Children’s embodied and linguistic organization of peer inclusion and exclusion

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This issue is the first of the two special issues on children’s inclusion and exclusion. It begins in an Icelandic context exploring social organization practices with toddler children to reveal how they initiate an interaction with their peers (Bryndis Gunnarsdottir & Amanda Bateman, ‘Initiating interactions in the toddler peer group: Embodied conversation starters’). We then move to Japan and Sweden to continue our interest in how children recruit play partners, this time with slightly older children (Matthew Burdelski & Asta Cekaite, ‘Practices of peer inclusion: Recruitment to play in Swedish and Japanese preschools’), where we see interestingly similar initiation strategies to our Icelandic toddlers. Remaining in the early childhood education space, but traveling now to New Zealand and
Wales, play entry is further explored to reveal the specific resource of gender categories that four-year-old children employ in their inclusion and exclusion of peers (Amanda Bateman, ‘Children’s co-construction of gender-segregated spaces’). Moving on to older children and to Finland, but keeping gender-related issues in mind, we see in our next article how primary-school-aged boys utilize overt embodied actions in their particular social organization practices with their peers (Julia Katila & Kreeta Niemi, ‘Primary schoolboys’ embodied relationships in the classroom: Supporting, nudging, wrestling and grooming as forms of haptic sociality’). And finally we come to the end of our global journey as we explore further classroom aged children’s interactions in Italy (Nicola Nasi, ‘Indexing authority in the classroom: children’s practices to achieve an authoritative position among classmates’), where issues of epistemic authority are managed in ways that orient to morality by the children.

Places where children have pragmatic autonomy over the complex co-production of social organization practices with their peers is often limited due to adults playing a significant role in children’s social worlds, where adults shape children’s morality (Bateman & Kern, 2018) and socialization (Cekaite & Burdelski, forthcoming). Such practices can be observed when teachers initiate and govern specific rules that shape – and can limit – children’s actions to behave in ways that align with adult defined morality (for example, Bateman & Roberts, 2018). This is in opposition to theory built on empirical studies which present children as competent and capable in co-constructing their own social and cultural worlds away from the watchful eye of adults (Corsaro, 2003, 2005; Goodwin, 1990). When children interact with their peers, they competently use embodied and linguistic resources to shape their social worlds and participation frameworks (Goffman, 1981; Goodwin & Goodwin, 2004) in intricate and intelligent choreographies.

Furthermore, research demonstrates children’s competence in managing their own social organization processes in pragmatic ways also involves the inclusion and exclusion of peers (Bateman, 2011; Butler, 2008; Danby & Theobald, 2012; Danby & Baker, 1998; Tulbert & Goodwin, 2011). Interestingly, equal treatment in interactions among peers that may be understood as a sign of inclusion may also entail mutually constructed approval as well as strongly expressed rejection (Butler, 2008; Butler & Weatherall, 2006; Heller, Kern & Rohlfing, 2021). Through observing children’s peer interactions from an ethnographic perspective, the pragmatic
accomplishments of these temporal movements can be analysed to reveal young children’s competencies of managing their social worlds, such as through turn-taking activities or action descriptions and assessments (Kemp & Kyratzis, 2018).

The special issues build on this prior research to offer further insight into child–child interactions in the early years (approx. 3 to 10 years of age) with a specific focus on peer inclusion and exclusion. This focus arises out of interest in the practical implementation of inclusion as a formal goal of educational institutions worldwide, as required by the UN-CRPD (United Nations, 2006), as well as a growing interest in children’s social competencies more generally. While there is a large body of research on how teaching practices may be more or less inclusive – usually through national curricula documents – much fewer studies have looked at interactions between peers from the perspective of inclusion/exclusion. It is the aim of this special issue to explore how children actively co-construct their social worlds through situated embodied and linguistic sequential practices and actions. An international panel of early childhood researchers are included in the special issues to explore how inclusions and exclusions are managed by children in their everyday interactions with each-other, revealing how different resources are used dynamically and pragmatically in situ in a range of contexts around the globe.

About the guest editors

Amanda Bateman is an associate professor in early childhood education and director of the Early Years Research Centre at the University of Waikato. Her research involves collecting and analysing video footage of children’s social interactions, and teacher-child pedagogical interactions. Recent publications include the co-edited books Early Childhood Education: The Co-production of Knowledge and Relationships (2017) and Talking with Children: A Handbook for Early Childhood Education (2022). Amanda’s current research focuses on traditional oral storytelling of Welsh and Māori legends in relation to identity and belonging in ECEC.

Friederike Kern is a professor of German linguistics and their didactics at Bielefeld University/Germany. Her research interests include multimodal aspects of discourse acquisition and language socialisation in everyday and classroom interactions, and the interactive organisation of learning and teaching. Recent research focuses on interaction with autistic children in pedagogical settings, and a co-edited book on Prosodie und Multimodalität/Prosody and Multimodality (Universitätsverlag WINTER, 2021).
References


