

6.9 School

Both recreation personnel and school teachers reported that the location
of after-school centres inside the school buildings may cause some friction
between managers of schools and managers of after-school centres.
School activities took priority over the daily program of the after-school
centres, including sporadic events, such as when a school principal
decided to use the school canteen for a personnel meeting, or a teacher
decided to have a play rehearsal in the canteen at the same time as the
scheduled after-school centre afternoon snack. Monthly meetings
between school principals and leaders of the after-school centres did not
seem to prevent such conflicts from occurring.

The leaders in both centres had monthly meetings with the school
principals. Anna, the leader of the Sunny Side After-school Centre, was
also in daily contact with teachers, as she had her lunch in the school
canteen along with school personnel. This was significant in her view,
since during these informal meetings she obtained relevant information
that she might otherwise have missed. She also established a more
personal contact with the teachers. Nevertheless, she felt that information
did not always appear through the right channels. For example, she often
found out through parents about school activities, such as when certain
classes were having a get-together with teachers and parents in after school-hours. Often she had to remind those children who were going to these events not to choose a conflicting activity in the after-school centre. Or the class could be taking a field trip and returning back later than usual, impacting attendance at after-school care. Anna got information in many cases from the parents, not the teachers or school principal.

Helen, the leader of the North Valley After-school Centre, did not meet with the school teachers on a daily basis. Even though her office was within the school premises and her daily work was in the school building, she did not have her lunch at the school canteen with the teachers. However, she met with the principal on a monthly basis. Helen felt that the principal had a generally positive attitude towards the after-school centre and that things usually worked out well between them. They discussed how things had been going, and if there were any unconventional school-days coming up, they discussed how those would be organised. These meetings were brief. In Helen's opinion, there had been no major problems in cooperating with the school.

### 6.9.1 Being ignored

Anna and Helen both claimed that often it seemed as if the work in the after-school centre was “forgotten”, and in many cases they were not consulted or kept properly informed by teachers or the school principal. Helen felt that there should be more formal cooperation between her and the teachers in grades 1–4. She did not attend regular meetings with the teachers, but sometimes they met in the school hallway and discussed matters concerning individual children. “We are attending to the same children”, Helen said, “and we ought to share more information.” According to Helen, the collaboration with regard to children with special needs was rather one-sided. The school gave her directions about the needs of specific children, but Helen was convinced that the teachers would in some cases have benefited by learning how she and her personnel were dealing with these children in the after-school setting. They had, for example, a boy who had behaviour problems and was acting a lot out in school. They managed to create a system in the after-school centre which helped him control his behaviour effectively. His parents were astonished and happy about the progress made in the North Valley After-school Centre.

Anna mentioned a further example of how the after-school centre could be forgotten in relation to the school. When the City School was celebrating its anniversary, a festival was arranged for students, parents and teachers. However, Anna did not receive a formal invitation for the recreation personnel and was not sent the schedule of the festival. During
the days before the event many parents asked Anna questions concerning the festival which she could not answer, as she had not been given the schedule. Anna said that being included would have provided an opportunity for the school to invite her and the personnel in the after-school centre to collaborate in celebrating the school’s anniversary.

Sólveig said, when asked about the cooperation with the school:

Sometimes if there is something going on in the school we are not informed until the time we show up. It is quite uncomfortable not to be informed with some notice, if there are changes. But, well ... there is this superintendent who sometimes interferes with what we are doing. It can be annoying, like if we have something going and we have a group of children in the school. And he shows up and turns off the lights and says that the lights should be turned off at 16:00. (Sólveig, Sunny Side After-school Centre, 2009)

It seems as if the school authorities sometimes forgot that there was another practice going on in the school buildings. This forgetfulness is a part of the lack of recognition experienced by the personnel in the after-school centres. Being forgotten can be perceived as similar to being told that you are not important or that you do not count.

6.9.2 Unclear collaboration

The collaboration between the schools and the after-school centres is in many ways unclear. Unconventional school days are days when the school closes early. Under existing legislation, the school board can decide to close the school early on up to 10 days of the school calendar. In the Sunny Side After-school Centre, the school closes early on approximately six days during the school year, and, according to the City Agreement, the school is responsible for providing care for the children registered in the after-school centre until it opens at 13.30. Anna had talked it over with the school principal, who accepted that it was the school’s responsibility to oversee the children during this time interval. Anna offered the school the use of the facilities of the after-school centre, and she even offered to contribute her services to helping out. When I met Anna in 2009 she was frustrated, as she felt that this collaboration had not been effective. The principal had been sending only three teachers to take care of up to 100 children, which did not meet the standard of the child-personnel ratio of one to twelve, as in the after-school centre.

I had been asked to open the facility before 12 o’clock which I, of course, agreed to do... I will just open up and you [the school principal] have to let the staff know where they are supposed to be... The school is over at 12 o’clock and I come in and all the
children arrive, and both houses are open. Children come streaming in but no personnel have arrived. And I am alone in this building with many children, so I have to send a child over to the school to get help. In the meantime a child comes crying from the other building: “There is no teacher and everything is a chaos”! [...] Nobody was taking responsibility. (Anna, Sunny Side After-school Centre, interview, 2009)

The incident described above was one of a kind, but there was another notable clash that had to do with the time children were supposed to spend in school, on the one hand, and in the after-school centre, on the other. According to the City Agreement concerning the operation of after-school centres within schools, children in grade 2 should be in school until 13:50, and then the after-school centre opens. However, the school day was actually over at 13:45 at the City School in the school year 2009–2010 for children in grade 2. This meant a five minute gap, within which neither the teachers in the school nor the recreation personnel were responsible for the children. Anna, the leader in the after-school centre, decided simply to open the after-school centre five minutes early, when school was over. Thus, on most days, the personnel would be outside the classrooms at 13:45 to welcome the children. However, the school teachers also had taken a stance and were willing to stay an extra five minutes with the children inside the classroom. Thus, even the distinction between when the school ended and after-school service began was unclear: the official document stipulating the specific hours was largely ignored by the practitioners, in this case both the school teachers and the personnel of the after-school centre.

6.9.3 “Everybody takes care of his own”

The research findings indicate that the teachers in the schools did not know much about the work in the after-school centres or how it was organised. Four teachers working with children in the schools were interviewed. This section introduces the themes that emerged when teachers discussed the cooperation between after-school centres and the schools.

The four teachers that participated in this study did not consider it part of their work to collaborate with the after-school centre. They said they had their hands full preparing school-work in which they were responsible for the well-being and academic progress of their students. It was not in their job description to arrange meetings with the leader of the after-school centre. “These are separate institutions and they [the children] have left us when they are with them [in the after-school centre]”, said Erla, a teacher in the North Valley School (interview, April, 2009). Erla added, however, that sometimes she and Helen, the leader, would discuss
issues concerning individual children, and she praised Helen for taking the initiative in such collaboration.

There was no formal collaboration between the teachers and the leader of the after-school centres, however, nor involvement with other recreation personnel. When the teachers were asked if they thought that collaboration should be increased, their responses were mixed. Lilja, a teacher in the City School, stated adamantly:

I really don’t see the point of that, because this is so separate. This is the school and [that is] the after-school. We have no say over their work. You might want to have a meeting if something comes up, like if there was bullying going on in the after-school centre that might not be going on in the school. You might need to have a meeting, but this has not come up. (Lilja, City School, interview, October, 2010)

The four teachers said that they did in fact not know much about what went on in the after-school centre.

I have to admit that I do not know if they have any specific goals. Whether they follow any policy or if it is just about organizing areas that are like storage, where they play games and such. I just don’t know. (Lilja, City School, interview, October, 2010)

Lilja had visited the after-school centre in spring 2009, just to get a glimpse of what the children were doing there and how the work was organised. She said she was impressed by the organisation of the facility and how it looked cosy with lively colors and practically designed play-areas for children. Everyday, recreation personnel came to Lilja’s classroom to pick up children who were registered at the after-school centre. It was the majority of her class. Sometimes new personnel came, and Lilja found it a bit uncomfortable when she was not formally introduced to the new persons. “Maybe I don’t have to know, but it would make me feel more comfortable”, she said.

Herdís, one of the two teachers interviewed in the North Valley School, said, when asked about the program in the after-school centre:

I don’t know. I see that they are doing crafts and playing cards and playing, they have a considerable number of toys, naturally more than we do. Then they go out to play. They have this cool thing, the Activity Board and stuff. And I really like Helen, she is resolute in keeping things together. So this is all like ... I sense that the kids are happy going there and such. (Herdís, North Valley School, interview, March 2009)
Erla, also from North Valley School, had strong views about the hours young children spent in the institutional environment of the school and the after-school setting.

In many cases children are spending too many hours per day at this age and in the first years of school. To be here at 8:00 and not home until between 17:00–18:00. This is a very long time. This is a social issue and maybe parents should be urged to think it through, because Icelandic society is so aimed at the needs of the work-industry and the employer. (Erla, North Valley School, interview, March 2009)

Her words reflect the view that the lives of children have become more institutionalized. Erla felt that the society needed to look more carefully at how the lives of children were organised. In her view, children were spending too much time away from their parents and their homes. Erla left school for her home around 16:00 and she often met some of her students, on her way out, who were still at the after-school centre. She knew that many of them were not going home until 17:00. According to Erla, children were spending too much time in institutional settings, which could be harmful for them.

Both the teachers and the recreation personnel felt that their assignments were different and that there was little overlap in their roles and responsibilities. However, the leaders of the after-school centres thought there should be more collaboration and information-sharing between the two organisations.

6.10 Conclusion

This chapter illustrates the responsibilities of the leaders of the two after-school centres, who played a significant role in organising the program of their respective centre, advising personnel, and solving conflicts. They did the work of brokering as they strived to coordinate the work of the after-school centre with the timetable of the school, and the shared premises. Both leaders were faced with challenges in their work. These challenges related to factors such as lack of facilities, and high ratios of children per staff member, as well as to the limited qualifications and experience the majority of the personnel had in working with children. Few of the staff members expected to be working in the after-school centre for more than perhaps one school year. The younger people considered it a good experience to work with children, and the part-time working hours fitted in with their studies. Although they thought that facilities and working conditions needed improvement, they were quite content in their work.
However, the majority of the recreation personnel did not stay on the job long enough to become full members in the practice.

The professional identities of the personnel shifted between (a) providing physical and emotional care, (b) supporting social development of the children and (c) organizing leisure activities that promote informal learning. The personnel divided the work between themselves and took turns taking care of various tasks, such as supervision of play-areas and group-work. The personnel emphasized that supporting social skills involved informal learning in social activities. However, the majority of the recreation personnel did not link their work with the learning and socialization that the children have experienced in school and pre-school. The recreation personnel did not feel that they could affect, or take part, in the broader educational community. They perceived themselves as non-participants with respect to the larger school community. Despite the emphasis on peer-groups and social relationships, the personnel did not systematically seek information about the children’s social progress in the schools or coordinate their work with the teachers. Thus, the recreation personnel did not consider their professional roles as linked to the roles of other professionals working with children. Generally, they exhibited a low level of professional ownership of the organisation of leisure activities in the after-school centres. However, the leaders of the after-school centres exhibited more professional authority.

Multiple ideas about children and childhood are reflected in how the recreation personnel organised their work and how they talked about children. In both centres, there was emphasis on democratic ways of working with children and on children’s freedom of choice. Children were considered capable and able to take responsibility for their actions within the after-school centre. However, the children also had to comply with the rules and daily framework established by the adults. Children had limited opportunities for contributing to the daily schedule even though they could, on some occasions, suggest ideas for activities. The recreation personnel said it was important to maintain friendly relationships with children, and that they regularly incorporated ideas from the children into their work.

Lastly, from the perspective of the recreation personnel, there is little evidence of the ‘holistic approach’ recommended in public policy (Reykjavík, 2010, 2012). There was little formal cooperation between after-school centres and schools. For example, it was considered sufficient to hold monthly meetings between the leaders of the after-school centres and the school principals for exchanging information. The general recreation personnel did not take part in meetings between the school and the after-school centre. There were rare exceptions when a staff member providing support to a specific child was invited to join in
collaborative meetings with specialists, to receive information on how to handle the child. In other words, the ownership of meanings belonged to the traditional school, as the professional knowledge about children in the school community was more valued than the knowledge that the recreation personnel could bring to the table. There appears to be a gap between the organisational design and practice within the after-school centres. Recreation personnel generally experienced a lack of recognition and did not perceive themselves as participants in the school community.
7 CHILDREN’ S PERSPECTIVES

Together, school and after-school centre frame children’s institutional lives in their first years in elementary school. The historical development of the after-school centres reflects ideas of children as both vulnerable and capable social actors. Policy makers and service providers have, to various extents, strived to organise a setting that supports care, learning opportunities, and leisure activities. Still, it remains unclear what kind of services the after-school centres should provide for children and little is known about how the children experience the activities in the after-school centres. This chapter addresses the views of the enrolled children on the activities in the two after-school centres. The children arrived at the after-school centres after the regular school-day was over. Thus, unlike the personnel, the children came to the after-school as a group which had already established strong connections through their schooling. In fact, the group of children formed their own community of practice that travelled from school to the after-school centre. Therefore, it is important to discern how the children experienced the transition between school and after-school centre, and the elements that seem to have helped them cope with that transition. The identity of the children within the after-school centre is inter-connected to their position in the social community of children, in the school as well as in the after-school centre.

This chapter discusses the themes that emerged from the data and explores the importance of play, the transition from school to the after-school centre, and the children’s views on the teachers and recreation personnel. The chapter outlines the identity of the children within the after-school centre through Wenger’s model of the social ecology of identity, and ends by discussing the various modes of belonging and the importance of autonomy for the children.

7.1 The importance of play

The findings of this study strongly indicate that play is an important part of being a child in the first grades of school. In both after-school centres under study in this research, play was valued and encouraged; however, there was little room for free play in the schools. School recess provided an important sphere for the children to play and be with their friends during school hours. The following sections outline the importance of play in the after-school centres, and children’s views on play-areas and group-activities. It also discusses how the children experienced the system set up
for choosing leisure activities in each after-school centre. The section ends with a discussion of play in the schools.

7.1.1 Play in the after-school centre

The children maintained that they play in the after-school centre but learn in school. Anna, for instance, said: “There is a big difference because in the after-school centre we always play and we get refreshments ... there is also a big difference because we are always learning at school.” Many of the children interviewed related ‘learning’ to school and ‘playing’ to the after-school centre. Kristín mentioned that in the after-school centre “you could choose to do a jigsaw puzzle, to be outdoors, and many other things.”

It sometimes happened when some children had already started to play that another child chose the same activity and joined the group. This could cause some disturbance and even though the children mostly solved the problems by themselves, personnel occasionally had to intervene. The result could be that either the child that had been excluded had to find some other activity, or the group was told to include him/her in their play. In this way, the children learnt to deal with rejection and make compromises. To participate in play was important for all the children. Figure 7-1 shows how Kata from grade 1 chose to represent herself in the after-school centre.

I asked Kata and her class-mate, Saga, what children did in the after-school centre.

Figure 7-1. Playing with the dollhouse

Saga: You play.

Kata: It is like a pre-school, only shorter.

Kolbrún: Exactly, but why do kids go to the after-school centre?

Kata: Because the mothers and fathers are at work.
Saga: Because the classes end early.
Kolbrún: Do the kids themselves decide to attend the after-school centre?
Saga: No.
Kata: No.
Saga: The parents decide.
Kolbrún: How do you feel about that?
Both: It is fun. (Saga and Kata, Sunny Side After-School Centre, May 2009)

Like Saga and Kata, most of the children realized why they were at the after-school centre, i.e because the parents were working and wanted the children to be in a safe place. Some of the children used the term ‘storage’ about the after-school centre even though the researcher tried to use the term after-school centre or the name of their after-school centre. Una used the term “care-centre” to describe the after-school centre. However, it also happened that children wanted to attend the after-school centre even though one of the parents was staying at home. One of the mothers, who had intended to have her child at home after school as she was on maternity leave, said that the boy had asked to attend the after-school centre because all his friends were there. Finally, she enrolled him at the after-school centre four days a week. The after-school centre is thus not only a place that takes care of children while the parents are at work, but also a place that plays an important role in the social life of children today. Davið and Logi explained what they were doing in the after-school centre and why they were there:

Kolbrún: Why are you in the after-school centre?
Davið: Then you are making beadwork like you can see here [points to a poster on the wall]. And playing with Legos and playing cards.
Kolbrún. Is it like being in school?
Logi: Yes ...
Davið: and sometimes we play with clay and sometimes you learn to do like at home, what is it called? ... chores at home. And then there is also handiwork and maybe computer games, Playstation.
Kolbrún: But why are children in Sunny Side After-school Centre or the after-school centre?
Logi: Because mom and dad are maybe still at work.
Kolbrún: And what do the staff-members do?

Logi: They take care of us.

Davíð: They just take care of us and tell us what we can do and what not. Maybe tell us off if somebody is disobedient. Except me, I don’t dare to disobey at school because I feel uncomfortable if somebody tells me off, it is uncomfortable. It is quite different at home. (Davíð and Logi, Sunny Side After-School Centre, May 2009)

The interviews with the children show, however, that the staff-members have considerable power to decide, for example, what is on offer each time, and they set the rules and see that they are followed. Above, Davíð described how uncomfortable he felt to be told off and, therefore, he did his utmost to obey the rules, be it at school or at the after-school centre.

When asked what they liked best in the after-school centre, the children had a variety of views. Most of the designated play-areas were mentioned. To mention a few specific things, the children liked to have the opportunity to color, to play cards, and to work with clay. Computers, baking, and Playstation were extremely popular. The outdoor playground was also mentioned but it depended on the season of the year. The outdoor playground became more popular in the springtime. Outdoor activities were usually unstructured as children participated in free play, but sometimes group games were organised under the supervision of the personnel. Boys spent considerably more time playing football than girls, though a few girls did participate in football.

I asked the children what they did not like to do at the after-school centre. The following are some of their answers:

- Most boring to be told to play with someone (Hilmar)
- When there is much noise (Margrét)
- When you are being teased (Sóley)
- When nothing fun is on offer (Sunna)
- When there is name-calling and you have to wait (Pétur)
- Being outdoors in bad weather (Hildur)

7.1.2 Group activities

In both centres, the personnel organised group-work, usually once a week, for the children in grades 2–4 and the children could sign up to participate. Two girls, Hanna and Ragna, from the North-Valley Centre, described how it worked:
Hanna: We like it when a poster is put up and you can decide if you participate in a trip or something. Then they have written it down, and you can choose to go. It can be like five or twelve kids and when the group is full they draw a line, or something. Then you can go along, in a day or two.

Ragna: It is good to be able to choose.

A children’s council was also set up in both centres, for the older kids. In North-Valley there was a special council for the children from grade 3:

Hanna: The kids ... they sit on these chairs ...

Ragna: Yeah, there are a few kids that get to pick something fun to do, and then we get to do it in three or five days.

Hanna: Maybe we go to the movies ...

Ragna: And we have to make a poster.

Hanna: Show the other kids, and then Magnús [staff member] comes with a paper and we have to draw and write on it what is going to happen. (Hanna and Ragna, North Valley Centre, March 2009)

The girls liked the fact that the children could take part in deciding activities, advertising it on a poster, and that everybody who wanted to participate could sign up. Still, the operation of the council was dependent on the personnel, who made sure that decisions were executed, posters made, etc. In the North-Valley Centre, there had been problems operating the children’s council as the children selected to the council did not attend the after-school centre every day. Often, only two or three children in the council would be there on the day of a meeting. Thus, meetings were regularly postponed and sometimes such meetings were not held for weeks.

7.1.3 System of selection

The personnel had developed different systems of choosing in the two after-school centres (see Chapter 6). In the Sunny Side After-school Centre, the children had circle-time or group-time led by the personnel and they chose an activity from a number of cards. In the North-Valley After-school Centre, the children went to the Activity Board as soon as they arrived and indicated their choice by putting their name next to a specific activity sign. Hilmar drew a picture of himself standing in front of the Activity Board; at the top of the board are names and pictures of activities, and the names of children are lined up beneath. The maximum number of participants allowed was designated by a number alongside the
relevant activity. Once it was fully booked, a red card was put on the board to signal that it was no longer open for selection.

The Activity Board was a central object at the North Valley After-school Centre, providing the children with information on what was offered each day and the opportunity to see what their friends had chosen. It was not uncommon that the children came in pairs to do their selection, deciding together where to put their names.

![Figure 7-2. The activity board in North-Valley centre](image)

The children in the Sunny Side After-school Centre seemed to be quite comfortable with the circle-time method. However, some of them complained of the time it could take and that sometimes other children were being noisy and disturbing. Inga and Nanna talked about the circle-time:

Inga: There is one manager that organises the selection and goes into the middle.

Kolbrún: Is it an adult or a child?

Inga: It is supposed to be a child, but sometimes it is not. Then it is just the adult.

Kolbrún: How do you go about the choosing?

Inga: And then we say what we like and they give us the activity card.

Kolbrún: And can you always find something interesting to select?

Inga: Yes. But sometimes the cards are finished.

Kolbrún: Ok, and what do you do then?

Nanna: We just select something else. (Inga and Nanna, Sunny Side Centre, May 2009)
On a number of occasions, children from both centres would switch between activities if their friend was not able or willing to follow their lead. To establish some discipline in the selection process, personnel at both after-school centres had decided on a minimum time limit for each activity and the children had to continue the activity until their time was up before they could move to another space. The interviews show that the children wanted more freedom to switch between activities and to reduce the obligatory duration of each activity.

The circle-time in the Sunny Side After-school Centre also provided a setting for disclosure of information and for conversations; however, the children thought that sometimes it took too much time and that it was not a good experience when there was much noise or disturbance. The Activity Board in the North-Valley Centre facilitated ‘flow’ so that the children did not have to wait for all the children to be present but could make their selection immediately upon arrival. There was less waiting time and it seemed to be less stressful for the children.

7.2 Transition from school to after-school centre

This section addresses issues of transition from the school to the after-school centres that were an important theme in the data. The children in the study had certain ideas of learning that they brought with them to the after-school centre. When they started first grade, it took some time for them to distinguish between the school and the after-school centre, as they sometimes referred to the recreation personnel as ‘teachers’. One of the mothers interviewed also said that sometimes her son had talked about things that happened ‘in school’, but she later found out that they occurred in the after-school centre. As the children moved from the schools to the after-school centres, however, they acted as ‘brokers’, their ideas of learning and friendship transferred through the two settings.

7.2.1 Learning in school

The children that participated in the research all agreed that they were in school to ‘learn’ and ‘work’. They linked learning to the processes of learning to read, write, do math, and work on their assignments. Most of the children said there was a big difference between the school and the after-school centre. Some of them compared the after-school centre to a pre-school, which most of them had attended before starting school, as the following example illustrates:

Ása: In pre-school you mostly play but in school you have to do more work.
Kolbrún: But how do you work in school, what do you do?
Ása: For example you...
Sigurður: ... learn to read.
Kolbrún: Yes, read.
Ása: ... and learn to do maths ... and also talk.
Kolbrún: Yes, exactly. Speak correctly.
Ása: Yes.
Sigurður: And not say bad things to others.
Ása: And put up your hand when you want to speak so we don’t all speak at the same time. (Ása and Sigurður, Sunny Side Centre, May 2009)

Interestingly, the children had strong opinions on what learning was about, and they agreed that ‘learning’ was not taking place in either the pre-school or the after-school centre.

![Figure 7-3. Learning in school](image)

7.2.2 Importance of being with friends

The drawings that the children made of themselves at the after-school centre often depicted them at play with their friends who were then specially mentioned. It mattered to the children to have a reliable friend at the after-school centre. Sóley drew a picture of herself and her two best friends, see Figure 7-4. She carefully put their initials on the picture, emphasizing their importance in her life.

Being socially excluded and without friends was not common, but Katja’s story is an example of such a case. Katja was from Russia and attended the Sunny Side After-school Centre. She had lived in Iceland for
only a few months during the first year of the study, when she was in grade 1. She was very quiet and serious in the after-school centre as well as in school, and never spoke with the other children. The language barrier and the fact that Katja seemed to be very shy made it difficult for her to connect not only to the other children, but to the personnel as well. Often, she would be sitting by herself drawing, or drifting around the playground, disconnected from the other children. When I visited the after-school centre during the second year of the study, Katja was a very different child from the girl I met the year before. Her Icelandic had improved dramatically and she was able to talk with her classmates. Furthermore, a boy from Russia, Alexander, had joined her class and also the after-school centre. Although Katja had already begun making friends among the girls, it was obvious that Alexander and Katja had a strong connection and they talked together in Russian. Katja was smiling, running around and participating in various group-activities in the after-school centre. For her, finding ways to connect and make friends was crucial for her participation and well-being.

Figure 7-4. Friends are important

Most often the children became friends with children of the same age, or from the same class. There were, however, some cases where a child made friends from another class or even from a different age group. The after-school centre thus offered an opportunity to establish new friendships and increased the possibilities for children who were socially isolated in their class to get new friends.

7.2.3 Importance of school-recess

The children who participated in the research came from two elementary schools in Reykjavík. The schools were quite different regarding organisation and ideology. Common to both schools was that the school day was very organised and split up into classes where different subjects were taught. In addition, the children attended many special classes, like
gymnastics, cooking and handiwork and they were split up into groups who attended these classes at different hours. There were two recesses during the school day, one short and one longer. It often took the children some time to get from one place to the next and it also took time to take off and put on their outdoor clothes. Many of the children liked the recess, but there were also some who complained about clashes between children during the recess and accidents that happened. The following is part of an interview with two children from grade 1 in the North Valley School, Halldór and María, where they talked about the school-recess:

Kolbrún: How do you feel about being outdoors during the recess?

Halldór: Yes, you see, then we can play for such a long time and that is fun.

María: In the short recess, one bell always starts to ring, that is difficult.

Halldór: Yes, you see, first it is the outdoor bell, then the indoor bell and then I just have to hurry inside and you see, take off my outdoor clothes and hurry into the classroom and into the gym and then suddenly, they are all just gone! (Halldór and María, North Valley Centre, March 2009).

Halldór describes, here, how it can sometimes be difficult to check the time, and also the insecurity which follows if a child loses sight of its group or is not in the right place at the right time.

Figure 7-5. Playing football in school-recess

The recess also seems to give an important opportunity to play and to be with friends. Una and Harpa came to me for an interview:

Kolbrún: What do you do during the recess?
Una: Then we just play.

Harpa: Like today, during the recess the girls were in the corner, or some of them ... and we just took off our socks and we only had on our fleece sweaters and trousers and we just lay down pretending to be sunbathing with our coats on and such. (Una and Harpa, North Valley Centre, March 2009)

The children seemed, to a certain degree, to select their activities and companions according to gender. It was thus most common that girls played with girls and boys chose other boys as playmates. Pétur and Magnús, who both attended first grade at this time, told me that most often they played football during the school recess and also in the after-school centre.

But sometimes they clashed with other kids, even older boys in the playground. Pétur said that sometimes he collided with another boy and then that boy would chase Pétur, as the excerpt below illustrates:

Kolbrún: When does that happen?
Pétur: Most often during recess. He pushed me, but I was trying to support him. I said to him: ‘What did you do to me, what is the matter with you?’ He was chasing me and he kicked me incredibly hard. I nearly lost my voice.

Kolbrún: What do you do during recess when something like this happens?
Matthías: Then we get the teacher.
Kolbrún: Do you most often find him?
Matthías: That is Jónas [assistant staff]. He does nothing!
Pétur: Not Guðmundur either [the school janitor]. He does not permit us to drink during the recess.

Matthías: He even would not allow me to go to the playground to watch my brother play football. (Pétur and Matthías, North Valley Centre, February 2009)

In the interviews with the children, it appeared that it was difficult for them to get assistance from adults during the recess. Such remarks were more frequent in the school that had a bigger outdoor playground. It was also clear that the children’s experience was that the adults were in charge at the school, be it their teacher, the janitor, or the assistant staff member. Children also said that they often talked in the recess about what they were going to do in the after-school centre and made arrangements about who to play with, etc.
7.2.4 Taking care of your things

The Sunny Side After-school Centre was located in a separate house on the school grounds. At the end of the school day, the children had to take their overcoats, schoolbags, and other belongings and bring them over to the after-school centre. Saga gives a good description of this trip:

Always when you have finished school, then you always have to go to the dining room, then again to the dressing room, get dressed, take the school-bag, put on your shoes, and carry everything out to the after-school centre and then again go out to play. It is quite difficult. (Saga, Sunny Side Centre, June 2009)

On some cold days, the children’s bags were quite bulky. Then they always dressed in overalls or overcoats and pants, had mittens and hats, scarves, fleece sweaters, woolen socks, and snow boots. Many had large heavy schoolbags, and on some days the children also had to bring gym- or swimming-gear. In the North-Valley Centre, the facility for children from grade 1 was located next to their classroom. However, children from grades 2–4 had to carry their belongings from the dressing room outside their classroom to the after-school centre on the floor below. In both centres, quite often some items were left behind. As parents came to fetch their children at the end of the day at the after-school centre, it was common to hear remarks such as: “Where is your overcoat? –Where are you mittens? –What have you done with your gymbag?” Often, the personnel in the after-school centre were trying to assist, and sometimes they had to open locked doors in the school to help retrieve lost items. In the personnel meetings, the personnel discussed how inconvenient it was that all the doors were locked after 4:00 pm but also that the children needed to be more responsible for their belongings.

Thus, the long day of school and care, and the various facilities that the children were using during the day, meant that it was often difficult for them to have oversight over all their belongings.

7.3 Views towards adults

The findings of this study indicate that children have strong opinions on what teachers in school do and that they are less clear about what recreation personnel in after-school centres do. The next two sections discuss the views of the children towards personnel in both the after-school centres and in the schools.
7.3.1 The recreation personnel

The children were asked about the role of the personnel at the after-school centre. To describe the staff’s role, the children used terms such as: look after, register, keep an eye on, talk to children, don’t teach anything, tell what is on offer, set rules. When I asked Ásta what they did, she said “they sit on the sofa and do nothing.” Kristín, on the other hand, said that recreation personnel taught them to draw and to do handicrafts in the art corner. In one of the after-school centres, one staff member was hired especially to take care of creative work in the art corner and, on most days, the children were able to work on different projects there. In the other after-school centre, organised art work more often took place in club activities and was generally related to different themes, like Christmas and Easter.

The children seemed to experience more freedom to select activities in the after-school centre than in school: “We can always decide in the after-school centre”, said Magnús from North Valley Centre. On the other hand, it was the personnel who had already decided on the range of activities. But what would the children have liked to change at the after-school centre if they could decide? Interestingly, the children from both centres had very similar ideas on what they would like changed, but it varied between individual children. The following is part of an interview with Tara and María, from the Sunny Side After-school Centre:

Kolbrún: If you could decide on everything and could decide on the activities at the after-school centre, what would you like to change?

Tara: Then I would like to have Playstation.

María: Yes, and also that you could have Playstation downstairs. In the same way as baking, only baking is more often possible.

Tara: Yes, and I would also always like to have Playstation and toys corner downstairs and toys corner, cushion corner, and art corner on the second floor. (Tara and María, Sunny Side Centre, June 2009)

Thus the children from both centres would have liked an increasing range of activities to choose from each day, and they also wanted to be able to switch between activities whenever they wanted. The children recognized that even though they got to choose between activities in the after-school centre, the personnel set and implemented the rules. I asked Ólafur about the rules in North Valley Centre:
Kolbrún: Are there many rules in the after-school centre?
Ólafur: Well, we don’t actually know all the rules, because if we do anything wrong, we are informed of another rule.
Kolbrún: Ok. So you are not informed of all the rules?
Ólafur: No, they don’t tell us about them all, but when we cross the line we are told another rule.
Kolbrún: Well, I see. Do kids often get to decide what they do in the after-school centre?
Ólafur: Not very often. (Davíð, North Valley Centre, March 2009)

Ólafur felt that the rules in the after-school centre were unclear and he did not feel that the children decided what they could do, although they could choose from a list of options. His words contradict Magnús’s words, above, that the children “always” got to decide in the after-school centre and is a reminder that children do not necessarily share perspectives or experiences. In fact, the role of the recreation personnel seemed to be unclear from the perspective of the children, as some children described the personnel as very passive while others said that the personnel took an active part in their activities.

7.3.2 The teachers in school

To describe the role of the teacher in school the children used words such as: teach, show one what to do, help, explain, scold, give permission. Heiða explained to me what teachers do:

Kolbrún: Will you tell me what teachers do?

Heiða: They have to show us what we have to do in the books and then they always say that we have to keep it in our brain and not to raise our hands [to ask for assistance], and then when one takes a seat at the table we have to remember what the teacher said in the brain. That is what the teacher says and then we start to work.

And Ragna added:

Ragna: And then also, Kristján [a schoolmate] always arrives and disturbs me when I work. I can’t stand it to have him sitting next to me. He is always disturbing us when we work.

Kolbrún: Tell me, what does the teacher do then?
Ragna: They don’t see what he is doing. He is always whispering a lot and doing stupid things ... Because, he is always imitating me. (Heiða and Ragna, North Valley Centre, April 2009)

One of the decisions the teacher makes is where the children sit and next to whom. The teacher can thus make decisions that sometimes have a big influence on the well-being of the children. I asked the children what they would change in school if they had the power to do so. They named many things, one boy would like to have one day a week with free activities, and another one wanted free activities every day. I asked Davíð what he would like to change in the school:

Kolbrún: Is there something you would change if you were the headmaster and could make all the decisions?

Davíð: Yes, I would let the kids work, have a little more time for work and then I would let them stay longer outside during recess, and just, you see, always when they have finished the work they have to do, then let them do what they want. (Davíð, Sunny Side Centre, May 2009)

I asked Jónas and Tindur what they liked most to do in school.

Kolbrún: What do you like most to do?

Jónas: To be outdoors in the recess and during free activities.

Kolbrún: Exactly.

Tindur: I like the free activities a little bit but if I want to select something fun then it is impossible because somebody else has already selected it.

Kolbrún: But why is the recess most fun?

Tindur: Because then you can do what you want. (Jónas and Tindur, North Valley Centre, March 2009)

There were different opinions on what was most fun at school. Many children mentioned the recess, art- and handiwork classes, and sports, but some children mentioned special-assignment books, as for example the “Do-you-want-to-try” books. Eva said that she simply liked best to “learn in school.” There were also different opinions on what was most boring in school. Most of the children mentioned that it was most boring to be teased, to be left out, or to be scolded by staff. What follows are a few examples of what they liked least in school:

- When somebody is teasing during recess (Guðrún)
• When you are scolded by somebody (Nonni)
• To put up your hand and wait (Vera)
• When there is noise in the class (Sunna)
• To do difficult tasks (Sigurður)

Generally, the children made a clear distinction between the teachers in the school and the recreation personnel, even though they did occasionally refer to the recreation personnel as ‘teachers.’ In school, as in the after-school centre, having a friend was very important and recess provided an opportunity to be with friends and even to plan activities for the after-school centre. The role of the teachers was quite clear from the children’s perspective: She was the person who taught, organised, and directed the activities in the school hours.

7.4 The identity of the children in the after-school centre

Experiences of participation as well as non-participation were intrinsic to the children’s experiences in the after-school centre. Wenger’s analytical model of identity indicates that there is no simple way to describe the identity of children within the after-school centre. On the contrary, children’s experiences were many-sided as they engaged in different ways with different people for different purposes. Figure 7-6 provides an overview of the elements of children’s identity within the after-school centre.

Figure 7-6 shows that there were various levels of membership according to the participatory perspective of different forms of belonging, i.e. engagement, imagination, and alignment. Children had experiences of both participation and non-participation in the after-school centre. They formed a strong community in the after-school centre in which they shared the collective purpose of playing and having fun. Furthermore, they shared experiences and meanings through conversations and actions, and making friends was crucial. Peer support was important in helping the children to cope within the institutions, not least the transition between school and after-school centre. However, the children had little access to the ownership of meanings as they were situated in a world dominated by adults. The fact that the children could choose between activities in the after-school centre supported their autonomy and strengthened the participatory level of their engagement. The children valued being able to decide for themselves but generally accepted the authority of adults, both in school and in the after-school centre. Nevertheless, it should be noted that the children had different resources and ways of belonging and their membership in the CoP of the children varied.
7.5 Ways of belonging

The children that participated in the study were a diverse group of individuals of different genders, ages, social backgrounds, personalities, and preferences. Each one developed his or her own specific way of belonging in the community, both the after-school centre and the school. All the children connected their experiences in the after-school centre in a unique way with their lives at home and their lives in school. This section gives examples of the children’s accounts of their different ways of belonging in the after-school centre and in the school.

![Diagram of the identity of the children in the after-school centre]

Figure 7-6. The identity of the children in the after-school centre
7.5.1 Feeling capable

The findings of this research indicate that it was important for the children to experience that they were capable and appreciated by their classmates as well as by the personnel. However, the children in the study experienced the after-school centre in different ways. They had their favorite activities, and friends with whom they liked to play. Some of them had access to many groups and could easily move between activities, spaces, and groups. Other children found this more difficult and attached themselves to a few individuals whom they tended to follow. In the same way, some of the children tended to seek more freedom, playing in spaces more distant from the personnel, like the outdoors playground. Other children sought more interaction with the adults and tended to select spaces where there was more contact with staff members, like the art corner or other indoor spaces. The children thus had different needs: some needing more security and calm, and others wanting to enjoy more freedom from adult intervention. For example, Davíð approached the personnel at the beginning of each session and needed to talk about what activities had been organised for that day. He then told them what he was planning to choose, and how he visualized the day. In the outdoor area, he did not stray very far from the personnel on duty and he was in regular contact. His class-mate, Nonni, however, simply ran straight to the outdoor area when the school was over and, if nothing came up, he would sometimes go through the afternoon without ever talking to the recreation personnel.

Likewise, some children enjoyed school while others found it less entertaining. The findings of this study indicate that it is important for the children to be able to cope with the assignments and feel capable. For example, Siggi, who enjoyed being in the Sunny Side After-school Centre, had a hard time pointing out what he liked to be doing in school. When he was asked to draw a picture of himself in both school and after-school centre he was quick to draw a picture of himself playing with lego in the after-school centre. But he couldn’t come up with an interesting theme to draw when picturing himself at school:

![Figure 7-7. Siggi in school (left) and in the after-school centre (right)](image)

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The picture shows Siggi in the after-school centre, playing Lego with a friend. To the left, Siggi drew himself in school, but had difficulties deciding what else to draw. He said, anxiously, that he didn’t know what to draw in the school and left the picture as it stands. His mother said that he was very happy in the after-school centre. She said that, according to the teachers, he seemed to be lagging behind his classmates in some subjects. There was concern that he would need special support, but his mother was optimistic that this was only a phase. However, she recognized that he was sometimes frustrated over the projects in school and felt inferior to the other kids.

Edda, who was from the same class as Siggi, had no difficulty describing herself as a student in school or as a child in the after-school centre. Her picture shows a dedicated student reading a book at her desk in school, under the watchful eyes of a smiling teacher, and to the right Edda is playing in the outdoor area in the after-school hours.

![Figure 7-8. Edda in school and in the after-school centre](image)

Edda was a resourceful child who was doing well both in school and in the after-school centre, according to the personnel. She talked about liking to learn in school, and she really liked her teacher. She had several good friends with whom she played both during school-recess and at the after-school centre.

### 7.5.2 Experiences of autonomy

The findings of this study show clearly that is important for the children to have the opportunity to do what they like to do, to be independent to some degree. To be able to decide what to do in the after-school centre, choosing from a
range of activities, was highly valued by the children. Still, some of them would have liked to have more of a say, such as what would be offered, when they could switch between activities, etc. Interviews with both children and their teachers in school confirmed that the children did not, in general, decide the subject of each class, or have choice of activities during school-hours. However, the children who quickly finished their tasks often had a free choice at the end of class in the way that they could choose from specific tasks (for example, project-folder, free reading, drawing, or something else). The teachers from the City School organised, additionally, a selection-time for the children in the last two classes of the day, two or three times a week, where children from grades 1 and 2 could choose between many activities, including beadwork, reading, working on maths, computer-time, role-play, playing shop, playing cards, etc. On the other hand, their choice was directed in so far as the children had to try everything once and could not make the same choice more than three times over the semester.

Furthermore, the Activity Board in the North Valley After-school Centre was a helpful tool in enabling the children to self-regulate their activities in the centre, and eliminated any waiting time when they arrived. In both centres, the flexibility of the schedule and the negotiation that could take place between the children and the recreation personnel contributed to the children’s sense of participation in the CoP. Being able to participate actively, through engagement and negotiation, strengthened the children’s feeling of belonging.

7.6 Conclusion

The findings indicate that the after-school centres in this study provided an opportunity for the children to play, be with friends, and take part in a variety of activities in the after-school hours. Four main conclusions can be drawn from the analysis of the experiences of the children in the two after-school centres that participated in the study.

Firstly, the children from both after-school centres had, in general, very similar experiences within their after-school centre. Although there were differences in the facilities and the organisation of daily activities, such as the system of selection, all the children that were interviewed emphasized that within the after-school centre they could play and be with friends. Thus, they emphasized the social character of the activities in the after-school centre. However, the social activities of the community of the children were not limited to the after-school centre. In both centres, the children described a social community of practice that was created in both school-hours as well as after-school hours.

Secondly, the children constructed their own communities of practice in which they organised their social relationships, their experiences of
learning, and their histories of knowledge, which existed both in the school and in the after-school centre. In fact, the CoP of the children created the link between the schools and the after-school centres. They took on the role of brokers as they made the transition between school and after-school centre. The relationships that developed in the peer-group affected how the children experienced the institutional setting, including the classroom, the recess, and the after-school centre.

Thirdly, the majority of the children made a clear distinction between the after-school centre and the school. The identity of children within the after-school centre was generally characterized by higher levels of participation than that of their identity within the school. The children in both centres, said they did not have the possibility of deciding what to do during school-hours; they said, rather, that the teachers decided and controlled the activities. Moreover, there was little opportunity for friends to play together in the schools, except during school recess. In the after-school setting the children could decide, within a framework controlled by the adults, what they would like to do, and most of the children seemed to enjoy being able to choose an activity and play with their friends. The ground rules and framework, such as spaces and timetables, was decided by the adults who worked in the after-school centres. According to the children, the recreation personnel took on a variety of roles, ranging from very passive to much more active participants in the activities of the children. The teachers in school, however, had a very clear role, which was to teach and direct the learning processes.

Finally, it was important for the children in the study to be able to feel capable, and to be able to exercise autonomy. Being recognized and valued within the group was important for all children, whatever their level of membership and negotiability within the group. While some were coping well both socially and academically, others were struggling for recognition and acceptance as part of the group. Moreover, the after-school centre provided opportunities for the children to take an active part in deciding what to do with their friends within the institutional setting. Some of the children in the study described time spent waiting in school and in the after-school centre as a frustrating time, a time which seemed boring and useless (waiting for the assistance of teachers, waiting in line, waiting while others choose). The children in the North Valley Centre valued the Activity Board which reduced their waiting time in the after-school centre to a minimum. Likewise, the children in the Sunny Side After-school Centre valued the weekly selection time in their school which added diversity in the organised school-hours and increased their autonomy. Thus, being able to negotiate meaning and take part decision-making, supports the children as active members in the CoPs to which they belong.
8 DISCUSSION AND SUMMARY

This chapter summarizes and discusses the main findings of this study. The research questions will be revisited and linked to the main conclusions in the study as well as to previous research and to the theoretical framework of this study. The aim of this chapter is to outline the organisational identity of the after-school centres as they are perceived by the stakeholders. Firstly, the main purpose of the after-school centre will be discussed with regard to the perspectives of stakeholders, the organisational status of the centres in the system and their connections to other practices where children live their lives. Secondly, this chapter discusses the main findings with regard to the roles of the recreation personnel and their professional identity. Thirdly, the perspectives and experiences of the children will be examined, in particular the ways in which their community of practice connects schools and after-school centres.

8.1 Defining the domain

The first research question of the study was: What is the purpose of the after-school centres in Reykjavík, and how has public policy reflected that purpose (see section 2.8)? The stakeholders hold a variety of ideas about the role, rationale, and purpose of after-school centres. Administrators and politicians in Reykjavík seem to prioritise the provision of day-care for young school children, but they have not defined any ways for assessing the quality of this service. Recent changes in policy emphasize that the after-school centres can support learning experiences and should be recognized as part of the educational system. This section outlines the identities of care, learning, and leisure as evidenced in the perspectives of the different stakeholders; discusses the unclear status of the after-school centres as evidenced by public policy and the overall lack of resources for the service. The section ends by exploring the boundaries and brokering between after-school centre and school, and after-school centre and home.

8.1.1 Identities of care, learning, and leisure

One of the main findings of this study is that the organisational identity of the after-school centres is a compound of multiple identities, including identities of care, learning, and leisure.

Table 8-1 outlines the organisational identity of the after-school centres from the perspectives of the main stakeholders.
| **Table 8-1. Multiple Identities of the After-school Centre as evidenced by the Views of different Stakeholders** |
|---|---|---|
| **The system:** Public policy in Reykjavik | Identity of care | Identity of learning | Identity of leisure |
| | Emphasis on safety and that children feel that they are cared for | The service is generally provided on school grounds. Supports social development of children | Democratic ways of working with children Organised recreation activities Informal learning |
| **Recreation personnel** | ... the children feel warmth and feel that they are coming to a place which is fun and welcoming. That they can trust the people that work here and know what they can and cannot do. [...] I don’t want this to be just a “storage” (i. gæsla) but rather like a home. | We are evidently teaching them many things, even though it is not learning through books or by the book. In other words, they are learning to handle the environment, taking responsibility, and they are learning to count and learning to write. We provide settings that stimulate these things. | This is their free-time and it is important that they experience a certain amount of freedom and that they have a choice of activities, not that they simply can do whatever they want. |
| **Teachers** | I have to admit that I do not know if they have any specific goals. Whether they follow any policy or if it is just about organising areas that are like storage for children. | I really don’t see the point of [increased collaboration] because this is so separate. This is the school and the after-school ... | They are doing crafts and playing cards and playing, they have considerable amount of toys, naturally more than we do. Then they go out to play. |
| **Children** | I come here because my parents are working and cannot pick me up straight after school. Children cannot be alone home. | The personnel teach us how to draw and sometimes to build. | I get to decide all the time when I am in the after-school centre, and I can be with my friends and go out and play football. |
| **Parents** | I need day-care for my child because I am not at home until five pm. I don’t want her to be home alone for many hours. | In the after-school centre, he is with his friends and taking part in a variety of activities. At home, he would be alone and bored. | I find it important that the after-school centre is not as structured as the school. Children need time to play because they are tired in the afternoon after a long day at school. |

Table 8-1 also presents the main discourses surrounding the rationale of the after-school centres: these include the provision of care, learning, and leisure. Evidence of each discourse can be found in the perspectives of
different groups of stakeholders. Nevertheless, the findings of this research indicate that:

- From the point of view of the system, the main rationale for the after-school centres has been the provision of basic day-care. The recent emphasis on a holistic approach—the coordination of school and after-school centre—reflects a vision of a new kind of school, yet to be constructed.
- From the point of view of the recreation personnel, the main aims of their work were to provide physical and emotional care, and additionally to enhance children’s social skills.
- From the point of view of the children, the main function of the after-school centre was to provide an opportunity to play and to be with their friends.
- From the point of view of the teachers in the schools, the after-school centre was providing physical care and, possibly, social support for the children.
- From the point of view of the parents, the most important function of the after-school centre was the provision of physical and emotional care for the children.

With regard to learning content in the after-school centres, these research findings indicate that most stakeholders favour social-learning activities, not academic-learning activities in the traditional sense. Recreation personnel, teachers, and parents in the study agreed that the activities in the after-school centre should not be structured in the same way as activities in the school. Moreover, the children valued the flexibility and the informal structure of the daily activities in the after-school centres. This finding is in line with the social pedagogy of the Nordic countries which emphasizes the capable child (Kryger, 2004). Hence, the after-school centres in Reykjavik seem to be providing a service which is designed to complement the school by emphasizing social learning instead of academic learning.

All stakeholders emphasized, though to different degrees, the importance of leisure in the work of the after-school centres. The most common understanding of leisure was that it constituted ‘free-time’ and was linked to the practice of offering children an amount of freedom to choose between activities. The system underlined the importance of democratic ways of working with the children. However, the provision of organised leisure activities which should support informal learning processes were encouraged. Thus, the idea of leisure itself was unclear and entailed discourses of leisure both as a freedom from duties and as a structured learning experience.
Behind the concept of leisure lay meanings of care and learning, as well as ideas about the self-realization of the individual.

These results concur with previous research in the field of after-school services, research which shows both the existing multiplicity of perspectives and that the emphasis shifts between care, learning, and leisure (Haglund & Anderson, 2009; Garey, 2002). Often, stakeholders apply different meanings to concepts such as the concept of care (Garey, 2002). This is because the relevance, the possible meaning of objects, is always related to the social context, the previous experiences, and the expectations of the individuals (Wenger, 1998). While from the perspective of the system the provision of care might involve only the provision of physical care, most parents would expect that the emotional well-being of their children would also be secured (Garey, 2002). There is no one ‘right’ way to describe the main role of the after-school centres: they are expected to meet the needs of different stakeholders, including the societal need for day-care. Furthermore, the after-school centre is expected to meet the demands made by both parents and the system-at-large for organised leisure activities that are constructive and offer learning experiences for children. Less visible are the demands made by children: that the after-school centre should be a space for children to be socially active, to play with friends, to make new friends, and to be able to exercise a degree of autonomy by choosing what to do.

However, the findings from this study show that even though most stakeholders recognize the potential role that after-school centres can play in the lives of children, there is little on-going discussion between the different stakeholders to clarify their understandings and expectations of this role. The venue and opportunities for such discourses to take place have been missing. The recreation personnel underlined the social role of the after-school centres which they perceived as being, essentially, very different from the role of the schools. At the same time, authorities emphasized the shared roles of the schools and the after-school centres to support the overall development and well-being of children by providing holistic services. The fact that teachers and recreation personnel do not collaborate or share information is evidence of the non-holistic approach which characterizes their daily practice.

8.1.2 Boundaries and brokers

This study showed that the organisational identity of the after-school centre is negotiated on the boundaries between the after-school centres and the network of practices operating in the proximity, specifically the school and the home. This section discusses the characteristics of these boundaries, and the work of brokering within and between the practices.
After-school centre and school. The boundaries between school and after-school centre are both ‘clear’ and ‘vague’. The findings of this study suggest that the after-school centres actually operate on the periphery of the school-community even though the history of the after-school centres in Reykjavík revealed the troubled relationship between the two organisations. An analysis of the identity of the after-school centre suggests that the service is closely connected with schooling, as the enterprises of schools and after-school centres are quite interconnected: They share members, and often facilities, as most after-school centres operate on school grounds. The spatial environment or locality has significant impact on the development of the service (Smith & Barker, 2002). The boundaries are also vague because the after-school centre is supposed to operate within the school without any external authority over, for example, the use of premises, as Cartmel (2007) found in Australian after-school programs. Sometimes, the children only ‘move’ from one practice to the next when the group of adults changes (that is, from teachers to recreation personnel) as they are still within the same room. Since the after-school centres serve children who have previously been in pre-school and who are currently in school, their opening-hours depend on school hours, and because they are most often located on school grounds, they are thus affected by the school culture (EFILWC, 2006; Haglund, 2004; Smith & Barker, 2002). For those reasons, there are strong indications that the organisational development of after-school centres will inevitably be linked to the development of the schools and schooling in general.

However, there is also evidence that the boundaries between the two practices are clear: There is a discontinuity between the after-school centres and the schools in the sense that teachers and recreation personnel do not usually share ideas, events, or experiences. Although the schools and after-school centres in this study shared physical premises (at least partially) and members, the personnel in general did not participate in brokering. This is in line with previous research in this area (Cartmel, 2007; Højholt, 2001). However, the leaders were coordinators and facilitated the work of the after-school centres by negotiating practical matters, including use of premises, with school leaders. But there was little coordination or negotiation between school personnel and recreation personnel. In fact, the majority of boundary objects, such as facility and furniture, originated in the school community, as did its source of meaning and agency. The authority of the school-community over the use of premises was quite obvious in this study, as in other studies (Cartmel, 2007; Smith & Barker, 2002). Classrooms were intended as areas for formal learning, with the use of tables and chairs for school work, not as artifacts for play and leisure activities. Recreation personnel did in general not participate in negotiation of the application or organisation of
these artifacts, even though both after-school centres in the study shared at least one classroom with the school, as well as other areas. Thus, the recreation pedagogy of the after-school centre was contained, in stead of being connected to school activities.

The gap between after-school centre and school is maintained by the low level of institutional framework and investment in the services provided in the after-school centres. The academic learning emphasis in the schools overrides the social learning emphasis found in the after-school centres. Bringing the two together is, thus, a complicated task. The organisational structure has to be defined, as well as the overlapping tasks of the schools and the after-school centres, and the content and form of the pedagogical collaboration. In fact, there has to be a venue where both personnel groups (teachers and recreation personnel) can meet to discuss and create shared meanings and repertoires (tools) to use in their work. For example, they should explore together how the learning that takes place in after-school centre connects with the learning that takes place in school, and vice vera. The connections made between the after-school centres and the schools will affect the future development of the after-school centres. In Reykjavík, the current policy is that these two institutions should work closely together to provide a holistic service for children. This is in accord with the development in other Nordic countries where the boundaries between school and after-school centre are blurred (Langager & Robenhagen, 2005; Haglund & Anderson, 2009). However, the findings of this study show that without an institutional framework, the status of the after-school centres will remain unclear. Without recreation personnel and teachers engaging in collaborative activities, without a shared domain of objectives, or a collective repertoire, there will be little continuity in practice between the two institutions, school and after-school centre.

After-school centre and home. The study indicates that recreation personnel felt that they partially substituted for the parents while the children were in their care. The leaders felt that they should try to incorporate domestic atmosphere in the centres, and emphasized the provision of care. In this sense, the recreation personnel identified more strongly with the parents, than with the teachers in school. However, formal collaboration with parents was at a minimum level, with only one introductory meeting at the beginning of the year. But the arrangement of an ‘open house’, where parents were invited to visit the after-school centre and perhaps look at an art exhibition prepared by children and personnel, was a venue for informal communication between parents and personnel. In fact, the parents interviewed in this study said that they did more often meet and talk to the recreation personnel than to the teacher in school due to the fact that when they collected their children after work, they were in the after-school centre. Research on collaboration
with parents has shown that communication that takes place at the end of
the day, when parents come and pick their children up, can be crucial and
that after-school centre can create an important bridge between home and
school (Broström & Schytte, 2005). Thus, it can be argued that the after-
school centre can be a setting where brokering between school and home can
take place.

The children did acknowledge that the after-school centre was in some
sense replacing the home, although the after-school centre was far from
being like home. As Davíð explained, being in the after-school centre or school
was “quite different from home” (see section 7.1.1). The children in the study
felt that the after-school centre was not like school and neither was it like
home, which is in line with previous research (Smith & Barker, 2002).
However, the after-school centre seemed to be a setting that, from the
perspectives of the children, connected school and home. This highlights the
strong views that children may have which could be instrumental in defining
the identity of the after-school centre, if only their voices were heard.

8.1.3 Unclear status in the school system

The history of after-school centres in Reykjavík displays in a rather striking
way how a sizeable organisational unit (that is, after-school centres) can
develop without any of the publicly accepted institutional moulds and
without any professional underpinnings, even though it has potentially an
important educational and societal function. Their unclear status in the
school system stems from two main factors: on the one hand, the lack of
institutional framework, and, on the other hand, their dependency on and
marginalisation within the school system.

The legislative framework in Iceland mandates no straightforward
regulations about the operation and organisation of after-school centres
or their pedagogic content. A clause in the Compulsory School Act
(Compulsory School Act, no. 91/2008) allows the schools to operate after-
school centres, but there are no further directives as to how they should
be organised. The lack of political, legal, theoretical, and professional
underpinnings is not generally seen as a problem, and the total lack of
ideological dialogue between the schools and the after-school centres
appears not to be lamented: on the contrary, any such dialogue seems to
be discouraged, in spite of the public rhetoric about holistic services. The
main social actors who have affected the development of the after-school
centres have been politicians and administrators, not professionals. The
professional participants, be they pre-school teachers, teachers, or
recreation personnel, have been largely ignored in the decisions that have
been made with regard to the organisational and administrative
framework. Other research has shown similar trends: that is, that there is
a general lack of operative framework and low level of investment in after-school services (EFILWC, 2006). The organisation is often characterized by insecurity and a lack of resources (Cartmel, 2007). Communities of practice need a design and a stable operative framework that supports the practice (Wenger, 1998). Within the constellation of practices that operate within the educational system, after-school services for school-aged children are at a low level. Even though there is general agreement on the need for day-care for young school children, the educational benefits of such services are generally neither considered nor recognized. In Sweden, special arrangements for after-school centres are the exception as schools and after-school centres share a legislative framework (Haglund, 2009).

During the most recent period, 2002–2011, the Sport and Recreational Council took steps to increase coordination and professionalism in after-school centres by emphasizing their distinctive functions of supporting the social skills of children and offering recreation activities. The present policy in Reykjavík today is that after-school centres and schools should work together to provide a holistic service for children. However, investment, infrastructure, and resources to work towards that goal are not yet forthcoming. The practice within these institutions cannot be sustained without a careful design that will allow the organic nature of the communities of practice to grow (Wenger et al., 2002). In the schools in Sweden, there is a concern that the school pedagogy overrides the recreational pedagogy (Haglund, 2009). Similar tendencies have been identified in the Icelandic pre-schools, with an increased emphasis on school-like activities instead of social pedagogy (Einarsdóttir, 2006b; Jónasson, 2006). For the community of practice in the after-school centre to survive in the school-system, its specific nature has to be recognized in the institutional framework, not only rhetorically but in the establishment of the resources necessary for the practice to thrive.

Organisations depend upon communities of practice to develop and sustain their specific status and role (Wenger, 1998). There has to be not only a balance but interactive connections between the design of the organisation and the practices within it. The history of the after-school centres in Reykjavík illustrates the fact that decisions were made by municipal authorities with limited consultation with the practitioners. Sometimes decisions were made in opposition to the views of practitioners, as was the case when the service was moved administratively from the day-care institutions into the schools. Even though the move may have been deemed appropriate at the time, it is possible that the after-school centres might have developed differently had municipalities made an agreement with day-care professionals (predecessors of the pre-school teachers of today) to cooperate with
teachers in developing the services. In Norway, for example, pre-school teachers generally teach in the preliminary classes and grade 1, as elementary-school teachers. Of course, it may seem idle to speculate on the possible outcomes, what if things had been done differently? But such speculations facilitate what Wenger refers to as ‘social learning.’ Through telling stories of the practices in the past and in the present, we gather knowledge that informs our decisions and perspectives for the future. To be able to imagine the possibilities is also a key to social learning and active participation. For those reasons, the organisational framework of the after-school centres needs to be rooted in the experiences and knowledge of the practitioners.

Even though a given practice is developed with the hard work and dedication of the participants, it cannot endure without some kind of institutional reifications which support the identity of the practice (Wenger, 1998).

8.2 Defining recreational pedagogy

The second research question raised was: How do recreation personnel interpret their role (see section 2.8)? The pedagogy of the recreation personnel needs to be made explicit so that reflective and critical development of their role can take place.

8.2.1 Lack of professional identity

The findings of this study indicate that the majority of recreation personnel have no formal education in the field of pedagogy and make short term commitments to their part-time jobs in the after-school centres in Reykjavik. The situation is similar in most Western societies (Cartmel, 2007; EFILWC, 2006) but, as previously noted, Sweden and Denmark employ a high proportion of educated personnel in their after-school centres (Haglund, 2009). If there is a high rate of turnover of personnel it means that each year a significant number are newcomers. They do not possess the experience of the ‘old-timers’, or have access to the knowledge that has accumulated over time in the after-school centres. It takes time to develop the insight necessary to become a full member of a CoP (Wenger, 1998). As a result, the recreation personnel have had problems articulating their professional identity and connecting their work to other practices within the educational system, such as the schools and/or the pre-schools. The major organisational and administrative changes of the operation of after-school centres in Reykjavik did, in fact, hinder their professional development, especially when the service was moved away from the pre-school teachers and into the schools (see
section 5.2.3). From the perspective of the system, it has been deemed acceptable that the workforce within the after-school centres is unstable and frequently changing, resulting in a low level of professional identity.

Consequently, this study specifically reveals that the majority of the recreation personnel interviewed did not consider themselves to be specialized in providing care or organizing leisure activities to support social skills. There was little documentation or assessment of this work although the strategies to develop social skills were regularly discussed at personnel meetings. Their theoretical and scientific knowledge, an important tool in their repertoire, was unclear. Although the recreation personnel in this study shared values such as social learning and democracy to some extent, they did not consider themselves specialists in the activities of the after-school centre, nor did they assume autonomy and control over their tasks, which is quite understandable given both the centres’ unclear role and the weak professional background most of them had. Professional identity involves not only an awareness of shared values and goals, but that professionals have considerable autonomy and control over a predefined task (Leicht & Fennel, 2008). Hence, according to these criteria, the general workforce in the after-school centre in Reykjavík cannot be defined as professionals. This is a global dilemma in the field of after-school care (EFILWC, 2006). With the exception of Sweden and Denmark, most countries do not have a professional workforce in the field of school-age care.

The practical and theoretical basis on which most after-school centres seem to operate relates to the ideals of care, learning, and leisure. These values were reflected in the perspectives of the personnel in this study. However, the majority of the recreation personnel had difficulties in assuming control over the task domain, even though it was left in their charge. In many cases, they relied on the initiative of, and advice from, more experienced personnel, as well as from the leaders of the centres. Thus, leadership was particularly important in the after-school centres since leaders of the centres assumed the primary responsibility for the work, supervising the work of the recreation personnel. A comprehensive discourse about the professional underpinnings of this service for children is lacking, and this is not unique to the centres in Reykjavík. Much more generally, there are some serious indications that the recreation pedagogy of after-school care for school-aged children in the Nordic countries seems to be in a state of crisis, largely because of the dominance of academic or school-based discourses. Even in Denmark and Sweden, where the professional training is most developed, research on the cooperation of recreation pedagogues and teachers indicates that the pedagogues feel pressured by teachers to work in accordance with the school culture and
rules (Calander, 2000; Haglund, 2004; Højholt, 2001). The discourse is largely directed from within the school community, the source of authority from which validity of meaning seems to emanate (Cartmel, 2007; Haglund, 2004; Smith & Barker, 2002).

The roles, values, and responsibilities of the recreation personnel are unclear. Although the recreation personnel in this study adopted the general view that social learning was the primary focus of the work in the after-school centres, few of them had articulated views on how they were supporting social learning. Nor did they connect their work with the work done in the schools or the pre-schools. A reflective discourse on the nature of the learning that can take place in the after-school centre, on the implications of such learning in the overall education of children, and on the role of the professionals in supporting such learning, has not taken place.

8.2.2 Intruders in the school

This study suggests that the practice of the after-school centre in the school building was seen as a kind of intrusion, and, as such, the personnel tended to feel that their work did not belong in the school facilities. The ‘ownership’ of a specific space was important in creating a sense of belonging and identity. This was evident, both for the personnel and for the children. The ‘heart’ facility in both after-school centres was very different from the other facilities that were used. It was furnished with sofas, mattresses, shelves with books, and pictures on the walls. The furnishing and decorations created a personal and friendly atmosphere. However, the personnel and the children often had to use facilities that were designed to meet the needs of the school, not the needs of the after-school centre. They used classrooms, hallways, canteens, and other areas for group-work, play, and various other non-schoolwork activities. The recreation personnel felt that the practice of the after-school centre was viewed as an intrusion in the school. The facilities, which were shared with the school, were not designed to meet the needs of their work and they could not arrange and decorate them according to their own wishes. The use of classrooms can be a source of conflict between recreation pedagogues and teachers, for example, if the recreation personnel use the classroom in ways different to those accepted in the school (Cartmel, 2007).

The marginalisation of after-school care within the schools, as evidenced in this study, is not unique. Generally, after-school centres are located in school buildings (section 5.3.4). The facilities are in many cases not adequate as after-school centres are scattered about, in different places, on the school site and they are often not able to accommodate their own equipment inside the rooms which they share with the school (Cartmel, 2007). Research has shown that the school culture affects and even controls how activities are organised in the after-school hours (Haglund, 2004; Petrie et al., 2000; Smith
& Barker, 2002). The personnel are easily influenced by how one ‘ought’ to behave in the school environment. Furthermore, the children in this study sometimes referred to the recreation personnel as ‘teachers’, although they seemed to perceive the roles of teachers and recreation personnel very differently (see section 7.3). Such confusion is not uncommon, as other studies have shown (Smith & Barker, 2002). Sharing facilities requires a dialogue about the meanings connected to roles, objects, and their employment. Wenger defined ‘boundary objects’—artefacts, terms, documents or other forms of reification—on which communities organise their interconnections (Wenger, 1998, p. 108). Buildings can be one type of such boundary objects, as well as playgrounds, school rules, and forms of agreement. Such artefacts can both connect and disconnect communities, as their design and the perspectives they evoke can enable or limit participation. In the case of the after-school centres, their weak status in the school system seems to limit the identification of recreation personnel as participants in the education of children and to nourish their sense of not belonging.

### 8.2.3 Provision of care

The recreation personnel emphasized the provision of care, both physical care and emotional care. For the staff, forming a caring relationship with the children helped to ensure their overall well-being, and following security protocols worked to ensure their physical safety. In fact, the findings of this study show that there has been increased demand for supervision of children. In the school-day-care homes in period 1 (1971–1992), the children were allowed to explore their neighbourhoods with the permission of the personnel. Today, they are not allowed to leave the grounds during the opening hours of the after-school centres, at least not without parental permission. The majority of parents as well as politicians expect that children will be well cared for in the after-school hours. Personnel are expected to make sure that children do not come to any harm, and to prevent children from wandering the streets.

Previous research has also shown that, generally, recreation personnel emphasise the provision of care (Petrie et al., 2000; Højholt, 2001). However, there are divergent opinions about what ‘care’ means (Garey, 2002). People have different expectations, although most parents do expect that their children are cared for, in a broad sense, that their emotional and social well-being as well as their physical well-being are ensured. This aligns with the views of the parents interviewed in this study, who talked about the positive atmosphere at the after-school centres and friendly relationships between children and personnel.

The primary source of the organisational identity of the after-school centre is the provision of care for young school-aged children. The global
need for day-care is the main reason for the establishment of the services (EFILWC, 2006). This is an element that the after-school centres share with their counterparts in early education, the pre-schools. Originally, pre-schools were set up to provide day-care. Today, it is recognized in Iceland that they not only provide care, but valuable learning experiences for young children (Jónasson, 2006).

The emphasis on care for school-aged children reflects the idea of the ‘vulnerable’ child that cannot be left on its own for several hours a day. However, research has shown that children can also take care of themselves during after-school hours, and many appreciate having time for themselves at home (Strandell, 2008). In Reykjavík, few children from the older grades, 3 and 4, attend the after-school centres. It seems as if the services are primarily aimed at meeting the needs of the youngest school children, those in grades 1–2. Moreover, the services provided in the after-school centres do not always meet the needs of all children (Petrie et al., 2000). Often, the resources needed to provide additional support to children with special needs is missing (EFILWC, 2007; Petrie et al., 2000). Thus, it is far from clear just what the provision of day-care for school-aged children should entail and whether, or how, such care should meet the needs of all children.

8.2.4 Social learning
This study found that the recreation personnel emphasized social learning in the after-school centres. The majority of the personnel talked about the importance for children of informal learning through social activities. They said that it supported the social skills of the children to take part in peer-group activities, on their own accord, without the constant supervision of adults. Hence, the personnel generally assumed a rather passive role in their work, overseeing the activities of the children rather than directing them. This is in line with other, earlier research that shows that recreation personnel in after-school centres are often experienced by the children as passive (Ackesjö, 2011).

The personnel considered it important to provide the children with a flexible and caring environment, and observations showed that the majority of the personnel seemed to have a relaxed and playful relationship with the children. Activities were varied, and emphasis was on free play and different group activities. Generally, recreation personnel prioritise the social development of children (Højholt, 2001; Stanek, 2011). Moreover, this study showed that the personnel felt that by establishing a good relationship with them, they contributed significantly to the social well-being of children in the after-school centre.
Social learning takes place whenever individuals participate in social activities (Wenger, 1998). To support the social skills of children, the recreation personnel used a variety of methods including the system of choosing activities, circle times, free play, and an emphasis on friendship. However, they did not link their work with the learning and the socialization that the children experienced in school and in pre-school. According to Illeris (2007), learning always involves content of some sort, whether it be a new ability, insight, or understanding. Furthermore, learning takes place whether or not there is any intentionality (Illeris, 2007; Wenger, 1998). Thus social learning takes place both in the school and in the after-school centre, even though it remains unclear just what the nature of social learning is. According to Icelandic legislation (Compulsory School Act, nr.91/2008), the schools are supposed to support the social development of children, their autonomy, and their understanding of democracy. However, the findings of this study suggest that the teachers in the schools did not prioritise social learning in their work; rather, this was the main aim of the recreation personnel. This study provides evidence that the after-school centres in Reykjavík support the social learning of the children that participate and, consequently, that the after-school centres are supporting the overall aims of the schools.

8.2.5 Organising leisure

This study indicates that younger children’s leisure time is increasingly spent within the after-school centres. The recreation personnel felt that the time children spend in the after-school centre should be regarded as a part of their leisure, as ‘free time’ for the children. However, it is debatable whether, and to what degree, participation in the after-school centre is part of children’s leisure time. In most cases, it is not left to the child to decide whether he or she wants to be in the after-school centre (Petrie et al., 2000). Haglund and Anderson (2009) argue that instead of defining leisure as a quantitative amount of time—a time free of duties, a residual time, a time for activities carried out for their own sake, or as a functional time for providing learning experiences—leisure should rather be considered holistically as part of the life of individuals. Experiences of leisure can be regarded as the expressions of the individual exploring his capabilities and seeking happiness (Haglund & Anderson, 2009). The practices of the school and the after-school centre are, from this perspective, like two sides of the same coin—each supporting the overall well-being of the individual.

An increased awareness of the importance of leisure in modern life is extremely important in a world that is characterized by increased control and supervision of children. Children need to be able to enjoy activities of leisure, not in a highly-controlled setting but in a setting that allows for
autonomy, play, and fun. This study indicates that the after-school centre can be such a place in the lives of young school children. The current framework seems, furthermore, to be in line with such a goal, even though the resources are still lacking.

8.3 Supervised lives of children

The third research question asked was: How do children view the daily activities in the after-school centre and how do they experience the difference between school and after-school centre (see section 2.8)? The lives of children have changed rapidly and the establishment of after-school centres is a part of the institutionalization of childhood. This section discusses the implications that can be drawn from this study about children as social actors in the after-school centre as well as in the school.

8.3.1 ‘We get to play all the time’

This study underlines the fact that, within the institutional framework of schooling, the after-school centre is a setting were school-aged children are allowed to continue to be ‘children’ who develop through play. The emphasis on play found in this study substantiates the claim that the Icelandic after-school centres operate largely under the influence of the social pedagogic model of the Nordic countries (see section 2.3.1). Children from both after-school centres emphasized the social character of the CoP in the after-school centre: that they were able to spend time with their peers and play in the after-school centre. One child in the study said that in the after-school centre the children ‘get to play all the time’. Because children were generally allowed to choose activities, they experienced themselves more as participants than as non-participants. As social actors, they had more control over their activities in the after-school centres than in the schools. The after-school centre provided children with the opportunity to participate actively and choose their own activities during their workday. This is in accord with other studies that have shown that the after-school centre can be a place where children are able to develop their social and creative skills and that it is also the place that children consider different from both school and home (Smith & Barker, 2002; Hviid, 1999; Johanson & Ljusberg, 2004; Klerfelt & Haglund, 2011).

The current trend in the development of after-school services is that they should be coordinated within the school system. Whereas the social pedagogy of the after-school centres is not strongly rooted within the school system, there is reason to worry that, if it is, emphasis will be on structured activities, not on play. The after-school centre has become a place for social gathering, for children to network and to create
experiences and shared histories of meanings. It has substituted for the homes, the streets, and the play-grounds where previously children would meet and play together in after-school hours (Strandell, 2008). Therefore, the social function of extended care should be treasured in the holistic services that are to be provided within school and after-school centre.

8.3.2 Difference between school and after-school centre

This study also indicates that the children made a clear distinction between the school and the after-school centre. They said that in the school they ‘learn’, as opposed to the ‘play’ in which they engaged in the after-school centre. They connected the concept of learning to the academic sense of learning, to learning to read and write for example. The children who participated in this research rarely had the opportunity to decide or to select activities during school hours, a finding in line with earlier Icelandic research (Einarsdóttir, 2008). There was, however, a difference between the two schools in this regard, as one of them offered a free selection period twice a week, and the children in that school were generally very pleased with this option. The children had clear ideas on the role of the teachers in the schools as instructors and supervisors. However, their ideas on the role of the recreation personnel was more unclear. Ackesjö (2011) suggests the relationships between recreation personnel and children are varied because the personnel assume many roles.

Interestingly, the perspectives of the children in this study reflected the traditional understanding of learning as ‘academic’ learning (Illeris, 2007). The children adjusted and conformed to the organisational framework in which they were situated, and their understanding of learning reflected the views of the system. As ‘newcomers’ to society, children strive for recognition by learning the values of the ‘old-timers’, the adults, who have more authority in society.

8.3.3 The CoP of children in school and after-school centre

This study shows that children act as brokers in Wenger’s sense, because they connect and transfer experiences and knowledge from school to after-school centre. However, their brokering did not include transferring knowledge and experiences between the two groups, teachers and recreation personnel. Rather, the brokering work of the children focused on sustaining the community of practice in which the children engaged from early morning until late afternoon. Peer support was important for children in the after-school centres as friends looked out for each others’ interests and provided support. Many children reported that on numerous occasions a friend helped out, such as when someone was being teased,
had injured himself, had forgotten something, or was having a hard time in some other way. This supports previous research results that suggest that children learn from each other and are supported by their peer group (Højholt, 2001; Strandell, 2011). In their institutional lives, children have to cope with a variety of issues. In school, children often have to cope with being a part of a big group, not being noticed, and having to wait (Einarsdóttir, 2008). The perception of the children in the study was that they had little control over their own situation and had to rely on the adults to notice and respond to their wishes and needs, which again concurs with previous research (Højholt, 2001; James, 2001; Petrie et al., 2000; Stanek, 2011). And, in fact, sometimes the children received more immediate responses from their peers than from the teachers. Furthermore, the relationships established between the children were more important than the relationships established between children and personnel. The peer-group was the community of practice that each child relied upon in the transition from school to after-school centre. The personnel could come and go, and the activities organised by the personnel varied, but the majority of the children felt safe because they knew the other children would be there too, and that they would be able to be with their friends. In her research with Danish children, Stanek (2011) came to similar conclusions on the importance of the social environment in the peer-group, and the support system organised in pre-school, school, and after-school centre.

Learning is transmitted between and through communities, even without intentionality or deliberative efforts (Wenger, 1998). Thus, from the children’s perspective, the school and the after-school centre are interconnected and form their workday. It is easier for the children than the adults to discern both the continuity and the discontinuity between the school and the after-school centre as they are the only participants that take part in both settings. The school is also a social setting in which children learn what is accepted and what is not, where they learn about each other’s strengths and weaknesses, and they find out who wants to be their friend and who doesn’t. The after-school centre is a setting which provides the time necessary for social networking and communication to take place.

8.3.4 Importance of belonging

One of the main conclusions of this study is that children’s feelings of belonging increase when they feel capable and have experience of autonomy within institutions. Interestingly, although schools are meant to support children to become autonomous and to support their social skills (Compulsory School Act, no. 91/2008), the children in this study felt that
they were seldom allowed autonomy during school-hours. In the after-school centre, they were, however, able to exercise autonomy up to a degree, within the framework set by the adults.

The children in this study appreciated the opportunities for participating in decision-making about their own activities and planning their own projects. Research has indicated that children value after-school centres because they get to take part in deciding what they want to do (Ackesjö, 2011; Klerfelt & Haglund, 2011; Petrie et al., 2000; Smith & Barker, 2002). However, sometimes consultations with children are only given lip service (Petrie et al., 2000), and this study suggests that personnel views towards the capabilities of children are complex (see section 6.8). However, having the opportunity to take part in decision-making strengthens the children’s perceptions of themselves as active members, in Wenger’s sense, in the school and the after-school communities. This study indicates that the social-pedagogical nature of the work in the after-school centres in Iceland supports the children’s sense of belonging in the institutional framework of schooling. As they seldom get to decide what to do in school and have little opportunities for play during school-hours (Einarsdóttir, 2010), the after-school centre provides a balance against the structured nature of the school. The elementary school is a comprehensive institution that is ruled by complicated laws and serves the interests of different groups such as the authorities, parents, and school personnel (Büchner & Fuhs, 2001). In contrast, the after-school centre is, still, a loosely-structured setting which allows the personnel to arrange the activities in accordance with their own ideas as well as the ideas of the children. The importance of these ideas becomes more evident in such a setting than in another where the formal framework is stronger.

8.4 Conclusion

The main findings of this study are, firstly, that the organisational development of after-school centres in Reykjavík over the past forty years shows that the after-school centres still remain in a state of uncertainty. The overriding rationale for the service has been shifting between care, learning, and leisure (section 5.1). The historical development of after-school centres in Reykjavík shows how their professional development has been hindered by two major administrative changes (section 5.1.1). Furthermore, this study sheds light on the conflicting discourses about the main role of these centres (section 5.2.1). Although the current institutional framework favours the view that the schools and the after-school centres should provide holistic services to children, there is little coordination between the two organisations (section 5.3.3). There have been attempts
to formalise this relationship but this development has been slow and somewhat erratic. Secondly, an analysis of the views of personnel in the two after-school centres reveals that their level of professional commitment is generally low (section 6.2.2). The participation of the recreation personnel was essentially confined within the practice of the after-school centre, as they did not participate in the school activities at large or collaborate with teachers or pre-school teachers (section 6.9). With regard to the broader community, the organisational framework, and the educational system, the recreation personnel perceived themselves as non-participants (section 6.9.1). The recreation personnel perceived their role as providing physical and emotional care for the children, as well as creating a setting that supported their social skills (section 6.7). Many of them talked about the importance of establishing a friendly relationship with the children (section 6.8). Thirdly, research with children in the two centres and interviews with their parents suggest that participation in after-school centres offers a good opportunity for the children to play with their friends and to take part in a variety of activities (section 7.2.2). The children said they experienced a big difference between the school and the after-school centre. They said that in school they were learning to read, to write, and to do math. In contrast, the children said that in the after-school centre they were playing all the time (section 7.1). The transition between school and after-school centre was facilitated by the fact that the children came as a group. Being with friends was, in fact, equally important during school-hours as in the after-school hours, and school-recess was an important venue for social activities, play, and the establishment of friendships (section 7.1). The children made a clear distinction between teachers in the schools and the recreation personnel, though they considered the roles of the recreation personnel in some ways unclear (section 7.3.1). The experiences of the children in the study were many-sided as they engaged in different ways with different people for different purposes, and their identification within the after-school centre was characterized by participation as well as non-participation (section 7.4). Nevertheless, the children felt that they were able to exercise more autonomy within the setting of the after-school centre than within the school (section 7.5.2). From the children’s perspective, the coexistence of the two institutions did not reflect a critical situation, though it may have seemed so from the perspective of the professional stakeholders involved.

Unlike previous research in the field of after-school services, this study has outlined the specific status of the after-school centres in the educational system from a holistic perspective, drawing on the views of all major stakeholders. From the point of view of the system, the main
function of these centres is to provide daycare, even though developments in recent years point towards a more pedagogical approach. As a community of practice, the after-school centre is an interesting entity to study. It can be described as an educational organisation in development, and is closely linked to the enterprises of the school. The after-school centre provides an important service for the community at large, facilitating parental participation in the work-force, especially the work employment of mothers who generally assume the main responsibility for childcare. The after-school centre has to an extent replaced streets and homes as places for children’s gatherings and social activities in the after-school hours. At the same time, the after-school centres seem to share the schools’ goal of supporting the overall development of children, not least their social development and their possibilities for becoming active members of society. Perhaps we are witnessing the early days of a new kind of schooling, in which academic learning and social learning will be intertwined and supported through both formal teaching and leisure activities.

Personnel and children develop different modes of belonging within the after-school centres, as they have memberships in various CoPs and, thereby, adopt a mixture of perspectives on their roles. The findings of this study show that the recreation personnel in the two after-school centres recognized the value of play, friendship, and flexibility. They enjoyed working with children and with their co-workers. However, they experienced a general lack of resources in their work and need further support to strengthen their professional identity. They provided support to the children when needed and organised various activities, but as other research has shown (Ackesjö, 2011) they often kept themselves in the background rather than in the foreground of activities. Recreation personnel in the after-school centres seem, in many ways, to be in a difficult situation. Even in countries such as Denmark and Sweden where there exists a professional sector of recreation pedagogues and higher levels of public investment, the personnel experience marginalisation (Haglund, 2004). The majority of the recreation personnel in Reykjavík had not received any special education or training for their work in the after-school centres and did not consider themselves specialists in the field of recreational pedagogy. It is, perhaps, not surprising that they did not consider themselves members of the educational system at large, even though they recognized the potential importance of their work for the overall well-being of children. As has been shown in other studies (EFILWC, 2006; Cartmel, 2007), the majority of the personnel made short-term commitments and often felt that their work was not valued. The repercussions of this include the fact that the personnel had difficulty in
developing a collective identity, a problem they share with their Australian counterparts (Cartmel, 2007).

The children in this study generally enjoyed participating in the activities of the after-school centre, although there were examples of children who were disadvantaged socially, or who were insecure, and needed more support from the personnel than others. Children did the work of ‘brokering’ as they connected school, after-school centre, and home. Therefore, parents as well as professionals would do well to listen to the voices of children on their various experiences and how these different settings connected (or not). Their social status in the peer-group was important, and building a network of friends helped them to establish a sense of belonging and security. The individual children learn to cope in school and after-school centre by the support they receive from other children (Højholt, 2001; Stanek, 2011). To understand the community of children moving from one practice to the next, it is important to examine their experiences within these different settings. The lives of the children in the two after-school centres were influenced by how they experienced schooling, and likewise, their lives in schools were influenced by experiences in the after-school centre, findings similar to those of other studies (Smith & Barker, 2002; Petrie et al., 2000). This study shows that it is essential that personnel in after-school centres, as well as schools, empower children and find ways to increase their autonomy within the institutional framework. Only by feeling capable and accepted do the children experience themselves as active members in the community of practice. It is vital for professionals working in children’s services to look at the lives of children holistically and take into account their experiences within the after-school centre.
9 IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

After-school services for school-aged children are arranged differently in different countries and have the purpose of replacing children’s self care. It is an arrangement that has gradually become institutionalised, but its institutional standing remains uncertain, from a number of perspectives. After-school programs can be provided by schools or other organisations, such as the scouts, youth clubs, or other non-profit organisations. After-school programs in Reykjavík have a historical connection to the social pedagogy of pre-schools, but their status and rationale still remain unclear and have changed quite substantially during the past forty years. The authorities in Reykjavík have set general aims for the work but the government has not actually developed policy with regard to after-school centres. No specific legislation addresses the organisation of after-school centres. This chapter discusses ideas for future research and some implications of the findings of this thesis for both policy and practice.

9.1 Future research

After-school service for school-aged children is an under-researched area in the field of education. Academics within the educational field focus more on schools than on after-school programs. This is perhaps understandable as school is obligatory and an important institution in the life of every child and every individual. Nevertheless, it demonstrates that these researchers may have a too narrow view of education. Social learning is an integral part of children’s lives and takes place in the communities of practice that children are part of including home, school, and after-school programs. Various forms of after-school programs have become a part of the everyday lives of a great many young school children as the numbers of children attending such programs are increasing (EFILWC, 2006). This study suggests a number of avenues that should be pursued by further research, in particular by a much closer investigation of the relationship between the various institutions that take care of the child, in this case the school and the after-school centre, from both an educational and an administrative perspective. Here, I suggest further research in four venues: (a) the development of educational practice, (b) the status and perspectives of children, (c) the infusion of leisure pedagogy into the traditional educational discourse, and finally, (d) further research on the professional knowledge base of leisure pedagogues.
Firstly, this study has suggested ways in which a particular practice is driven by the demands of different stakeholders and is moulded by various organisational and administrative efforts. Still, many questions remain unanswered in regard to the development of educational practices. A more detailed comparison between after-school centres, pre-schools and compulsory schools might provide important insights into these developments. Such comparisons, especially in the framework of the theory of Communities of Practice, could also be fruitful and shed further light on how the relationship between design and practice has affected their organisational development. Furthermore, it is of interest to follow the further development of the CoP of the after-school centres as they become part of a more formalized setting, and to see how negotiation and identification processes will develop.

Secondly, the knowledge base of recreational pedagogy and its status as a professional discipline need additional study. The concepts of care and social learning, which constitute the main roles of the recreation personnel in the lives of children, need to be scrutinized further. Moreover, the increased emphasis on learning experiences through organised recreational activities demands further investigation, especially the impact of such activities on children and their education. As evidenced by other studies (James-Burgdumy, Dynarski & Deke, 2007; Söderlund, 2004), it has, for example, proven hard to establish a relational link between the participation of children in after-school services and their academic progress. Many issues need to be addressed, such as: What would constitute the necessary knowledge base for personnel? How is quality defined in after-school services? How can the after-school centre support the overall development of children, specifically their social skills? Thus, many exciting venues for research await with regard to the professional development of recreation personnel.

Thirdly, the infusion of recreational pedagogy into the more traditional educational discourse calls for a further research. Such infusion is not only proposed in policy documents in Reykjavík but is also evidenced in Swedish and Danish studies (Calander, 2000; Haglund, 2004; Langager & Robinson, 2005). As suggested by research (Calander, 2000; Cartmel, 2007; Haglund & Anderson, 2009; Smith & Barker, 2002) and evidenced in this study, there is a tension between these two different pedagogical approaches and the professionals, that is, recreation personnel and school teachers have difficulties in connecting and collaborating. Even though the overarching ideals and goals are very similar for the school discourse and the recreational discourse as far as the well-being and social development of children are concerned, the approaches, perspectives, vocabulary, and ideas of implementation seem to be very different. Further study is
needed of both the discrepancies and the similarities of these two pedagogical approaches. This is particularly important in the case of Reykjavík, where schools and after-school centres are meant to provide holistic services, and steps have been taken to increase the coordination of these services.

Fourthly, the findings of this study suggest that the status of children within schools and after-school centres, their voices and activities, merit further research from several perspectives. It is very important to probe more thoroughly the importance of play in the educational development of older children. It has been accepted in pre-school that play may be interspersed with more formal activity (Jónasson, 2006), but the same may be the case for older children, as has in fact been suggested by Einarsdóttir (2008) and clearly reported by the children themselves. Furthermore, researchers would do well to apply a variety of methods to gathering data on the views of children in schools, for example by means of interviews, meetings with children, and drawings and photos, where children have the opportunity to express and describe their experiences. In the Icelandic context, the majority of research on the views of children in schools has consisted of questionnaires and surveys, which do not always reveal the complexity of children’s perspectives and experiences. This study suggests that because of the regulatory freedom the after-school centres enjoy (for better or worse), they provide a unique opportunity for exploring how the views of the children might be harnessed to help mould the enterprise. The present study was confined to the views of children who participate in after-school centres. Research that would compare the views of children who do not attend the after-school centre with the views of those that do, could shed further light on the lives of children in after-school hours.

Lastly, this thesis builds on two case-studies and applies qualitative methods in gathering data. To substantiate further the findings of this study it would be helpful to use questionnaires and other quantitative methods to see whether the views and ideas of the participants in the present study are representative of the larger public.

9.2 Implications for policy

Wenger (1998) has argued that for communities of practice to be sustained, a balance has to be struck between organisational structure and the level of participation–a balance between design and practice. The historical development of the after-school centres in Reykjavík shows that there have been many obstacles along the way which have impeded their development within the educational system. The general view about after-school centres in Reykjavík seems to be that they are pretty much ‘storage
places’ rather than a genuine part of the overall educational system. Judging from the lack of public policy, it seems as if the care provided in after-school programs does not enjoy the same status in society as, for example, pre-school or elementary school care. This marginalisation of after-school programs seems to exist whether the service is managed by the schools or by organisations outside the school system.

9.2.1 Establishing a formal institutional framework

Young school children spend a considerable amount of time in after-school programs, and research shows that learning takes place anywhere, anytime, and anyhow. It is just a question of what kind of learning or development takes place. It seems sensible to make wise use of the time children spend within the institutional setting of an after-school service by creating a framework that supports the quality of the care provided within these centres. Authorities need to ask and answer the questions: What are the aims of the service? How will we realize those aims?

In Iceland, as in many other Western countries, the legislative framework is unclear and vague. Municipalities in Iceland are not obligated to provide after-school services, as municipalities in Denmark and Sweden are. This lack of a legal framework would be advantageous if an institution had very strong professional core personnel, which would not have to fight for its pedagogical, administrative, and financial standing. But this has not been the case, as the historical development of the after-school centres has shown. In the present situation, it is difficult to get financial support at the local level for investment in after-school centres. The Icelandic legislature would do well to set forth a clear policy on the operation of after-school centres that would define the aims of such services, and mandate conditions for their operation, including both the qualifications of personnel and requirements for facilities. Such institutional reifications of the practice of after-school service would promote the service, create awareness of its importance, and make demands on the municipal authorities.

It took almost fifty years after the establishment of the first day-care centres for young children in Iceland to get lawgivers to establish a public framework for such institutions (Lög um dagvistarstofnanir, 1973). Hence, it can be seen that it takes time for society to recognize new practices and establish their institutional status. Furthermore, legislation must be strongly rooted in the practices themselves, and their value has to be recognized. Today, such legislation could probably be tied to the law on compulsory education, but only on the condition that it would be extended to emphasise the complementary roles played by the after-school centres and the schools.
9.2.2 Supporting professional development

Policy makers, educational authorities, politicians, and administrators at the community level can support the professional development of the personnel working in after-school centres in various ways. In the first place, authorities need to develop resources to support the professional development of the after-school sector. There are at least three reasons for this: Professional competence is lacking; even though there are some signs of it, these have been sporadic and weak overall. The importance attached to the after-school centres by the stakeholders clearly requires a higher level of professional competence. The absence of a formal pedagogical framework is also an independent reason for the necessity of a strong professional component in such an important institution. Thirdly, the balance between design and practice suggested by the CoP framework also requires this. The needed resources would include the establishment of educational programs for recreation personnel and accreditation processes for personnel and for institutions. The authorities should require much greater professional competence of their personnel, and this could be developed concurrently through educational programmes at the university and through ambitious professional development programmes at the after-school centres. Professional leadership is especially important in a field where the majority of personnel have not received special education or training. Authorities should seek to hire leaders and key personnel with tertiary education in pedagogy, recreation studies, or equivalent education to work in after-school centres.

Next, in order to support the professional development of the personnel, it is vital to create venues for the exchange of ideas and knowledge of the professional underpinnings of after-school services. If schools and after-school centres are to provide holistic services to children, their work has to be coordinated and involve a professional exchange of ideas and work methods between teachers and recreation personnel. Personnel in many after-school centres in Iceland are setting up projects for and with children that are making a difference and are contributing to the well-being of children. Those projects need to be highlighted and discussed so that others may learn from them. Educational authorities and program leaders should make sure that projects are documented and presented to the educational community and also to the broader community.

Finally, it is important to reduce employee turnover and to find ways to encourage long-term commitment to work in the after-school centres. Research shows that personnel in after-school centres often have insecure working conditions, such as short-term contracts or part-time work and insufficient remuneration, a clear signal of the low priority attached to this
service. It is necessary to offer personnel full-time jobs with possibilities for training, work advancement, and professional development. This could be achieved through increased cooperation with the schools, where recreation personnel could hold positions along with their positions in the after-school centres. Alternatively recreation personnel could hold positions in after-school centres and in youth centres for teenagers that are operated in the evenings. Another suggestion is that they could work in the mornings, in cooperation with welfare services, in organizing leisure activities for deprived social groups such as immigrants, at-risk teenagers, children with special needs, and parents that need support, while in the afternoons they would work at the after-school centres. These options would help create full-time positions in the work force for recreation pedagogues.

9.3 Implications for practice

This study provides evidence that the various stakeholders hold a variety of opinions about the organisational identity of the after-school centres. The implications of this study for daily practice are several and concern the value-base of recreational pedagogy, increasing inter-disciplinary professional dialogue, and affecting the ways in which professionals listen to the voices of the children.

9.3.1 Reflecting on the values of their work

Recreation personnel need to reflect on the underlying values and core purpose of their work. They have to examine the knowledge base of their profession, defining their specific areas of expertise and the roles they take on in their work. But this has to be clearly set in the context of the overarching development of the individual children who exist in an increasingly complex environment, thus placing it in the perspective of other institutions and practices, notably the schools. Only then can it be said that there truly exists a professional body of recreation personnel who have the ideological base and the professional competence to develop their work from not only the broad perspective of the child and its life but from the narrower perspective of the particular tasks required. Recreation personnel in Iceland should seek advice from Sweden and Denmark where such professional bodies exist: the idea here is not to import their traditions uncritically, but rather to explore the possibilities and pitfalls that exist in the development of holistic services for the schools and the after-school centres. I have argued in this thesis that the values of care, social learning, and leisure provide the main sources of identity for these services. In Reykjavík, stakeholders and personnel hold a variety of opinions, and the value of this work is neither publicly accepted nor discussed. If the main purpose of the work is to offer care, then the
question arises: What sort of care? If the main purpose is to provide learning experiences, then we need to ask: What kind of learning experiences should take place in the after-school centres? Additionally, the personnel would have to ask: What are the ways and means that we can employ to reach our goals?

Lastly, in their endeavour to become recognized professionals in the lives of children, recreation pedagogues in Iceland could benefit from looking at the professional development of pre-school teachers, their educational counterparts working with younger children. After-school care shares both historical and pedagogical roots with day-care for younger children, seen in Iceland today as a formal part of the school system. Recreation pedagogues, seeking professional recognition, could learn from the experiences of pre-school teachers.

9.3.2 Initiating a professional dialogue

The general view on the after-school ‘system’ is still (after forty years of development) that such services exist primarily to make sure that young school children come to no harm during after-school hours. This view is reflected not only in the current lack of policy in Iceland, but also in the perspectives of the teachers in this study who did not know how work in the after-school centres was organised. Furthermore, these teachers did not seem to recognize any possible educational impacts of the after-school centre, in particular, they did not see that there might be important educational components or goals missing from their own endeavors. This study also indicates that the recreation personnel themselves did not feel that their work belonged within the school system. Both the recreation personnel and the teachers in the schools had a very limited understanding of each other’s work. There were very few incentives encouraging the recreation personnel to actively participate in the educational system, and support for their professional development was quite limited. Professional requirements were low, and the official aims of, and coordinated supervision over, the work in the after-school centre was lacking.

The leaders in the after-school centres claimed that their contributions to the development of children were not recognized within the school-system. For the above-mentioned reasons, it is crucial that recreation personnel invite not only teachers in the schools but also other professionals in children’s services, to participate in a dialogue on how to better connect the various services for children. Only the recreation personnel themselves can undertake the steps necessary for developing their work and letting others know what it entails. They cannot assume, on the basis of the four decades of history presented in this thesis, that administrators or politicians will take the initiative in this professional
dialogue. The nurturing of the professional identity has to be rooted within the professional sector. For example, recreation pedagogues and program developers can invite professionals, parents, and other stakeholders to attend open seminars, conferences, and meetings where they can reflect on the practices and exchange ideas. Whether the recreation personnel have the authority to be taken seriously enough remains an open question, and it would be most desirable if the different professional groups would unite in such an effort. The professional sector has a social responsibility to make their voices heard and recognized within the broader community in the interests of the service users, that is, the children and their families.

9.3.3 Strengthening the collaboration

This study indicates that recreation personnel and children have distinct roles or tasks in the after-school centre. They share the common goal of finding ways of being together that support play activities and friendship. However, the personnel are not always aware of the issues children face in the schools or in their homes. Feeling inferior at school or troubled at home influences how children feel and act in the after-school centre. Often children operate as ‘brokers’, transmitting information between, for example, school and after-school centre. Therefore, professionals in the after-school centres should focus on setting up sustainable networks with coordinators in the schools, not only the school leaders, but teachers and support personnel as well. Furthermore, personnel that work in both the schools and the after-school centres can ‘broker’, as well as the children, and work at establishing reciprocal relationships between the two settings. But it must be on a basis of mutual respect, an issue of major concern that came up repeatedly in this study. These two institutions should be able to work together to educate children, to provide ‘educare’. At the very least, teachers and recreation personnel need to learn to value each other’s work, and to recognize that social and academic learning of children are intertwined. Such cooperation is especially important for children who are disadvantaged in some way, struggling either socially or academically, as well as for children with disabilities and immigrant children.

Currently, the after-school centres in Reykjavík operate on the periphery of the school system. The practice of the after-school centres provides opportunities for increasing the active participation of children in both leisure and school-related activities. The practice of the after-school centres invites opportunities, providing tools for creating a framework where children are able to select activities and be looked upon as competent participants. If such things are considered important in
teaching and school-work, then the schools have something to learn from the after-school centres. However, if the practices of the after-school centres are to flourish in the schools, the recreational elements of the practice need to be imported into the schools and into teacher education.

9.3.4 Listening to the voices of children

It has been argued above that a major ingredient in this study was the inclusion of the voices of children in the after-school centres in the research process. Without the perspectives of the children, we would know little of the social activities that permeate their lives, both in the schools and in the after-school centres. Through the descriptions given by children, we realize how complicated their institutional lives can sometimes be. At the same time, we are aware of how effortlessly the children create a community of practice which helps them adapt and cope within these institutions. It was obvious from the study that the children have a very clear idea about the institutional environment, and seem to grasp very easily not only the explicit but also the implicit messages that the social environment sends. Furthermore, they have interests, ambitions, and ideas that might be included in the institutional practices to a far greater extent than the ‘system’ currently comprehends or recognizes. There were interesting examples of this in the two after-school centres studied, such as children’s councils, the systems of activity choice, and the general receptivity of the personnel to the ideas of children, but clearly, further study of the involvement of children in the institutional setting is needed.

There are a host of concrete improvements that are called for on the basis of the discourse with the children. The children in this research sought more security and protection against teasing, for example, during school-recess and in the outdoor areas. Some of them said that because of the noise caused by many children sharing the same area they did not feel well, for example, in the dining rooms, in the classrooms, or in other areas. It is, therefore, important to find ways to fight against noise, to facilitate the flow, and to limit the waiting times for the children. The children who participated in this research mentioned repeatedly the fact that they often had to wait: to wait for the role-call, to wait during circle-time, to wait for a teacher’s assistance, and to wait in a queue for the meal, waiting while others made their selection. Although children have to learn to be patient and to wait when it makes sense to do so or is totally unavoidable, personnel in both the schools and the after-school centres should examine closely the organisation of the activities to avoid unnecessary waiting time for the children.

Adults usually have the final say in matters concerning the life of children in institutions. The authority of the adults, the teachers and the personnel in the after-school centres, is important and can influence the well-being of
children in these institutions. Children are very sensitive to unfair use of power and most of us have memories of such events from our own childhoods. The importance of this became obvious in this study. It is, therefore, important that people who work with children realize their responsibilities and do their utmost to protect children’s interests. It is a genuine pleasure for them to be able to participate in serious projects, to be taken seriously, and to take an active part in life. Children are filled with pleasure and self confidence when they realize that they are trusted and feel that they are perceived as capable and valued partners in practice.

9.4 Final reflections

The making of this thesis has been an adventurous journey which has enriched my understanding of the practices that exist within after-school centres, of children’s lives in school and after-school centres, and of the challenges that face recreation personnel who want to develop their professional knowledge and offer quality services to children. Wenger’s theory of communities of practice allowed me to theorize about the social reality that I had experienced, first as a practitioner and then as a researcher. It gave me the tools to examine the ways in which participants form their identities in different communities, and to reflect on the relationship between the after-school centres and the schools. The sociology of childhood inspired me to look anew at the practices within the after-school centres, practices which I believed I knew relatively well, not only from a practitioner’s point of view but from the perspectives of the children themselves. I realized how important it was to tease out their experiences and voices on these practices.

Reflecting upon the research presented in the thesis, I recognize that some things could have been done differently. Firstly, I could have involved the children more in the research process, such as in the formation of the research questions, the methods used, and the interpretation of the findings. The focus of the research might have been more on issues that are important to children, rather than on the issues that I brought to the research and extracted from the data. I might have drawn more concrete conclusions in regard to the issues that matter to children and characterize their experiences in the institutional setting. Secondly, I could have built my findings on the life histories of some children or some recreation personnel, expressing the meaning of the after-school centre in their lives. The data might thus have provided richer and more detailed histories of learning and identification from their perspective. The connections between the after-school centre, school, and home might have been brought more clearly to the foreground through the life-histories of some children. However, this examination of the
identity of after-school centres provides a rich foundation on which to build further research. This study has provided evidence for the importance of after-school centres for society at large, for parents, and for children. It has been argued that the practices of after-school centres and their complex tasks are strongly connected to the values and practices of care, learning and leisure. The findings suggest that social learning is an important part of after-school centres and that children should be recognized as active members in the institutional environment. These research findings should not be looked upon as the 'final say' on the subject. In fact, I hope that this thesis on the organisational identity of the after-school centres will serve as an inspiration to others interested in the lives of children, inspiring them to probe further the issues presented here. Last but not least, I hope that others will continue to make more enlightened and effective efforts in examining the practices of the after-school centres and the important services they provide.
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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Letter of approval from the Ethics Committee
Appendix B: Information letter to recreation personnel and teachers
Appendix C: Information letter to parents
Appendix D: Information leaflet to children
Appendix E: Example of semi-structured interview protocol with personnel
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Appendix A – Letter of approval from the Ethics Committee

Jón Torfi Jónasson, prófessor
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Oddi v/ Sturlugötu
101 Reykjavík
Reykjavík 2. desember 2008


Á fundum sínum 17. nóvember 2008 fjallaði siðanefnð félagsvísinandaeldar Háskóla Íslands um umsókn þína vegna ofangreindrar rannsóknar. Meðumsækjandi þinn er Kolbrún Þ. Pálsdóttir, doktorsnemi í uppeldis-og menntunarfræði. Markmið rannsóknarinnar er tvíþætt a) upplifun og skoðun barna á vinnudegi sínum í skóla og frístund og b) hugmyndir og skoðanir starfsmanna, þ.e. að kennara og frístundaleiðbeinenda, um eigið hlutverk og samstarf stofnanna. Rannsóknin er eigindleg.

Umsóknin samþykkt með eftirfarandi athugasemdum sem ábyrgðarmanni er bent á að lagfæra:

a) Kynningarbréf á að vera undirritað af ábyrgðarmanni rannsóknar.
b) Í kynningarbréfi til forráðamanna vantar að fram komi samþykkki skólans fyrir rannsókninni.
c) Samþykkki forráðamanna fyrir viðtölum við börn vantar með umsókninni.
d) Í kynningarbréfi þarf að umorða „taka upp vinnusvæði“, en óljóst er hvað felst í því.

Siðanefnð félagsvísinandaeldar óskar eftir að fá afrit af kynningarbréfi, þar sem tekið hefur verið tillit til athugasemda nefndarinnar, ásamt samþykkisbréfi foreldra fyrir viðtölum.

F.h. Siðanefnðar félagsvísinandaeldar HÍ

Guðbjörg Linda Rafnsdóttir, formaður
Appendix B – Information to recreation personnel and teachers

Reykjavík xx

Rannsókn á vinnudegi barna á frístundaheimili og í skóla

Kærí X,


Rannsóknin mun fara fram á vorönn 2009 (janúar-maí)). Ég óska eftir því að fá að koma í nokkuð reglubundnar heimsóknir, að meðaltali um six to nine tíma á viku í skóla og/eða frístundaheimili í samráði við þig, og fá að fylgjast með starfinu. Ég mun einkum taka niður skriflegar nótur. Þá mun ég eiu sinni á hvoru tímainlí fá börnunum einnota myndavélar og biðja þau einn dag að þa myndir af því sem þeim finnst skemmtilegt og áhugavert bæði í skóla og frístundaheimili. Þá óska ég jafnframt eftir því að fá að taka við þig 1–2 viðtöl til að fá nánari upplýsingar um starfið þitt.

Til að rannsóknin geti farið fram, er nauðsynlegt að fá skriflegt leyfi þitt. Ég óska því eftir undirskriftn þinni á meðfylgjandi blað. Ef þú óskar frekari upplýsinga mun ég fúlslega veita þær í síma 864 70 28 eða á tölvupóst kolbrunp@hi.is. Vinsamlega afhentu mér blaðið næst þegar við hittum sem við það það þú á þátttöku í rannsókninni hvenær sem er og/eða óskað eftir breytingu af fyrirkomulagi rannsóknarinnar.

Ef þú óskar frekari upplýsinga mun ég veita þær í síma 864 70 28 eða á tölvupóst kolbrunp@hi.is. Jafnframt getur Elva Ellertsdóttir, ritari Siðanefndarinnar, veitt nánari upplýsingar um þátttöku í rannsókninni hvenær sem er og/eða óskað eftir breytingu af fyrirkomulagi rannsóknarinnar.
Leiðbeinandi minn og ábyrgðarmaður rannsóknar er Jón Torfi Jónasson, forseti Menntavíslasviðs Háskóla Íslands – jtj@hi.is

Með fyrirfram þökk,

___________________________
Kolbrún Þ. Pálsdóttir
Doktorsnemi við félag- og mannsinsindadeild HÍ

___________________________
Jón Torfi Jónasson
Forseti Menntavisindasviðs
Ábyrgðarmaður rannsóknar

SAMÞYKKI – Consent Form

Hér með veiti ég samþykki mitt fyrir því að rannsakandi (KÞP) fái að fylgjast með starfinu í bekknum. Ég er einnig tilbúin(n) að koma í a.m.k. tvö viðtöl þar sem rætt er um starfið mitt. Ég hef lesið meðþýskandi upplýsingablað og geri mér grein fyrir að ég get haft mikil áhrif á framkvæmd rannsóknarinnar sem og hætt við þátttöku hvenær sem er.

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Nafn

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dags
Appendix C – Information letter to parents

RANNSÓKN Á VINNUDEGI BARNA í FRÍSTUNDAHEIMITI OG SKÓLA
Reykjavík xx

Bréf til foreldra barna í X bekk

Kæru foreldrar,

Markmið rannsóknarinnar er að rannsaka heildstæðan vinnudag barnanna útfrá sjónarhóli barnanna sjálfræði og óðlast skilning á þeim verkefnum og reynslu þeirra í skóla og frístundaheimili. Ekkverður einstaka börnum fylgt eftir, heldur fylgst með barnahópum. Vonast er eftir að rannsóknin auki skilning á reynslu barna innan skólakerfisins ásamt því að varpa ljósi á leiðir til að efla samstarf frístundaheimilis og skóla.

Rannsóknin mun fara fram á apríl-máí 2009 og mun rannsakandi dvelja að meðalaltali um sex til núu tíma á viku í skóla eða frístundaheimili í samráði við starfsmenn. Það mun börnin einn dag fá einnota myndavélar og verða beðin að taka myndir af því sem þeim finnst skemmtilegt og áhugavert bæði í skóla og frístundaheimili.

Fyllsta trúnaðar verður gætt við úrvinslu gagna. Hvergi munu nöfn barna, foreldra eða starfsmanna koma fram og gögn verða engum aðgengileg nema rannsakanda. Jafnframt er mikilvægt að taka fram að öllum gögnnum verður eytt þegar að rannsóknin er fullunnin og niðurstöður hafa verið birtar. Rannsóknin hefur verið samþykkt af hálfu Siðanefndar
Félagsvisindadeildar HÍ og Persónuvernd er upplýst um rannsóknina. Elva Ellertsdóttir, ritari Siðanefndarinnar, getur veitt nánari upplýsingar um réttindi þátttakenda í síma 525 4573 eða á netfangi elva@hi.is.

Til að rannsóknin geti farið fram, er nauðsynlegt að fá leyfi forráðamanna. Þið munuð á næstunni fá sendan tölvupóst þar sem óskað er eftir rafrænu samþykki. Athugið að hægt er að afturkalla samþykki hvenær sem er á meðan á rannsókn stendur. Ef þið óskað frekari upplýsinga mun Kolbrún veita þær fúslega í síma 864 70 28 eða á tölvupóst kolbrunp@hi.is.

Með fyrirfram þökk,

_______________________________
Kolbrún Þ. Pálsdóttir
Doktorsnemi við félags- og mannvísindadeild HÍ
Appendix D – Information leaflet for children

Upplýsingar um rannsókn

Ég heiti Kolbrún Þ. Pálsdóttir og er nemandi við Háskóla Íslands. Ég er að vinna að spennandi verkefni um hvað krakkar gera í skólanum og á frístundaheimilinu. Mig langar til að fólk viti meira um hvað krökkum finnst um skólann og frístundaheimilið.

Ég mun koma í heimsóknir til ykkar í frístundaheimilið og í skólann, og ef þú samþykkir mun ég spjalla við þig um nokkra hluti eins og:

• Hvað gerir þú í skólanum og á frístundaheimilinu?
• Hvað finnst þér skemmtilegt eða leiðinlegt að gera í skólanum og á frístundaheimilinu?
• Hvað gera kennararnir í skólanum?
• Hvað gera starfsmennirnir á

Þú þarf ekki að svara spurningum minum.
Þú mátt sleppa því ef þú vilt.

Hlakka til að hitta þig!
Appendix E – Example of the semi-structured interview protocol with personnel in after-school centres and schools

Geturðu sagt mér frá hvers vegna þú valdir þetta starf?
How did it come about that you work in an after-school centre?
Hvað finnst þér skemmtilegast/leiðinlegast við starfið?
What do you find positive/negative about your work?
Segðu mér frá helstu markmiðum starfsins, hvað myndirðu orða þau?
How would you describe the main goals of the work?
Hvernig upplifir þú bönnin? Hvernig myndirðu lýsa barnahópnum?
Can you tell me about the children, how do you experience them?
Hvað finnst þér ganga vel/illa í samskiptum þínun við barnahópinn?
Can you tell me about your communications with the children?
Í hverju felst samstarfið milli skólans og frístundaheimilisins?
In what ways do the school and the after-school centre cooperate?
Í hverju felst samstarf þitt við starfsmenn frístundaheimilis/skólans?
How do you cooperate with teachers/recreation personnel?
Hvað finnst þér mega vera öðruvísi í því samstarfi?
Could the cooperation be any different, in your opinion?
Hefur starfið í skólanum/frístundaheimilinu einhver áhrif á þín störf?
Does the work in the school/after-school centre in any way affect your work?
En á bönnin? Does the work in the school/after-school centre affect the children?

Hvað veistu um starfið í skólanum/frístundaheimilinu (þ.e. stofnunina sem þú starfar ekki hjá)?
What can you tell me about the work in the school/after-school centre (the institution you do not work at)?
Appendix F – Example of semi-structured interview protocol with children

Geturðu sagt mér frá skólanum þínnum/frístundaheimilinu?
What can you tell me about your school/after-school centre?
Hvað er öðruvísi í skólanum en í frístundaheimilinu?
How is the school different from the after-school centre?
Hvað er öðruvísi í frístundaheimilinu en í skólanum?
How is the after-school centre different from school?
Hvað gerir starfsmaðurinn í frístundaheimilinu?
What do recreation personnel do?
Hvað gerir kennarinn ykkar?
What does your teacher do?
Hvað er skemmtilegt/leiðinlegt að gera í frístundaheimilinu?
What do you find fun/boring in the after-school centre?
Hvað er skemmtilegt/leiðinlegt að gera í skólanum? What do you find fun/boring in school?
Fáið þið stundum að ráða hvað þið þró gerið?
When can you decide what you want to do in school/after-school centre?
Hvað mætti vera öðruvísi í skólanum/frístundaheimilinu?
If you could be in charge in school/after-school centre, what would you change?

Topics:
Matartímar – lunch
Síðdegishressing – refreshment
Útivera – recess and outdoor activities
Leikur – play
Verkefni – assignments
Hópastarf – group work
Vinir – friends
Appendix G – Example of semi-structured interview protocol with parents

Minnispunktar – Notes
Viðtal við foreldra – Interview with parents

Hvernig gekk barninu að byrja í skóla/frístundaheimili?
*Can you tell me about your child’s first days in school and the after-school centre?*

Hvernig upplifir þú að barninu líði í frístundaheimilinu/skólanum?
*Can you tell about how your child is doing in the after-school centre/school?*

Hvernig talar barnið um frístundaheimilinuð/skólan?n?
*What does your child tell you about the after-school centre/school?*

Hvernig gengur barninu í frístundaheimilinu/skólanum?
*How do you feel that your child is managing in the after-school centre/school?*

Hvað gerir barnið á frístundaheimilinu?
*What does the child do in the after-school centre?*

Hvað tekur við að skóladegi loknum?
*What does the child do when at home after school and the after-school centre?*

Hvernig upplifir þú hlutverk starfsmannanna í frístundaheimilinu?
*What should be the role of the personnel in the after-school centre?*

Hvernig telur þú að skipulag dagsins henti barninu þínu?
*How do you feel that the daily schedule in school and the after-school centre suits your child?*

Hvernig upplifir þú samstarf skóla og frístundaheimilis?
*How do you experience the cooperation between the school and the after-school centre?*

Hvernig samskipti hefur þú við starfsmenn frístundaheimilis/kennara í skóla?
*How would you describe your relationship and communication with the after-school centre personnel/teachers in school?*

Eitthvað sem þú vilt bæta við? Something you would like to add?
Appendix H – Quotes from interviews in English and Icelandic

Interviews with personnel (Chapter 6)

Drífá, Sunny Side After-school Centre, June 2009
We try to have a quiet moment and often before they choose we talk together or kind of have a meeting. And if it is somebody's birthday we sing, and we talk about how the weekend was and so on. We try to stop and have a quiet moment during circle–time. Try to hear how they are and talk together.

Við reynum að hafa þetta rólega stund og þá oft áður en við byrjum valið þá er eitthvað svona spjall eða hálfgérður fundur og líka bara ef að einhver á afmæli þá syngjum við afmælissönginn þegar við erum í þá og spyrjum hvernig helgin var og svona. Við reynum svona aðeins að stoppa og eiga rólega stund þegar að það er val. Svona heyra í þeim og spjalla við þau.

Heiða, North Valley, March 2009
You are not telling them to do this or that. You are simply trying to be like on their territory or level, and trying to support them and to make them happy.

Maður er ekki að segja þeim að gera hitt eða þetta. Maður er bara eða reynir að sko vera á þeirra sko svæði eða þeirra levesi, og bara reyna að örva þau og að þau séu glöð.

Heiða, North Valley, March 2009
What surprised me was that when I meet the kids outside work we are just as good friends as in work. We are not just some personnel that are there, but we are people that count and they talk to you. And if we meet in the Mall they say: Hi, what are you doing? Which I really like.

það sem kom mér á óvart er að ef ég hitti krakkana fyrir utan vinnu þá erum við alveg jafn góðir vinir eins og í vinnunni. Við erum ekki bara eitthvað starfsfólkið sem er þarna heldur erum við fólk sem að skipta máli og þau spjalla við mann og ef maður hittir þau í Kringlunni, þá segja þau hæ, hvað ertu að gera, sem mér finnst rosalega skemmtilegt.
Helen, leader, North Valley, Februar 2009

We are evidently teaching them many things, even though it is not learning through books or by the book. In other words, they are learning to handle the environment, taking responsibility and they are learning to count and learning to write. We provide settings that stimulate these things.

Við erum náttúrulega að kenna þeim helling, þó það sé ekki eftir bókinni eða á bókina. Sem sagt, það er hægt að lesa inn á umhverfið, taka ábyrgð og þau eru að læra að telja og læra að skrifa. Það eru aðstæður sem við bjóðum upp á til þess að öra þessa hluti samt.

Helen, leader, North Valley, Februar 2009

They have this quality to just go on, take what ever comes next. That is my experience. Most of them do not have the anxiety and worries and unneccessary worries that we, the grown-ups, have developed.

Þau taka því sem kemur næst. Það er mín upplifun.

Anna, leader Sunny Side After-school Centre, March 2009

I had been asked to open the houses before 12 o’clock which I of course agreed to do... I will just open up and you [the school principal] have to let the personnel know where they are supposed to be. The school is over at 12 o’clock and I come in and all the children arrive, and both houses are open. Children come streaming in but no personnel have arrived. And I am alone in this house with many children so I have to send a child over to the school to get help. In the mean time a child comes crying from the other house: “There is no teacher and everything is a chaos”! [...] Nobody was taking responsibility.

Þá var ég beðin um að lána húsin síðast...ég sagði ekkert mál ... ég bara opna húsin ... þið þurfið bara að láta starfsfólkið vita hvar þau eiga að vera, síðan er skólinn búinn kl. 12, og ég mæti hingað og óll börn koma. Svo er opið út í hitt húsið og börn byrja að fara þangað en þar er enginn starfsmaður. Ég er ein með óll hin, þannig að ég þurfti að senda barn til að láta vita. Svo kom barn úr hinu húsinu hágrátandi og sagði “það er enginn kennari og allt að verða vitlaust”...og þá voru þau svona...það er einhvern veginn enginn að taka ábyrgð á þessu.

Anna, leader Sunny Side After-school Centre 2009

This is mainly about upbringing ... to teach them to know right from wrong and to play together ... the social ... be good friends and be considerate,
but still to flourish as individuals [...] Our goal here is to make them feel good and that they like being here and feel secure.

“Their heilmikið uppeldi í rauninni... að kenna þeim bara rétt og rangt og að leika saman...þetta félagslega..vera góðir vinir og taka tillit en samt að njóta sín sem einstaklingur [...] Við höfum bara markmiðið herna að þeim líði vel og þau hafi gaman að því að vera herna og finni til öryggis.

Anna Sunny Side After-school Centre, March 2010

This is infact only their extra work. They are students and that is number one. They are here and they do good, but you can also sense that sometimes they are lacking the passion. But maybe you should not expect to much, I don’t know. And maybe I think that if we were to get more educational programs and they would receive education on child development, because these kids do generelly not have children. So there is a lot for them to learn and many things make them insecure. So it would be extremely good if they would get more guidance. But as I say, this is a very good group that I have and they are extremely good to the children.

Af því að þetta er í raun og veru alltaf aukavinnan þeirra. Þau eru í skóla og það er alltaf númer eitt. Og þau eru herja og þau standa sig vel, en maður finnur það líka að það vantar stundum ástriðuna. En það er kannski ekki hægt að æstlast til þess, ég veit það ekki. Og líka kannski held ég við fengjum meiri fræðslu og þau fengju meiri fræðslu um barnauppeldi og þroska og annað því þetta eru yfirleitt krakkar sem eiga ekki börn. Þannig að það er svo margt sem þau þurfa að læra og það er svo margt sem þau eru óörrugg í. Þannig að það væri rosalega gott ef væri hægt að hafa svona meiri handleiðslu kannski. En eins og ég segi, þetta er ofsalega góður hópur sem ég er með og þau eru alveg einstaklega góð við börnin.

Helen, leader North Valley After-school Centre, March 2009

In the mornings you do all kinds of preparation. I take care of buying everything, book keeping and I buy food and all toys, do work–reports for staff, I attend meetings and collaboration meetings on behalf of the Recreation Centre about different things, such as the first day of summer, the festival day of the neighbourhood. So there is always something going on, you can hardly say that there comes a morning when you cannot find something to do.

Fyrir hádegi þá er maður í allskonar undirbúningsvinnu. Ég sé um innkaup, bókhalda og ég sé um innkaup á mat og innkaup á öllum leikföngum, skila af mér vinnuskyrslum starfsmanna, ég sit fundi, ég sit samráðshundi, þá á ég við að frístundamiðstöðin er í samráði vegna ákv. daga yfir árið, t.d. sumardagurinn fyrsti, Hverfishátíðin og það er svona ýmislegt. Þannig að
það er stöðugt eitthvað í gangi, það er svona varla að maður geti sagt að það komi morgunn sem maður getur ekki fundið sér einhver verkefni.

Herdís, North Valley School, March 2009
I don’t know. I see that they are doing crafts and playing cards and playing, they have considerable amount of toys, naturally more than we do. Then they go out to play. They have this cool thing, the Tablet and stuff. And I really like Helen, she is resolute in keeping things together. So this is all like, I sense that the kids are happy going there and such.

Ég sum sem veitþað ekki. Ég sé að þau eru að föndra eitthvað og spila og leika sér með, þau eiga þó nokkuð af dóti, náttúrulega meira en við. Svo fara þau út og eru hérna útí að leika sér. Þau eru með svolitið sniðugt, setja þetta upp að tóflu og svona. Og mér líst mjög vel á Helen. Hún er mjög ákveðin að halda utan um allt. Þannig að þetta er allt svona, mér finnst krakkarnir mjög ánægð að fara þarna og svona.

Margrét, North Valley After-school Centre, March 2009
That the children feel warmth and feel that they are coming to a place which is fun and welcoming. That they can trust the people that work here and know what they can and cannot do. [...] I don’t want this to be a “storage” but rather like a home, where they come and feel good, they are fed, get the help they need. You know, that this is like mom and dad, without being mom and dad, or as close to it as possible ...

Að þau finni hlýju og finni að þau eru að koma á stað sem er gaman og gott að vera. Þar sem að þau treysta fólkinu sem vinnur hérna og vita í raun og veru hvað þau mega og hvað þau mega ekki. [...] Ég vil að þetta sé ekki gæsla heldur að þetta sé svona meira himilí, þar sem að þau koma, þeim liður vel, þau fá að borða, fá þá hjálp sem þau þurfa. Þú veist, þetta er svona eins og mamma og pabbi, án þess að vera mamma og pabbi, en eins nálægt og hægt er að komast ...

Margrét, North Valley After-school Centre, March 2009
I like to think about that after some years I might meet one of these kids on the street as teenagers or adults and they might come and say hello and I might not know who they are, because they have changed and I have not! And it will be just lovely. I have been with some of these kids since Grade1. And I just love it. And I can feel that they care. Sometimes they come knocking on my door because I live nearby.

Mér finnst gaman að hugsa til þess að eftir einhverár ár þá á ég eftir að hitta krakka úti á götu eða fullorðið fólk sem kannski kemur og heilsar mér og ég veit kannski ekkert hver þetta er, því þau hafa breyst svo mikilý, en ekki
Ég. Og það verður bara yndislegt. Ég er búin að vera með sumum krökkunum frá því í 1. Bekk. Mérfinnst það alveg frábært. Og finn alveg væntumþykjuna frá þeim. Stundum koma þau og banka upp á, því ég þy hér rétt hjá.

Magnús, North Valley After-school Centre, March 2009
Helen is on top of things, so she has worked out the framework, and you kind of just fit into it, so it is very, very simple.

Helen er náttúrulega með þetta allt á hreinu sko, þannig að hún er búin að búa til ákveðinn ramma og maður bara dettur inn í hann. Það er mjög, mjög einfalt.

Lilja, teacher City School, October 2010
I have to admit that I do not know if they have any specific goals. Whether they follow any policy or if it is just about organizing areas that are like storage, where they play games and such. I just don’t know.

Ég verð eiginlega að viðurkenna það að ég veit ekki hvort að það er eittvöð markmið í gangi. Hvort að þau eru að fylgja einhverri stefnu eða hvort að þetta er eiginlega bara að þau skipuleggja einher svæði sem að eru einhver geymsla, þar sem þau eru í leikjum og svona. Ég bara veit það ekki.

Lilja, teacher City School, October 2010
I really don’t see the point of that because this is so separate. This is the school and the after-school. We have no saying over their work. You might want to have a meeting if something comes up, like if there was bullying going on in the after-school centre that might not be going on in the school. You might need to have a meeting, but this has not come up ...

Ég eiginlega sé engan tilgang með því, af því að þetta er svo aðskilið. Þetta er eiginlega bara skólinn og svo eftir-skólinn. Þannig að þegar að við höfum raunverulega ekkert um þeirra starf að segja, það er ekki nema kannski að manni finnst þurfa fund ef það er eittvöð sérstakt, ef það er einelti sem kemur upp í frístundaheimilinu sem er kannski ekki að gerast í skólanum, maður þarf að halda fund, en það hefur bara ekkert komið svona upp ...”

Margrét, North Valley After-school Centre, March 2009
Patience, caring and affection. Understanding that children are children and adults are adults and you cannot demand the same from them [...] And this light discipline, this natural discipline. And just a willingness to cooperate.
Þolinmæði og kærleika og ástúð. Skilning á því að börn eru börn og fullorðnir eru fullorðnir og þú getur ekki krafist sama af þeim og ég myndi t.d. krefjast af þér. Og þennan létta aga, þennan eðlilega aga. Og bara samstarfsvilja.

**Margrét, North Valley After-school Centre, March 2009**

In many cases children are spending too many hours per day at this age and in the first years of school. To be here at 8pm and they are not home until five going six am. This is a very long time. This is a social issue and maybe parents should be urged to think it through because Icelandic society is so aimed at the needs of the work–industry and the employment.

Í mörgum tilfellum er þetta allt of langur dagur fyrir börn á þessum aldri og fyrstu árin í grunnskóla. Að vera komin hérna uppúr átta og koma svo ekki heim til sin fyrir kl 5 að ganga 6. Þetta er mjög langur tími. Þetta finnst mér vera þjóðfélagslegt mál og það mætti kannski vekja foreldra meira til umhugsunar af því að íslenskt þjóðfélag er svo atvinnumiðað og svona vinnuveitendavænt.

**Margrét, North Valley After-school Centre, March 2009**

We have a lot to learn from these kids. I think it would be a good idea to give us some time to sit down and just look at the children and their behaviour. See what we can learn from them too. Their easy going characters and freedom ...

Við getum mikið lært af þessum krökkum. Ég held að það sé sniðugt líka að setjast niður á góðri stundu og bara horfa á börnin og sjá þeirra hegðunarmunstur. Hvað við getum lært af þeim líka. Þetta áhyggjuleysí og frjálsræði ...

**Margrét, North Valley After-school Centre, March 2009**

... it gives me opportunity to work with a specific group and see what they have and build on that. That they can do things themselves.

Þetta gefur mér tækifæri að vinna með vissum einstaklingum og sjá hvað í þeim býr og byggja eitthvað inn i þau. Að þau geti hlutina.

**Sólveig, Sunny Side After-school Centre, May 2009**

This is their free–time and it is important that they experience a certain amount of freedom and that they have a choice of activities, not that they simply can do whatever they want. They also need boundaries and discipline so that they will not be exhausted at the end of the day. So this is their leisure time but they are also learning communication. They
develop their social capabilities by being around their peers, and yes, interacting with them.

Sólveig, Sunny Side After-school Centre, May 2009

You have a lot of freedom. If you are interested in something than you can mediate that to the children, like there is one singer here and she has a choir and there are art clubs and sometimes I offer dance because I am taking dance lessons. You have a lot of freedom in the work. This I find a huge benefit.

Sólveig, Sunny Side After-school Centre, May 2009

Sometimes if there is something going on in the school we are not informed until the time we show up. It is quiet uncomfortable not to be informed with some notice. If there are changes. But, well ... there is this superintendent who sometimes interferes with what we are doing. It can be annoying like if we have something going and we have a group of children in the school. And he shows up and shuts down the lights and says that the lights should be shut down at 4pm

Veiga, Sunny Side After-school Centre, April 2010

It is our job to take care of them while their parents work. We have to make sure that all children have arrived, register when they come and if
somebody is missing we have to find him or her. We observe the children throughout the day and guide them, make sure that they are secure.

Það er hlutverk okkar að passa upp á að öll börnin séu hérna, merkja við alla og finna ef einhvern vantar. Fylgjast með börnunum yfir daginn og leiðbeina þeim, passa að þau séu ekki að fara sér að voða.

Interviews with children (Chapter 7)

Ása and Sigurður, Sunny Side Centre, May 2009

Ása: In pre-school you mostly play but in school you have to do more work.
Kolbrún: But how do you work in school, what do you do?
Ása: For example you...
Sigurður: ... learn to read.
Kolbrún: Yes, read.
Ása: ... and learn to do maths ... and also talk.
Kolbrún: Yes, exactly. Speak correctly.
Ása: Yes.
Sigurður: And not say bad things to others.
Ása: And put up your hand when you want to speak so we don’t all speak at the same time.

Ása. Maður má mest leika í leikskóla, en maður þarf að vinna svo meira í skóla.
Kolbrún. En hvernig vinnur maður í skólanum, hvað er maður að gera?
Ása. Maður er til dæmis...
Sigurður. að læra að lesa.
Á og læra að reikna.. og líka tala við.
Kolbrún. Já, einmitt. Tala fallegt mál
Sigurður. Og ekki segja ljótt við aðra.
Ása. Og rétta upp hönd þegar maður vill fá orðið svo allir tala ekki í einu.

Davíð, Sunny Side Centre, May 2009

Kolbrún: Is there something you would change if you were the headmaster and could make all the decisions?
Dávið: Yes, I would let the kids work, have a little more time for work and then I would let them stay longer outside during recess, and just, you see, always when they have finished the work they have to do, then let them do what they want.

Kolbrún: Er eitt hvað sem að þið mynduð breyta ef þið væruð skólastjóri og mættuð ráða öllu?

Dávið: Já, ég myndi leyfa krókkunum að vinna aðeins, hafa aðeins meiri vinnutíma og síðan myndi ég leyfa þeim að vera lengur úti í friminútum og bara, og hérna, alltaf þegar þau eru búin með öll verkefnin, sem þau eru að gera, þá mega þau fara beint í frjálst.

Dávið and Logi, Sunny Side After School Centre, May 2009

Kolbrún: Why are children in the after-school centre?

Dávið: Then you are making beadwork like you can see here [points to a poster on the wall]. And playing with Legos and playing cards.

Kolbrún: Is it like being in school?

Logi: Yes ...

Dávið: and sometimes we play with clay and sometimes you learn to do like at home, what is it called? ... chores at home. And then there is also handiwork and maybe computer games, Playstation.

Kolbrún: But why are children in Sunny Side After-school Centre or the after-school centre?

Logi: Because mom and dad are maybe still at work.

Kolbrún: And what do the staff-members do?

Logi: They take care of us.

Dávið: They just take care of us and tell us what we can do and what not. Maybe tell us off if somebody is disobedient. Except me, I don’t dare to disobey at school because I feel uncomfortable if somebody tells me off, it is uncomfortable. It is quite different at home.

Kolbrún: En til hvers er maður í frístundaheimili?

Dávið: Þá er maður svona að perla, eins og hér stendur (bendir á spjald á veggnum). Og legó og spil.

Kolbrún: Er það eitthvað líkt og að vera í skólanum?

Logi: Já ...

Dávið: Og síðan er leira stundum og síðan er ... hvað heitir það aftur? Þar sem maður lærir að gera eins og heima: heimilisfræði. Og síðan er líka smíði og kannski tölvuleikir, PlayStation.
Kolbrún: En af hverju eru krakkar í Bláuborg eða í frístundaheimili?
Logi: Af því mamma og pabbi eru kannski ennþá í vinnunni.
Kolbrún: Og hvað gerir starfsfólkið?
Logi: Passar okkur.

Halldór and María, North Valley Centre, March 2009
Kolbrún: How do you feel about being outdoors during the recess?
Halldór: Yes, you see, then we can play for such a long time and that is fun.
María: In the short recess, one bell always starts to ring, that is difficult.
Halldór: Yes, you see, first it is the outdoor bell, then the indoorbell and then I just have to hurry inside and you see, take off my outdoor clothes and hurry into the classroom and into the gym and then suddenly, they are all just gone!

Kolbrún. Hvernig finnst ykkur ganga í útivistinni, í frímínútum?
Halldór. Já, sko, þá getum við við leikið svo lengi og það er gaman.
María. Í stuttu, þá fer allt af að hringja ein bjalla, það er svo erfitt.
Halldór: Já, sko, fyrst er útibjallan, svo bara innibjallan og þá verð ég bara að drífa mig inn og sko, úr fötunum og drífa mig inn í stofuna og í íþróttir og allt í einu þá eru þau bara farin!

Hanna and Ragna, North Valley Centre, March 2009
Hanna: We like it when a poster is put up and you can decide if you participate in a trip or something. Then they have written it down, and you can choose to go. It can be like five or twelve kids and when the group is full they draw a line, or something. Then you can go along, in a day or two.
Ragna: It is good to be able to choose.
Hanna: The kids ... they sit on these chairs ...
Ragna: Yeah, there are a few kids that get to pick something fun to do, and then we get to do it in three or five days.
Hanna: Maybe we go to the movies ...
Ragna: And we have to make a poster.
Hanna: Show the other kids, and then Magnús [staff member] comes with a paper and we have to draw and write on it what is going to happen.
Hanna. Okkur finnst skemmtilegt þegar að svona spjald og maður getur ráðit hvort að maður fari í einhverja ferð eða eitthvað þannig. Og það er búið að skrifa það svona niður og maður getur valið það. Það geta svona fimm eða tílf krakkar og þá þegar búið að skrá það gerum við svona strik og eitthvað þannig. Þá getur maður farið í það, ekki hinn, heldur hinn.

Ragna. Það er gaman að mega velja.

Hanna. Krakkarnir sitja á svona stólum ...

Ragna. Það er nokkrir krakkar sem velja eitthvað skemmtilegt svo eftir fjöra fimm daga þá gerum við það

Hanna. og forumin kannski bara í bíó ...

Ragna. Það þarf að búa til auglýsinga.

Hanna. Syna krökkunum og síðan kemur Magnús (starfsmaður) með svona blað og við þurfum að teikna á það og skrifa á það hvað gerist.

Heiða and Ragna, North Valley Centre, April 2009

Kolbrún: Will you tell me what teachers do?

Heiða: They have to show us what we have to to in the books and then they always say that we have to keep it in our brain and not to raise our hands [to ask for assistance], and then when one takes a seat at the table we have to remember what the teacher said in the brain. That is what the teacher says and then we start to work.

Ragna: And then also, Kristján [a schoolmate] always arrives and disturbs me when I work. I can’t stand it to have him sitting next to me. He is always disturbing us when we work.

Kolbrún: Tell me, what does the teacher do then?

Ragna: They don’t see what he is doing. He is always whispering a lot and doing stupid things ... Because, he is always immitating me.

Kolbrún: Viltu segja mér frá því hvað kennararnir gera?


Ragna: Lika bara það, kemur allt af Kristján [skólabróðir þeirra] og truflar mig að læra lika. Og mér finnst það ópolandi að sitja við hliðina á honum. Hann er allt af að trufla þegar við erum að læra.

R: Segðu mér, hvað gerir kennarinn þá?
Ragna: Þeir sjá ekki hvað hann er að gera. Hann er bara að hvisla svo mikið og gera eitthvað bull ... Af því að hann er svo mikið að leika það sem ég er að gera.

Inga and Nanna, Sunny Side Centre, May 2009
Inga: There is one manager that organises the selection and goes into the middle.
Kolbrún: Is it an adult or a child?
Inga: It is supposed to be a child, but sometimes it is not. Then it is just the adult.
Kolbrún: How do you go about the choosing?
Inga: And then we say what we like and they give us the activity card.
Kolbrún: And can you always find something interesting to select?
Inga: Yes. But sometimes the cards are finished.
Kolbrún: Ok, and what do you do then?
Nanna: We just select something else.

Inga. Það er einn valstjóri og hann sér um valið og fer inn í miðjuna.
Kolbrún. Er það starfsmaður eða krakki?
Inga. Það er krakki en stundum er hann ekki. Og þá er bara starfsmaður.
Kolbrún. Hvernig gengur að velja?
Inga. Og þá segjum við og þeir rétta okkur valspjaldið.
Kolbrún. Og getið þið alltaf fundið eitthvað skemmtilegt til að velja?
Inga Já. En stundum eru spjöldin bara búin.
Kolbrún. Já, hvað gerið þið þá?
Nanna. Veljum bara eitthvað annað.

Jónas and Tindur, North Valley Centre, March 2009
Kolbrún: What do you like most to do?
Jónas: To be outdoors in the recess and during free activities.
Kolbrún: Exactly.
Tindur: I like the free activities a little bit but if I want to select something fun then it is impossible because somebody else has already selected it.
Kolbrún: But why is the recess most fun?
Tindur: Because then you can do what you want.

Kolbrún: Hvað finnst þér skemmtilegast að gera?
Jónas: Úti í frímínútum og í vali.
Kolbrún: Einmitt.
Tindur: Mér finnst líka smá-skemmtilegt í vali en ef ég vill velja eith hvað skemmtilegt þá get ég það ekki því það er einhver annar búinn að velja það.
Kolbrún: En hvers vegna er skemmtilegast eins og í frímínútum?
Tindur: Út af því þá má maður gera hvað sem maður vill.

Ólafur, North Valley Centre, March 2009
Kolbrún: Are there many rules in the after-school centre?
Ólafur: Well, we don’t actually know all the rules, because if we do anything wrong, we are informed of another rule.
Kolbrún: Ok. So you are not informed of all the rules?
Ólafur: No, they don’t tell us about them all, but when we cross the line we are told another rule.
Kolbrún: Well, I see. Do kids often get to decide what they do in the after-school centre?
Davið: Not very often.

Kolbrún. Eru margar reglur í frístundaheimilinu?
Ólafur. Sko, við vitum ekki allar reglurnar, því ef við gerum eith hvað vitlaust þá er okkur sögð önnur regla.
Kolbrún. Ok, svo þið þekkið ekki allar reglurnar?
Ólafur. Nei, þau segja okkur ekki allar reglurnar, en þegar við förum yfir strikið þá er okkur sagt ný regla.
Kolbrún. Já, ég skil. Fá krakkar oft að ákveða hvað þeir gera í frístundaheimilinu?
Ólafur. Ekki mjög oft.

Pétur and Matthías, North Valley Centre, February 2009
Kolbrún: When does that happen?
Pétur: Most often during recess. He pushed me, but I was trying to support him. I said to him: ‘What did you do to me, what is the matter with you?’ He was chasing me and he kicked me incredibly hard. I nearly lost my voice.
Kolbrún: What do you do during recess when something like this happens?
Matthías: Then we get the teacher.
Kolbrún: Do you most often find him?
Matthías: That is Jónas [assistant staff]. He does nothing!
Pétur: Not Guðmundur either [the school janitor]. He does not permit us to drink during the recess.
Matthías: He even would not allow me to go to the playground to watch my brother play football.

Kolbrún: Hvenær gerist það?
Pétur: Oftast úti í frímínútum. Hann hrinti, ég var að reyna að halda honum uppi. Ég sagði: Hvað varstu að gera við mig, er eitthvað að þér? Hann var að elta mig og sporkaði ótrulega fast í mig. Ég missti næustum röddina.
R: Hvað getið þið gert úti í frímínútum ef svona gerist?
Matthías: Þá náum við í kennarann.
R: Finnið þið oftast kennarann?
Matthías: Það er Jónas [skólaliði]. Hann gerir ekkert!
Pétur: Heldur ekki Guðmundur [húsvörður skólans]. Hann leyfir manni ekki að fá sér að drekka í frimó.
Matthías: Hann leyfði mér ekki einu sinni að fara á fótboltavöllinn og horfa á bróður minn í fótbolta.

Saga, Sunny Side Centre, June 2009
Always when you have finished school, then you always have to go to the dining room, then again to the dressing room, get dressed, take the school-bag, put on your shoes, and carry everything out to the after-school centre and then again go out to play. It is quite difficult.

Alltaf þegar maður er búinn í skólanum þá er maður alltaf að fara í matsalinn, svo aftur að fatahenginu, klæða sig í fötin, taka töskuna og í skóna og bera alla leið út í [frístundaheimilið] og svo aftur út að leika. Dálitið erfitt.

Saga and Kata, Sunny Side After-School Centre, May 2009
Saga: You play.
Kata: It is like a pre-school, only shorter.
Kolbrún: Exactly, but why do kids go to the after-school centre?
Kata: Because the mothers and fathers are at work.
Saga: Because the classes end early.
Kolbrún: Do the kids themselves decide to attend the after-school centre?
Saga: No.
Kata: No.
Saga: The parents decide.
Kolbrún: How do you feel about that?
Both: It is fun.

Saga. Leika sér.
Kata. Það er bara svona eins og leikskóli, bara miklu stytttri.
Kolbrún. Já ok. En til hvers vegna fara krakkar í frístundaheimili?
Kata. Útaf því að pabbarnir og mömmurnar eru ennþá að vinna..
Saga. Útaf því að skólinn er svo snemma búinn.
Kolbrún. Hvað finnst ykkur um það? Ákveða krakkarnir sjálfir að fara í frístundaheimilið?
Saga. Nei.
Kata. Nei.
Saga. Pabbarnir og mömmurnar skrá okkur.
Kolbrún. Hvað finnst ykkur um það?
Báðar í einu. Gaman

Tara and María, Sunny Side Centre, June 2009
Kolbrún: If you could decide on everything and could decide on the activities at the after-school centre, what would you like to change?
Tara: Then I would like to have Playstation.
María: Yes, and also that you could have Playstation downstairs. In the same way as baking, only baking is more often possible.
Tara: Yes, and I would also always like to have Playstation and toys corner downstairs and toys corner, cushion corner, and art corner on the second floor.

Kolbrún: Ef þið mættað ráða öllu, mættað ákveða hvað er í boði í frístundaheimílinu, hverju mynduð þið vilja breyta?
Tara: þá myndi ég hafa Playstation.
María: Já, og líka hafa að það mætti fara í Playstation niðri. Það er svona alveg eins og að baka, bara baka er pinulítið oftar.
Tara: Já, og ég myndi líka alltaf hafa Playstation og dótakrók niðri og dótakrók uppi og púðahorn og listakrók.

Una and Harpa, North Valley Centre, March 2009.
Kolbrún: What do you do during the recess?
Una: Then we just play.
Harpa: Like today, during the recess the girls were in the corner, or some of them ... and we just took off our socks and we only had on our fleece sweaters and trousers and we just lay down pretending to be sunbathing with our coats on and such.

*Kolbrún:* Hvað gerið þið í frímínútum?
*Una:* Þá bara leikum við okkur.
*Harpa:* Eins og í dag í frímínútum voru stelpurnar í horninu og það voru sumar ... og þá vorum við bara, fórum úr sokkunum og við vorum bara á flíspeysunum og svona buxum og við vorum bara að liggja þar í sólbaði með úlpurnar og svona.
Appendix I – Presentations and publications

The following presentations and publications have resulted from this research:

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<tr>
<th>Publications</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Source</th>
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<tr>
<td>After-school centres for six to nine year olds in Reykjavík, Iceland.</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>Barn (4). 2010, Norsk senter for barneforskning.</td>
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<th>Presentations</th>
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<tr>
<td>After-school centres in Reykjavik: an institutional perspective and children’s perspective</td>
<td>April 30, 2009</td>
<td>Conference. Norsk Senter for barneforskning, NTNU, Trondheim, Norway</td>
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<tr>
<td>After-school centres in Iceland</td>
<td>March 4, 2010</td>
<td>Conference for Recreation Pedagogues. University College Syd, Vejle, Denmark</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dagivistun grunnskólabarna i fortíð og nútíð [Day-care for school-aged children, past and present]</td>
<td>April 9, 2010</td>
<td>Conference „Gæði eða geymsla”, Félag áhugafólks um skólaþróun and the School of Education</td>
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<td>Rátttaka 6-7 ára barna i skóla og fristundahemilí [Children’s participation in school and after-school centre]</td>
<td>October 22, 2010</td>
<td>Menntalvík, annual conference of the School of Education, Iceland.</td>
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<td>After-school centres in Reykjavik</td>
<td>May 2, 2011</td>
<td>University of Roskilde, The Department of Psychology and Educational Studies. Research meeting. Denmark</td>
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<tr>
<td>After-school centres in Reykjavik: Care, learning and leisure</td>
<td>January 30, 2012</td>
<td>University of Gothenborg, Department of education, communication and learning. Seminar. Sweden.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Professional identity of leisure-time pedagogues: discourses of care, learning and leisure</td>
<td>March 10, 2012</td>
<td>NERA, Nordisk educational research association. Annual conference in Copenhagen</td>
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<tr>
<td>Care, learning or leisure? The organisational identity of after-school centres in Reykjavik</td>
<td>August 23, 2012</td>
<td>Research Seminar, Griffith University, Australia</td>
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