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Transforming subjectivity
When aiming for mutually transformative processes in research with children

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to investigate how children use their participation in research as a potential transformative social practice in everyday life. The concept of transformative social practice will be discussed in relation to the notion of transformation. Through empirical examples provided by Holly (12) and Oliver (11), the article argues that research processes open up possibilities for understanding ourselves (researchers and participants) in new ways 'Life Mapping' - as dialogical method in research with children - will be presented and reflected upon as a way for children to develop different understandings of themselves, their families, and everyday life. This emphasizes the connection between the use of child-relevant methodologies and how specific children can bring dialogues from the research process in to play in their everyday lives. Data is drawn from a qualitative study and is a part of a PhD project studying children's everyday lives with two households as a result of parental divorce. The project involves ten children aged 8-12 and their parents.

Introduction

Interviewer: Have you ever missed your dad when you were at your mom's house?
Oliver: Yeah
Interviewer: What did you do?
Oliver: I just don't let myself think about it

The protagonists of this article are children whose parents are divorced. Because of that, their everyday lives are split between two households in different time-sharing arrangements. The children have their own ways of dealing with possibilities and dilemmas connected to these living conditions and these 'ways' are not to be generalized and understood out of context. Oliver's parents have been divorced for four years. They are very fond of his time-shared living arrangements, having him and his brother in a seven-day shuttle. It is in that complex light Oliver's quotation must be comprehended. His missing the other parent is not an explicated part of his narrative, it is not something he can actively articulate or manage. It just is.

When inviting Oliver to join the research project, he was hesitant. His mother, though, thought it would be interesting for him to participate and to talk about his everyday life with two households.

Children's agendas for participating in research are various. In this present study, some of the children expressed a need to talk about a part of their life they could not share with others (the time before the divorce), a few articulated a curiosity of being part of 'research', as well wanting to 'help' the researcher understand life with time-shared living arrangements. Their specific ways of participating in the research have triggered reflections on their subjective motives and agendas. The researcher's agenda, for that matter, was again different. First of all, it was the ethical and scientific aim to gain knowledge about premises of childhood called time-shared living arrangements from the children's perspectives. Second, it was an attempt to make the research process a joint and dialogical space for investigating everyday life from different adolescent perspectives - to provide a platform for the children to express and articulate their experiences.

The aim of this article is, first of all, to offer new ways of studying the link between children's everyday life and research, where research processes have the potential of being transformative social practices. It is argued that the research process provides space for dialog, (joint) reflection and exploration of different ways to understanding oneself and may promote changes in relation to problematic situations. The main intent is to challenge the general (adult) assumption about 'time-shared' children through the issues *the children* highlight as significant, as possibilities and dilemmas in their everyday life, rather than the agendas different adults have on behalf of the children.

This present project is to be seen in the light of a growing concern of children's well being in case of parental divorce. Several longitudinal studies show that children with divorced parents perform worse as adults: educationally, financially, and socially (e.g. Amato & James, 2010; Ottosen, 2004; Kelly, 2006), than children who do not have divorce experiences.

Within the past decades, different time-sharing arrangements have appeared as novel ways of living with children in post-divorce settings. Parents literally time-*share* the children between them. Arguments to do so are many, some point towards gender equality – men and women's equal rights to the children - others to children's right to both parents in their everyday lives. This living arrangement allows the child to have everyday life with both parents at different times, and therefore the possibility to maintain a close relationship to both the mother and the father, whereas, earlier living arrangements suggested the child lived at the mother's house and visited the father on a regular basis, or vice versa.

The following pages will examine how research can be employed as a catalyst - to be potentially transformative in the social practices of everyday life. How is transformation and transformative practice to be conceptualized? Is it (merely) when the research subjects feel happier, wiser, and lighter afterwards, or, is it also required that they become reflective, perhaps sad, or thoughtful? These different boundary zones of the concept will be analysed and evaluated.

The paper is divided into two parts. First, some of the methodological considerations of studying children's everyday life will be presented. Then cases will illuminate differences in how individual children use the research process. Holly (12) expresses a need to overcome a dilemma concerning spending more time at her mother's house. Oliver (11) becomes reluctant and irritable when asked to reflect on differences in his time-sharing arrangements. The intent is to present two ordinary (but opposing) cases involved in research.

In the following sections, the notion of transformation and research as transformative social practice will be addressed and discussed in relation to studies on children's (time-shared) everyday life. Since children's perspectives are the focus of this study, we start the comprehension of their everyday life in their universe.

Transformers and transformative aims in research with children

In order to utter whether a practice is potentially transformative, the conceptualization of transformation must be investigated.

> "They are all able to 'transform', rearrange their bodies into common or innocuous form […]"[1]

The action figures (and movie characters) *Transformers* are sentient alien robots. As the name *Transformers* reveals, they are capable of transforming into different forms including vehicles, devices (such as guns or cameras), or (robot-) animals (ibid.). The *Transformers* literally (and easily) change form in order to work together on a task. The transformation is done with no effort; it acts as a natural part of them. The figures use their transformation in order to solve a precarious situation, to help themselves or each other. Their transformation has one determined purpose – to deal with (and conquer) a specific (unstable) situation in the best possible way. It is a transformation from one sealed mode to another.
How are these action characters related to understanding research as a transformative social practice related to children?

> "Reading diffractively is about close respectful reading. Taking what you like of something – and try to play with patterns of thinking that might produce possibilities of something else" (Barad, 2003).

When reading these action figures diffractively, looking at ways they need and use transformation in their (everyday) lives, may after all contribute to a different awareness on the potentiality of transforming subjectivity through research. Working diffractively is about find ways of rethinking subjectivity, open the analytical lenses for new ways of comprehending, understanding and posing data questions (Barad, 2003; Juelskjær, 2011).

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[1] Description of the action figures Transformers on www. imdb. com

In this case, the *Transformers*, their ways of transforming and using transformation, serve as *inspiration* for reconceptualising and clarifying the perception of the notion in this present study.

When something (or someone) is to be transformed, it connotes change, alteration, conversion, and commutation. However, these utterances all seem to refer to a stable and lasting change – change connected to some kind of definite finality.

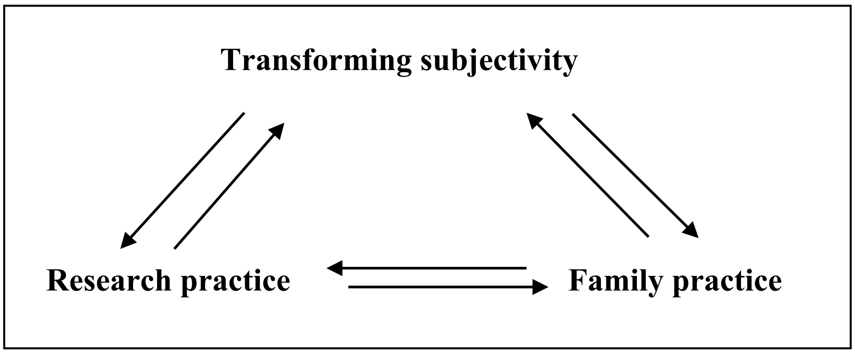
In the conceptualization of this study, transformation also refers to change, but not necessarily in a permanent and stable way. Change may occur temporarily, but it is always *connected* to the subject and to subjectivity. In this understanding, subjectivity is not *changing*, but it is nuanced and utilized in ways that open up new possibilities. This opening does not always refer to ways of expanding our possibilities of action, but to ways *extending* views on our lives and selves - a collaboration with others, as Stetsenko (2008: 471) states:

> "An activist transformative stance suggests that people come to know themselves and their world as well as ultimately come to be human *in* and *through* the processes of collaborative transforming the world […]"

The children participating in this study do not transform themselves into something else, as the *Transformers* do. Along with the researcher, they contribute to the shared practice of research and by the *shared* contribution an even greater potential for transformation is added (see Murphy & Carlisle, 2008). This project has been designed to identify dilemmas and constraints connected to sharing arrangements. The researcher's activist stance aims to reflect troublesome situations as the children narrate stories of their everyday lives. In other words, in order for research to become a transformative social practice, it demands a *joint,* purposeful, human collaboration (Stetsenko, 2008), or a dialectical transformative activist stance (Ritchie, 2008: 517)

When research has a transformative aim, it contributes to discern different needs connected to precarious situations, and investigates ways they have already been dealt with. By designating dilemmas, constraints, and possibilities of everyday life and the child's management of these, research practice illuminates the need for differentiated self-understandings.

Transformative social practice is an open-ended process engaging various movements and actions occurring over time. Thus, transforming subjectivity is part of presenting dilemmas and potentialities of everyday life to the children in new ways through their first person perspectives – ways that grant a novel glance at understanding themselves, their families, and their time-shared living arrangements through the research process.



Hence, transformative social practice is not to be comprehended as process *vs.* action, but as process *through* action - as an interconnected part of the transformation. As subjects we develop and change through the different contexts we participate in, in the same manner the ways these contexts are structured have influence on our possibilities of taking part.

Researching children's perspectives on their everyday lives

In order to create a basis for research as being potentially transformative, this present study has been designed to identify various ways of dealing with time-shared living arrangements. Through children's (and parent's) narratives of everyday life, the aim is to comprehend what is at stake when the conduct of everyday life is split up in different sharing arrangements. Family member's participation in research has different meanings to them. In this regard the research process works out differently and is indeed situated differently for each participant. When recognizing the importance of this diversity in the construction of meaning, the range of perspectives contributes to comprehending the complexity of everyday life.

Theoretically, there is a strong emphasis on the potency of children's action, viewing them as co-creators of their own living conditions through their participation in different contexts.

The approach to this study is based on Cultural-Historical Activity Theory and German/Scandinavian critical psychology (e.g., Leontjev, 1978; Vygotsky, 1978; Holzkamp, 1983). Subject science analysis attempts to focus on clarifying the relations between meaning units, reason patterns, and intentions to act (Holzkamp, 2013: 493).

When highlighting everyday life, it is the purpose to investigate the 'ordinary life' in contrast to positivist research traditions' focus on pathological and abnormal issues of human life. It is an attempt to explore the daily life through a first person perspective, rather than from a third person (expert) perspective. By illuminating the everyday life, it opens up possibilities of detecting both general *and* particular conditions of life. When interested in both sides, it is out of an overall consideration of everyday life as always both ordinary *and* specific in various ways.

First person perspectives present specific narratives concerning everyday life, as experienced by the particular child. When aiming for first person standpoints, it permits access to subjectively reasoned ways of participating or articulating constraints and possibilities of everyday life. In case of divorce, many children have two households to relate to - the two may be an interconnected part of the child's everyday life, but still act separately, since rules and routines often differ in many ways.

In the comprehension of everyday life, the concept of *conduct of everyday life* is essential. This notion focuses on the subjective ways of living an everyday life (Holzkamp, 1998; Dreier, 2011), in order to comprehend how specific children (and their families) have come to live as they do (Kousholt, 2011). Children seek to conduct their lives in cyclical arrangements, both in relation to their two households, and in relation to contexts outside the family. The research aspiration is to illuminate and reflect how specific children seek to i*nterconnect* and *balance* out these various settings of different demands and expectations. Such matters emerge in research when the investigative light is tuned to a first person standpoint on complexity of cross-contextual everyday life.

In the next section some methodological reflections of the study will be presented and the method of *Life Mapping* discussed and contemplated.

Life Mapping as a mediating method?

The preliminary reflections for this study emphasize children as subjects with their own agenda - agendas that were not necessarily the same as those of the researcher. Therefore, the challenge was to create a space for the children's *differing* agendas and first person perspectives to unfold.

In order to capture the children's narratives, *Life Mapping* has been developed as a dialogical tool in the research process. It is to be understood as a *process* of mutual engagement in the child's everyday life with time-sharing arrangements involving both the child and the researcher. The process is highlighted to illustrate the emphasis on situated togetherness, an interactional accomplishment.

If we therefore wish to comprehend the nexus of other people's meanings, reasons, and intentions to act, we need their support – we must ask and they must be willing to answer, otherwise we remain within the conditioning discourse (see Holzkamp, 2013: 429) focusing on causes and effects.

Interviewing children is not simply holding a microphone; it calls for numerous preliminary reflections of how – in the first place – to employ children as participants.

Most of the participants for this study are recruited through web sites concerning children, divorce and time-shared living arrangements; others have been recruited through word of mouth and have thus expressed interest in participation. All the children were employed through their parents, in other words the parents accepted the conditions before asking their children (also see Gulløv & Højlund, 2002).

As a preliminary manoeuvre for the interview, the researcher met the children and at least one of the parents in order to introduce the purpose of the project. The children were told that their knowledge about everyday life with time-sharing arrangements was a necessity in order to utilize the practice in a productive way. The children were informed that the researcher was interested in the phenomenon of time-shared living arrangements because it is a relatively new modality for childhood. It was put into context by reference to 'olden' times when most children with divorced parents lived with their mother and visited their father in the weekends. The researcher pointed out her interest in what it was like to switch rooms and households on a regular basis from a child's perspective, since the adults had forgotten to ask the children about their perspective on these childhood premises and the impact on everyday life. They were told that many parents had attempted to move in and out of the house where children lived, but could not keep it up in the long run. The research interest emphasized their everyday lives, not as children of divorced parents, but as children living in a regular shuttle and the possibilities and dilemmas that come along with that.

Finally, they were told, to have a good time while colouring a big poster, drinking orange juice and eating chocolate biscuits. *Life Mapping* was presented as the foundation of the interview with the aim of illuminating the everyday life practices with two households. The framings of the *Life Mapping* was to be negotiated for instance if the child or the researcher did the drawing on the poster. In correlation to this first ½ hour encounter, the children would not have to give their permission of participation. Most children immediately expressed excitement about the interview, while a few were more reluctant, wherefore the researcher decided - on their behalf - to get back to them when they had time to think about it and discuss it with their parents.

The interview was either held at one of the households or at other places that felt safe to the child. They were encouraged to reflect upon whether it would be difficult to speak freely about their two households if they were interviewed *in* one of them. As a part of these considerations some children chose other places for the interview – a few took place at the researchers office, another at a grandmother's house and one interview was held at a school setting.

Mapping your life

The metaphor of *Life* '*Mapping*' highlights additional ways of capturing everyday life and emphasizes other navigational tools than the spoken language. There are diverse approaches to mapping – looking from a satellite and getting the overall picture of continents, countries, and oceans, or in contradictory, moving on a specific road, mapping them as one walks. Further, maps can be used in different ways: To find your way, to locate yourself, as a reorientation of the 'planned' route, to find a shortcut, to navigate in order to visit foreign sites, revisit old spots, or simply find your way back from a journey.

Inspired by Hviid (2008) and her use of Life-Map methods in research with 12-year-old children concerning the concept of development, the approach was elaborated towards comprehending children's everyday life with two households. Hviid focuses on the children's specific engagements over time in order to comprehend the micro genetics of development, as it is experienced from the children's perspective. She writes:

> " These drawings worked as 'papers in progress' between researcher and research-participants and both parties referred to the drawings during the interview to understand and explain, but the children always had the final word on whether or not to represent the specific themes on the map" (Hviid & Beckstead, 2008: 161)

Similar to Hviid, the aim is not a search for 'correct' answers to concrete questions; the intent is to open spaces for joint investigation of movements and processes in the children's lives with two households. Such movements cannot be captured just through questions and answers. As a methodological tool in the interviews, *Life Mapping* has been elaborated and structured as a graphic model in the form of a map of movements, transitions and different arrangements of everyday life - in present time, in the past (before the parental divorce), pointing towards the future focusing on expectations, dreams and possibilities, but also constraints in the light of the present and the past.

When using methods such as interviews and *Life Mapping,* mastery of language is a necessity. In her research, Hviid (2002; 2008) asks the children to draw places of significance from the present and the past. In addition to the graphical illustration, Hviid interviewed them on the meaning of these places in connection to their development.

> "Verbal language completes or nuances the graphic reconstruction of the past. Thus, the first person perspective is preserved, and the complementarity of modes of externalisation (graphical and verbal) might enable to reconstruct the processes at stake" (Zittoun, 2009: 419).

The transitions between time and space are not understood as entities but as overlapping, entangled and in flux. In that sense, situations from the past are also situated in the present, as dreams of the future also may be relevant in understanding the past.

Cross-contextual movements in time and space are particularly central to the *Life Mapping* attempt to comprehend what is at stake for the child in the continuous transition in time and space between two households. During *Life Mapping*, the child may face past experiences and perhaps present dilemmas in the conduct of everyday life. These constraints are not necessarily directly connected to time and space, but entangled with particular experiences through the child's life span.

> "The major difficulty is to capture the time-dimension, that is, the processual nature of the phenomenon under study. Indeed, any form of description requires stepping out of time" (Zittoun, 2009: 407)

When everyday life is divided between two residences, temporality and spatiality come into play. One thing is to consider chronological time and thus linear, temporal movement as located on a timeline. However, this particular set up of everyday life actually contains several modalities of time – time makes loops backwards to 'old' times (with mom and dad married) and everyday life in this context. The 'olden' times might contain happy memories or painful memories. These different times can be perceived as both contradictory *and* intertwined. 'Olden' times (and memories) will always be a part of the present and the future, but meaning construction related to old times may differ as the child grows up (See Holzkamp, 1983; 2012a: 350; Zittoun, 2009: 416). In this light, time and space is not only understood as concrete, but also as subjective by being ascribed a specific significance and connotation.

When we examine the ways time-shared living arrangements structure everyday life, dilemmas may emerge in connection to 'olden' time and contemporary time.

The child's experiences and construction of meaning according to space-time mattering are investigated in the *Life Mapping* as a way of comprehending the complexity of these childhood premises.

The *Life Mapping* method is elaborated as a mediating and navigating tool during the research process. Also, it functions as a common *third* (inspired by Lihme, 1988) between the child and the researcher, since interviewing children successfully – when interested in narratives and unfolded tales - demands more than a microphone, a recorder, and a page full of questions. A researcher must be reflective in terms of both research questions, but also alert to matters raised by the child as significant in the situated interview setting. The children are positioned as experts, and will most probably point out issues the researcher had not thought of beforehand.

'Obser-view' by choice

Obser-view is a nexus between two prominent methods within this theoretical framework – participant observation and interview.

Many researchers within this theoretical approach have successfully made cross-contextual participant observations following the research-participants through different contexts of their everyday life (e.g., Kousholt, 2011; Højholt, 2001; Larsen, 2011; Stanek, 2011).

Through participant observation daily living is illuminated in other ways than chosen for this study. This methodological approach focuses more on the observable than the spoken. By participating and observing over a period of time, the researcher gets a sense of family life from the inside – an embodied sense of the physical framings, the routines and structures of the daily living. It opens the possibility of studying the (verbal as well as non-verbal) interplay between parents and children. Knowledge gained from participant observations can complement, challenge, and refine the knowledge obtained through interviews (Kousholt, 2011: 236).

Some may claim that when focusing on verbal interaction exclusively; we lose the first person perspective. We talk the talk instead of walking the walk. However, *Life Mapping* is not only about what is being said (as participant observation is not just about what is being seen). Observing the child's reactions towards certain questions, facial expressions, body language, moments of silence, and thoughtfulness (see Højholt, 2001: 73-76) is all part of mapping everyday life. In this sense observation supports what is said, and contributes to a complex and multifaceted understanding of the child's different narratives, wherefore the concept of 'obser-view' seems appropriate; the two methods are interconnected and entangled parts of one another. Further, the aim is to capture another 'angle' of children's everyday life than what is necessarily observable through participant observation or articulated through regular interviews.

Through *Life Mapping,* the focal point is the child's experiences and situated construction of meaning in daily living. The meaning structure is to be conceptualized to be the subject-facing side of the societal structure (Holzkamp, 2013: 418) – from the standpoint of the specific child. These meaning structures are (always) positioned in the specific time and space of the interview, and will differ from time to time and setting to setting. The over all focus of *Life Mapping* is for possibilities and dilemmas concerning time-sharing arrangements to emerge, and pursuing the children's individual reasons of specific actions – reasons from their standpoint. Zittoun introduces the conceptualization of 'ruptures' as another way of understanding constraints. She writes:

> "A rupture signs the end of a mode of adjustment; after such event, the routine changes are invalidated: new dynamics have to be established" (Zittoun, 2009: 409)

During the research process, the child is introduced his/her own routines and structures of everyday life in other – very specific and detailed (inspired by Andenæs, 1991) – ways than usual. The conduct of the daily living is pinned out. In this approach 'ruptures' also come forward. The child's voicing of naturalized structures in everyday life configures questions and reflections regarding cross-contextual, familiar settings. As the quote below illustrates, dialogues on everyday routines reflect a practical dimension and considerations on ruptures in Holly's different ways of participating and contributing at her two households.

> Interviewer: What's different? Do you do something here (at mom's) that you don't do there (at dad's)?
> Holly: My dad doesn't mind if I don't help him with the dishes – for instance. He doesn't really complain. But my mom, she does, and I think that's ok. I told him that I wanted to help him but he doesn't seem to care. Also, he wants to do my lunch – but I can do that myself…
> Interviewer: So (at mom's) you have to do a lot of stuff by yourself.

> Holly: Yes, but I don't mind. It doesn't take me that long

However, the construction of meaning serves as foundation for what is at stake in the child's situated life with two households, and can in that sense, serve as a generalization of some children's constraints in time-sharing arrangements. By voicing Holly's differences in her conduct of everyday life at her father's house in relation to her mother's, Holly discovers certain ruptures making her realize the impact the differences has on her as a person, since she finds it meaningful to help with housework and prepare her own lunch. Vygotsky (1930) argues that this process is bidirectional as we, when we change our ways of thinking, also change our actions in the world. However, most often these bidirectional changes are neither linear nor foreseeable (also see Zittoun 2009: 413).

The *Life Mapping* is also the child's creative process in forming an overview of time and space with the researcher as a guide and co-creator. The child decides which 'streets' and 'towns' to include and, as the drawing progresses, the map helps one stay on the 'road' of important 'places' in the child's situated life as it illustrates the transitions and movements both from above and outside. At the same time, the dialog on the specific transitions and movements are situated in the child's perspective on concrete experiences in present time, before the divorce and in the expectations for the future.

In that sense, the interview can be conceived as a joint venture with an aim of giving the researcher opportunities to investigate the living arrangements from the children's point of view. Also, the children are given the possibility of relating to themselves and their life situation in different ways when considering the research questions. They may be asked questions they have not thought about before, which can lead to novel ways of comprehending their everyday life and understanding themselves; ways of opening the scope of possibilities or constraints, which must be reflected upon and perhaps dealt with. By illuminating different oppositions, dilemmas and possibilities we can do what we find best.

Additionally, the researcher is an outsider concerning the child's everyday life. Some of the naturalized issues must therefore be explained during the interview. In his research with clients in therapy, Dreier (2008: 60) points out that strangers (as therapists) introduce other perspectives on experienced constraints with greater ease than clients themselves since strangers are not directly involved in the clients everyday life in between and afterwards (ibid.). Apparently most of the children do not consider the researcher a complete stranger in this study, since they have introduced themselves previously and exchanged expectations. The outsider position, however, seems to offer new conversation on ordinary but significant matters of everyday life with two households; the outsider ensures confidentiality, takes responsibility of the research process creating an interpersonal space for reciprocal exchange of standpoints, reflections and concerns. This joint investigation also leaves room for a range of reflections and different answers. Each answer is *just* an answer in this specific context where no one gets hurt, offended or sad because of what has been said.

In case of this study, children and parents can, without charge, try out and examine novel presented perspectives and ways of understanding themselves and their everyday life. In this light, the research process acts as a specifically arranged meeting – a situated social practice with varied purposes for the participants and different issues and concerns at stake.

As previously mentioned, the transformative aim of research is situated, negotiated and reflected during and after the research process. The purpose is to investigate how children create and construct meaning through such processes, and use this knowledge to deal with experienced constraints and dilemmas. However, when simplifying transitions and movements of time and space into a drawing, complexity is overlooked, as is the flow of time and space. However, a simplification may sometimes contribute to a bird's eye view to supplement the first person perspective. Another concern could be that the different situations of the mapping do not appear as entangled and intertwined parts of the child's life, but as separate entities.

Life Mapping is a situated approach, and this characterizes the research process for the children as well as the researcher. As researchers, we cannot a priori predict what new (if any) insights the children's narratives will bring forth. *Life Mapping* is (just) a static drawing situated in a specific time and place. In that sense, *Life Mapping* mirrors the child's specific and present experience of cross-contextual everyday life. Yet, when it is approached analytically, considering – for instance – space-time mattering, it comes to life as a kind of everyday *life map*.

Subsequently, the theme of research as a potentially transformative social practice is analyzed through concrete empirical examples given by Holly and Oliver.

Research in everyday life as transformative social practice?

When highlighting everyday life through a research process, it opens for the possibility of detecting both the general *and* the particular conditions of the daily living, since (also time-shared) everyday life is always both ordinary *and* specific in various ways.

Analysis I: Holly's cha(lle)nging needs

At first sight, Holly (12) appears as a rather shy girl, dressed in shorts and with a ponytail at her mother's house for the preliminary encounter. A few days later they have (by Holly's choice) arranged the interview to be held at Holly's Grandmother's house. She still seems a bit withdrawn, but when Holly is introduced to the ideas behind *Life Mapping*, she immediately starts to draw - even before the recorder is on.

Holly's parents, Linda and Alex, only live a short bike ride from each other. Holly has a 50:50 sharing arrangement with seven days each place. The sharing structure is set for Holly to visit the other household whenever she wants during the week. Holly's parents have both remarried, and she has new siblings in both households.

Holly has been living with two households since she was three years of age; it is the only way of living she remembers. From her mother's point of view, the two households are completely integrated in Holly's everyday life, including the premises of moving back and forth.

Most likely, it is not something Holly reflects upon on a regular basis. However, investigating the details of an everyday life in transfer, there emerges a requirement for a lot of planning, overview, and attention to different ways of participating.

> Interviewer: Do you prepare yourself (for changing homes) in any way?
> Holly: No, it is mostly Sunday mornings. I get up early – 7.30 – and pack all my stuff. I have my school bag, my bag for sports, bag for my laptop, and then I have a large bag for all my other stuff: my raincoat, my wellingtons and all that

Holly keeps separate clothing at her two households, but still, there are many things to be brought. This quote pinpoints the practicalities of living with two homes. Also, her mother and father's different expectations towards her are a condition Holly must adjust to. Even, when Holly articulates that she does not need prepare her weekly move she still has to gather an overview of the practical sides of moving, *and* she mentally needs to prepare herself for differing expectations, as mentioned at the very beginning of this section.

When living with time-sharing arrangements one may argue that the cyclical nature of everyday life is a double loop by continually going back and forth. The child (both practically and mentally) seeks to interconnect and balance different circumstances into the conduct of everyday life. When referring to a 'double loop' the argument is be attentive to both the repeated routines *and* the differences of the two households.

In Holly's narrative of everyday living, she attempts to conduct her life similarly in both places. Her life outside the family unit is structured by sports and time with her friends. In order to keep track on Holly and her well being, Linda and Alex text each other or talk over the phone on a daily basis. Still, it appears, there are many differences between the two households. As Holly works on *Life Mapping*, she points out one major divergence: bedtime.

> Holly: They [my dad and his wife] think I need a lot of sleep. It's because when I was younger… it was hard for me to get up in the mornings because I was tired. But it's not like that anymore - I like to stay in bed for a while, but it's not at problem for me get up in order to be on time.
> Interviewer: And your mom knows that? That's why you can go to bed later when you are at her house?
> Holly: Yeah… I can go to bed at 9 – 9.30 at mom's

When staying at Alex's, Holly needs to live by the routines and rules set by him and his wife Connie, which means being in bed early (8 – 8.30 pm), even when she goes to bed 1½ hours later every other week. Therefore, in her attempt to conduct everyday life with coherence, Linda and Alex's various rules and structures frame Holly's possibilities and constrain her conduct.

As Holly maps her everyday life at her two households, she articulates changing needs towards her sharing arrangements, as she grows up. At one time she was longed for more time with her mother. She narrates this need through a specific situation when she was ten years old and she was supposed to go away on a two-week holiday with her father:

> "I just remember that I was so upset. My dad was frustrated because I didn't know what was wrong - but I just missed my mom"

At that time, it was too overwhelming for Holly being away from her mother for two weeks; the holiday was the rupture triggering her emotions, demanding some sort of action. In this example, Holly expresses an indefinite, embodied emotion of being upset. These tend to live in the body as feelings and senses not belonging to any location in particular. When these are of more definite nature, it becomes clear what circumstances they are connected to in the child's everyday life, wherefore they can be put into words, discussed, and perhaps even acted upon.

The emotions of longing for the mother affects Holly's mood to such an extent that she cannot hide it. In retrospect, Holly realizes that missing her mother was the issue involved. Holly's *changing* needs points towards more *challenging* needs. When children live with time-sharing arrangements, matters of loyalty are at play, most often children are quite aware of not preferring one parent over the other. In that sense, time-shared parenthood seems more gender equalized than parenthood of nuclear families. In this case, Holly's father is frustrated, because he usually knows how to fulfill her daily needs, but in this particular situation, something else (or someone else) was needed. With a genuine interest in her well-being, he suggests that she stayed at Linda's house until she felt better.

Through the joint process of *Life Mapping,* Holly realizes, that she has already found her own ways to deal with this situation:

> "Well, if I didn't have [my dog] Prince, I don't think it would have been like it is now. I would just have seen my mom the weeks I was staying at her house. I would probably have been completely different. I think I would have missed her much more and been more upset, because sometimes, if I want to get some fresh air, I'll just go and see Prince sometimes at night – around 6 or 7 – I am so glad I have Prince".

A few years earlier Holly had been given the Cocker Spaniel *Prince* at her mother's house. She agreed to walk it, play with it, and feed it, when she was living at Linda's. At her father's house Holly also has the dog Daisy. In Holly's narratives, Daisy seems connected to the weeks at her father's, even though Holly also walks the dog some afternoons when staying at her mother's. Holly also takes Prince for walks during the weeks at her father's, but somehow it seems Prince has become Holly's 'legal' way of also spending more time with her mother (see Tipper, 2011 for further research on how animals occupy children's social lives and family spaces). The dog appears to serve as that which enables her to adjust her schedule to meet her needs for spending more time with her mother. In Holly's conduct of everyday life, she has created another cyclic loop – a loop crossing the double loops permitting her to rearrange her time-sharing arrangements to meet her longing for the mother. Holly expresses that she likes being at Alex' every other week and she was not pleading for a complete change of households. She just needed more flexibility in the sharing arrangement.

Likewise, flexibility and autonomy also seem to be at the top of Holly's list for things to attain in the future. To Holly, the ultimate freedom is to choose what she wants and whom she should be with - to settle down, to be herself, with no expectations, no bags to carry.

> " I want to move away from home as soon as I can […]. Because then I can get away from both of them – like – I don't have to be (time)shared anymore[…]. It is like – I would have more freedom to.. to be able to be myself, and didn't have all these bags all the time"

However, this quotation is related to the future, in present time Holly has not (yet) found her ways to cope with (all) the implications of being 'shared' by her parents. To her, the current solution to the freedom of being on her own is to be creative and find *ways* to make her own 'ruptures' in the sharing-arrangements organized by her parents. Opening her understanding of herself, gives Holly the courage to explore other ways creatively to overcome dilemmas and complex life situations –she discovers novel understandings of herself as a person in this transfer. To be ‘time-shared’ seems to be a rupture of the everyday life that has to be handled on a regular basis. These ruptures cannot be dealt with once and for all, but over and over again in relation to different situations and different needs.

When turning off the recorder and ending the *Life Mapping* process, Holly became shy again. Her answers were more reserved, shorter, and often given in single sentences.

Analyses II: Oliver’s desire for consistency

Oliver: It’s all the same

These words are repeated again and again by Oliver (11) during the interview, when asked to describe everyday life at his two households. He refuses to go into detail, because “*It is all the same*”. Oliver lives seven days in each home before switching.
Oliver has been introduced to the researcher as a rather introvert boy in preliminary conversations with his mother Suzy. At the first meeting, gathered around the kitchen table, Oliver seems curious but reluctant when introduced to the research project, and the researcher is not quite sure whether or not he is eager to share his story. His mother, however, seems very determined to talk about the time-shared living arrangement she and her ex-husband have structured for Oliver and his brother Noah. Also, she enthusiastically articulates the friendly relationship between the boys’ father Matt, her husband Tom and herself. Leaving the house, the researcher still senses some hesitation from Oliver. But a few days later he accepts the invitation to participate.
Oliver is interviewed at his mother’s house. His brother Noah has been interviewed immediately before and Oliver had a chance to look at Noah’s *Life Mapping* before making his own.
In the following, it will be argued that Oliver’s unenthusiastic attitude towards the research process and his unwillingness to share his version of his everyday life might be his way of telling a different story concerning time-sharing arrangements than the one being told by his mother Suzy, her husband, and his father. Opposite her son, Suzy openly reasons her decision of choosing the sharing arrangements after the divorce.

> ”It was so nice. I have been stressed out for years, also because Matt, he wasn’t… He was at businessman and had to work a lot – so, I was alone with them [Oliver and Noah]. It is just fantastic,…it is a whole new life now!”

From Suzy’s perspective, getting a divorce seemed to open up a whole new way of living. After taking care of most house work and the children, she now has the opportunity to pursue her own carrier and interests. She and Matt decided the boys should live a week at each household with a one day overlap, allowing each of them to spend time with their parents one on one. Suzy’s agenda for participating was most of all to contribute with ‘good’ stories about children and time-sharing arrangements in contrast to the image of divorcing parents as always fighting each other with the children in the middle.

Suzy’s excitement over her newly found freedom and Matt and Tom’s friendship also seems to set the conditions for Oliver’s possibilities and dilemmas. He experiences his mother referring to her happiness in present time (during the interview), and the conditions created because of the time-sharing arrangements. However, this set-up does not appear to leave much room for the past – in other words, the 'olden' times do not exist except perhaps in Oliver's memory. His *Life Mapping* mainly contains experiences from the present.

During the interview, Oliver does not recall anything he wants to share when he is offered space to articulate the past and reflect on its meaning in his present everyday life. To Oliver, there is no reason to reactivate memories from 'olden' times, since memories from life with mom and dad married have no room in the present. With her questions, the researcher seems to entangle the setup for different space-time mattering's, which Oliver prefers to keep disentangled in his focus on the present.

As quoted in the beginning of this section, Oliver insists on equality when speaking of his everyday life with households. The more he insists, the more the researcher's questions seem to be directed at differences, since other participating children have pointed out that there will always be difference – mostly because mom and dad are *different*. But what is Oliver's agenda in pointing out similarities and underlining the consistency in his everyday life?

Oliver narrates a story of conflicting interests. Not by explicating them or pointing them out but by his one-line answers and lack of interest in presenting his everyday life. He makes an effort *not* to reproduce his parent's story of the perfect time-sharing arrangements it seems, but not by creating counter standpoints. The researcher's questions on *difference* seem to trigger Oliver, since sameness – in his world - appears to be the glue that connects his conduct of everyday life in his two households and justifies this way of living. It is also the glue that attaches him to the family narrative of time-sharing arrangements as a *fantastic* way of living.

"*All actions have to be grounded with reference to one's own interests*", Holzkamp (2013: 439) writes. By persisting that everything is the same, there is no reason not for living at both his father and his mother's. *Difference*s, in contrast, seem to be a rupture that disturb the delicate balance of accepting the childhood premise of time-sharing. In Oliver's case it is this sense of balance he – on a daily basis – seeks to stabilize and accept.

> ”[T]here have been times that Oliver wanted to live with us. Earlier it was easier to say that he couldn't, but now when he is growing older, and we live closer to Matt, then he can just come and go – but we still have to figure out how to organize it" (Suzy)

Parents and children's perspectives on everyday life are inevitably entangled. In order to comprehend adolescent, first person perspectives, parental viewpoints sometimes serve as gateways to understanding complexity. However, parents also seem to understand their children differently than the children understand themselves. According to Suzy, Oliver articulates a need for living at mother's house and both she and Matt are aware of this issue. Suzy reasons: "*Oliver likes structure, and there is not much structure at Matt's"*.

The time-sharing arrangements structure the lives of many people – Oliver's mother, her husband, his father, his brother Noah and Oliver. A lot of changes must be made in order to adjust the existing arrangements. Different family members' individual conduct of life is intertwined in joint living arrangements - both at Matt and Suzy's. In that sense, one can say that Oliver is acting under pressure against his life interests.

But focusing on sameness, Oliver is highlighting repeated routines across his two households and doing chores appears to be a recurring theme in Oliver's narrative of his everyday life, as he describes ways he help out his parents with the house work in great detail: *" I vacuum. Clean the kitchen, empty the dishwasher, set the table, empty the trash, and empty the paper bin*".
He does not explicitly reason his emphasis on the daily chores, except that it gives him his weekly allowance. The chores seem to serve as a sort of micro structural arrangement for Oliver creating consistency, but also a self-understanding as someone contributing to the household, ensuring the smooth progression of daily activities. It seems be his way of insuring sameness and setting up arrangements that is structuring his everyday life shuttle with two residences. In other words, he structures things within his reach.

It is notable that when participants are rather uninformative, it is difficult to grasp the complexity of everyday life. Somehow, it seems that Oliver's first person perspective on his own life (opposite Holly's) is drowning in the perspectives of other members of his family, whereas Holly's seems to be complemented and nuanced by it.

In the following it will be argued that participant resistance to the research sometimes expands our understanding of social practices, different logics and agendas at stake in the researched field. Resistance characterized by 'lack of information' and uninformative participants can transform into substantial empirical material when considering the research process as a *mutually* transformative social practice.

Research as a stepping stone

The following discussion is related to how children make use of the research process as a transformative social practice in everyday life. The analyses addressed how *Life Mapping* aimed at embracing different issues at stake in the child's life with time-sharing arrangements, while highlighting differences in space-time-mattering. As illustrated through the presentation of Holly and Oliver's different perspectives, children draw on the research process and experience it as more or less meaningful when reflecting on their everyday life.

Some children grasp this possibility to pave the way for different understandings of themselves, family relations and their sharing arrangements when entering a research process, as we saw with Holly. When commencing *Life Mapping*, she takes the lead. Her shyness drifts away as she starts to speak and her process seems to provide an island, where she can express herself and reflect upon themes she has not talked about or thought of before. Holly insists on doing most of the drawing herself, taking her time to both visualize and explain how she experiences her sharing arrangement and the challenges that come along. Her initial agenda for participating was most of all to provide knowledge for adults to understand life with time-sharing arrangements better, but that agenda seemed to change through the process.

Holly's life with two households is narrated with a strong focus on present (and past) dilemmas and the impact they have on her future possibilities and plans. Through the research process, Holly seems to come to terms with her life circumstances in other ways than earlier. For instance, her vague, but powerful emotion of missing her mother seems to take up a more specific character. She also realizes that the meaning of freedom - to her -

is connected to the prospect of making her own choices about how to be, and where to stay. In that sense, Holly challenges her understanding of herself and her life during the *Life Mapping* process by reflecting on the ways she has participated in home life.

Through her activist stance, it seems, Holly uses new insights from the research process as a transformative social practice in her everyday life. After having read the transcribed interview sent to her, Holly e-mails the researcher:

> "It seems like you have read my mind. I understand a lot of things more clearly now also who I am and stuff like that [..] .. freedom, what I would like for the future. I also understand my family differently [..]"

With Holly as a prime example on how children actively can make use of the research process as a stepping stone in their everyday lives, the rest of this section will focus on children like Oliver, who have stronger resistance towards reflecting on their time-sharing arrangements.

When resistance is at stake

When Oliver works on *Life Mapping*, he is reluctant and disinclined. He insists on the researcher doing the drawing, and he answers the questions in one-liners. Oliver's *Life Mapping* is giving an overview of the different contexts of his daily life visualized by his mother's house, his father's house, his school, the youth club, the football club and his friends. When Oliver refers to football practice and his friends, he seems a bit more open and talkative, but as the research questions gets centered on his home settings, he withdraws and resists going into any details.

Reluctance and resistance is not necessarily something to overcome (Vitus, 2008: 473) in research. Rather, we must be curious and interrogate how and when resistance plays a role in children's possibilities for expressing themselves properly during the research process, and how their articulations may be comprehended.

As researchers, we expect the participants to give us the authority to define the research setting. Even when the research design aims for a - more or less - symmetrical relation where the child is the expert of his or her own life, the interview and *Life Mapping* is still defined and framed by the researcher. In other words, the researcher is positioned as the 'host'. Vitus (2008) has – in her research with ethnic minority boys – discovered, that when the situation was reversed – the boys 'hosting' the conversations on topics meaningful and of relevance to them and their everyday life - the resistance and rather uninformative one-line answers were counteracted and replaced with 'thick' narratives of social practice (ibid.: 482). Therefore, the researcher must be attentive to different ways of 'hosting' the research process by accepting a child's (lack of) initiative as a benchmark on what is at stake. In the particular example of Oliver, the researcher stepped directly into the mother's narrative of the time-sharing arrangements with an expectation of this to be reproduced through Oliver and his brother. However, the mother's version was not necessarily the truth for everyone involved. In that light, Oliver's everyday life might have been investigated with more success from the contexts of friends and football practice giving him the opportunity to host the process in a (to him) more undemanding way.

By creating space for participants to describe themselves in recognizable, respectable and meaningful ways, the road is also paved for exploration of novel ways of comprehending dilemmas and constraints. Holly obviously found, that the research process expanded her understanding of herself and her life. That was not the case for Oliver. The apparently 'innocent' research questions were, to him, as 'matter out of place' (Douglas, 1966).

Perhaps, it was anticipated of Oliver through the research process to *transform* himself – in real Transformer manners – into someone keen and enthusiastic searching for ways to overcome his (unarticulated) constraints. Oliver's subjective agenda for participating is unknown; perhaps common curiosity or possibly he was persuaded his mother. When researching possibilities and dilemmas it sometimes points towards circumstances of life that cannot be changed. Potentially, the research process could provide an island for these rather fixed circumstances to be articulated and expressed. However, at this particular time in his life, Oliver could not benefit this platform and the research process did not have a mandate to change or challenge that in Oliver's mindset**.**

With a research aspiration of comprehending a first person standpoint, it is problematic that most of Oliver's needs are reasoned by his mother. In other words, he objectified in a third person perspective, which this theoretical framework seeks to transgress. Therefore, the one-sidedness expresses causes and effects explained by his mother (the conditioning discourse cf. Holzkamp 2013), rather than illuminating reasons and meaning constructions from *Oliver's* own point of view. However, if we want to know something about Oliver's reasons, he must be willing to enter a mode of intersubjective understanding (ibid.: 424), otherwise reciprocity is impossible, and instead of comprehending what's at stake, *we* (researcher and parents) attempt to reason and interpret on behalf of him.

As considerate parents both Suzy and Matt urge Oliver and Noah to speak openly about their feelings and well-being. At the very beginning of this article, Oliver explains how to handle missing the other parent. Apparently, to speak openly and articulate his longing has no function in Oliver's everyday life, as he has learned to suppress it and '*just not think about it'.* Different kinds of feelings and emotions *are* being explicated during the research process with Oliver in various ways. Contrasting to Holly's expressive ways, Oliver states these 'in between the lines', by facial expressions, by silence. In line with this Holzkamp (2013: 464) suggests:

> "One consequence of not being able to act in one's recognizable own interest, might be *not* to act at all, to refuse any action, "leave the field" […]. One other option (certainly more usual) will be to comply, at least mentally, by simply "adjusting" […].

Through his first person perspective during and after the research process, Oliver extracts no novel possibilities for action whatsoever; an analysis of his participation in his two households could indicate emotions of an indefinite character. By witnessing your own story and aiming to voice the indefinite may open new scopes of possibilities to him, new ways of understanding himself, or making inside emotions an articulated and outside matter. In that sense, the research process is a transfer of emotions from indefinite to definite. One thing is to create the space for expression of emotions; another thing, however, is to *be able* to act upon it in ways that actually changes the difficult or challenging conditions.

Many of the participating children – including Oliver's brother – appreciate the difference between the two households, claiming that the different ways of living supplement one another. In Oliver's articulations, it seems that *sameness* 'glues the structure' in order to

make his everyday life coherent. However, there may be plural ways of understanding this *sameness*: as an articulation for coherence but also as a way to evade the sensitive dilemma of prioritizing one parent.
According to Holzkamp (2013:436), one acts 'reasonably', in the sense that one consistently tries to find out what one has to do or not to do in a concrete setting to benefit from it or at least not to harm oneself. Not as rational and calculating homo oeconomicus, but grounded in subjective reasons which sometimes also are contradictory and inconsistent. By this example, Oliver does not expand his action possibilities towards better life conditions – instead he acts (and articulates) *reasonably,* ensuring coherence, consistency, sameness and family harmony in his everyday home life. In this respect, Oliver's ways of acting are somehow subjective functional to him in preserving (some of) his interests – although in contradictory ways. His adjustment to his life situation presents an immediate solution as he ensures the family peace. The other family members are very content with the current living arrangements, and if Oliver insists on changing his; it will affect all the other's as well (in perhaps undesirable ways) and the family peace could somehow be jeopardized. Yet, it is also an obstacle to him in his desire to change his current living arrangements in ways more suitable to his individual needs. When not actively dealing with troublesome aspects; it may be regarded as restrictive agency. However, in such ambiguous situations we must balance and moderate our options in relation to what is at stake. To change the complex structures of time-sharing arrangements may seem as quite a task to an 11-year-old, especially when the other family members apparently are satisfied with things as they are.

Analytically, the *Life Mapping* process served as an eye opener to the tension on the interrelation between *similarities – differences*, although most of the research questions seemed to provoke Oliver, especially when questioning the sharing premises. This point might indeed explain his one-line answers by insisting on sameness and consistency, and obstinately denying any differences, he is actively attempting to deal with things as they are, at least for now. Oliver thus retains a status quo, whereas Holly (and many of the other participating children) insisted on diversity.

Research as mutually transformative?

This article has repeatedly argued for research as potential mutually transformative social practice. Neither children nor researcher change - in true Transformer manner - into something completely different through or after the research process. Change is a process emerging over time often involving both the past, present and the future.

Through the interview with Holly, the researcher was encouraged to 'do more of the same', since she – as intended in the project design – actively used the research process to understand herself better; she refines her perceptions of herself and her everyday life in more nuanced and complex ways
Conversely, Oliver did not reproduce the intended purpose of the project as he was withdrawn, holding back and obviously did not appreciate the research settings or the questions. It would have been easy to excuse him as a 'non-compliant' participant. However, when insisting on a *joint* investigation in the project design, the research also has responsibility when a participant feels awkward. It might have been more fruitful to approach Oliver by 'walking with him' in his insistence on sameness and investigate his experiences and meaning making processes from there, instead of challenging it.

It is boys like Oliver who call for us to actively stop, to reflect, to reconsider: to do something different. It is also boys like Oliver who challenges and makes us rethink our own researcher subjectivity.

Re-examining who we are as researchers and why we sometimes disinclined get trapped into embracing certain perceptions of the world is not simple. However, in each case when we involve a child in research, we need to sense, register and evaluate what is at stake for the specific child and if necessary modify the approach and challenge our own presumptions. We need to keep in mind to offer ourselves as dialogical partners and not as interrogators. To create space for children's different and often changing agendas in a process of mutual engagement.

The researcher subjectivity indeed plays an active role in the research process. In case of this study, gendered differences may also have an impact on the outcome of the *Life Mapping*, regarding both participants *and* researcher, since the researcher is a woman evaluating the process by her concrete, situated, historical (and feminine) standards with the drawbacks and advantages that come along

Some might suggest that *Life Mapping* connotes to feminine perspectives of life: e.g. to express emotions, to draw, and to be extrovert - ways that may not always resonate with boys. Some might also claim, the need to construct a spectrum of male and feminine responses respectively, which might not be captured in *Life Mapping*, if seen as a gendered comparison. However, the theoretical framework of this study propose awareness on the specific *subject* in his or her situated circumstances of life. In that light, gender is considered as it is attributed through articulations or actions. Therefore, rather than a determining focus on gender, the methodological attention must be tuned to construct a certain 'we-subjectivity' between the researcher and the child – a joint 'us' as a stepping stone embodying the research process in 'something *we* create and share between us'. In the case of Oliver the research was conducted through a *you and I* (and at some points as you *vs*. I) whereas Holly immediately subscribed on the *we*-position offered by the researcher. In order to create we-subjectivity, both parties have to eager it. The construction 'we-subjectivity' could be examined further in the methodological approach and its epistemological preconditions.

A few concluding remarks

As stated in the introduction to this paper, children's agendas for participating in research diverge and they may change along the way as the research progresses. The researcher's outline for this present project was, first of all, to capture the dilemmas and constraints of different time-sharing practices children highlighted as significant – as a kind of counteraction towards the dominant adult centered way of defining problems and constraints on behalf of the children.

If we wish to grasp the children's experiences of what is at stake in their time-shared everyday lives, we need open our eyes and ears – first of all towards what is being said but moreover towards our own presumptions and reactions to it. If we do so, we (and they) may note the hard work many children do every day to find ways to create consistency in their time-shared family life, but, also the ways they find to open their scope of possibilities. Such matters emerge through the research process.

The aim of this article was to offer new ways of studying the *link* between children's everyday life and research, where research processes have the potential of being transformative social practices. The employed etymologies of *challenging* and *changing* seem to serve as a nexus for this purpose.

In unison the two concepts highlight the 'messy' mutual effort of understanding ourselves, each other and our everyday practices in novel and more complex ways through the research process. Leaving us both happier and wiser but certainly also more reflexive and thoughtful.

This effort does not necessarily cease as the research ends. Often – as transformative processes usually do – they are borne in mind, forgotten for a while, and perhaps later remembered again. At a suitable occasion it may lead to new insights, wherefore we sometimes learn and develop in retrospect. This applies both to participants and to researchers.

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