



AARHUS UNIVERSITY



Coversheet

This is the accepted manuscript (post-print version) of the article.

Contentwise, the post-print version is identical to the final published version, but there may be differences in typography and layout.

How to cite this publication

Please cite the final published version:

Villumsen, A. M., & Kristensen, O. S. (2016). When risk becomes invisible in the everyday life of day care. *Early Years*, 36(1), 17-32. doi:[10.1080/09575146.2015.1093463](https://doi.org/10.1080/09575146.2015.1093463)

Publication metadata

Title: When risk becomes invisible in the everyday life of day care
Author(s): Villumsen, A. M., & Kristensen, O. S.
Journal: Early Years
DOI/Link: <https://doi.org/10.1080/09575146.2015.1093463>
Document version: Accepted manuscript (post-print)

General Rights

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the public portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognize and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

- Users may download and print one copy of any publication from the public portal for the purpose of private study or research.
- You may not further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain
- You may freely distribute the URL identifying the publication in the public portal

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

Title page

Title: When risk becomes invisible in the everyday life of day care

Author: Anne Marie Villumsen, Associate Professor, PhD, VIA University College, Department of Social Work, Faculty of Education and Social Studies

Address: Ceresbyen 24 DK-8000 Aarhus C, Denmark

Tel: +45 87553308

Mail: amv@via.dk

Author: Ole Steen Kristensen, Professor,
Aarhus University, School of Business and Social Sciences, Department of Psychology and Behavioural Sciences

Address: Bartholins Allé 9, DK-8000 Aarhus C, Denmark

Tel: +45 87165823

Mail: olesteen@psy.au.dk

When risk becomes invisible in the everyday life of day care

Both the identification of children at risk in day care and multidisciplinary collaboration with other professions have a political focus. This study was designed as an organizational field study and attempts to establish a coherent practice of multidisciplinary collaboration between day care and social services. This article focuses on the mono-professional pedagogical identification of children at risk as well as on the underlying process of professional reasoning. Interviews with day care staff are analysed and the findings give reason to assume that central aspects of the children at risk and their life circumstances become invisible in the everyday life of day care. Due to defensive routines as well as an organizational culture that frames and creates a non-explicitly structured practice using intuitive processes, the problems of children at risk become invisible in the everyday life of day care. When risk become invisible, it not only impedes the mono-professional help the children receive, it also inhibits a crucial multidisciplinary collaborative provision of support to children at risk and their families. The identification of children at risk seems to be based on an undistinguishable selection of significant information, processed by intuitive processes.

Keywords: professional reasoning, identification of children at risk, multidisciplinary collaboration

Introduction

During the last twenty years, several severe child abuse cases have emerged, increasing the public and political focus on multidisciplinary professional practice and emphasizing the need for a comprehensive risk management system (Gambrill & Shlonsky, 2001; DePanfilis & Zuravin, 2001). The political response has been to enact government initiatives which emphasize early intervention and multidisciplinary working.

A prerequisite for early intervention is that the necessary skills for identifying children at risk be present. The majority of all Danish children spend most of the day in day care, and therefore day-care pedagogues become vital in identifying children at risk. However, it is well-documented that pedagogues find identification difficult (Plough, 2007; Jensen, Jensen & Andersen, 2005; Mehlbye et al., 2009; Villumsen & Kristensen, 2013).

Children at risk is a vague concept. The addition 'at risk' implies a reference to poor life outcomes in general. However, the concept is often used to designate problematic social or emotional behaviour, situations and/or life circumstances to which professionals must pay attention. The use of vague concepts makes identification more difficult and makes it possible that elements of risk become invisible, in the sense that professionals overlook central aspects of the children (Munro, 1999) and their life circumstances. In an attempt to create efficient multidisciplinary collaboration between pedagogues and social workers, the issue of identification and professional reasoning in uncertain situations is addressed.

In this article, we analyse the reasoning among pedagogues in the context of establishing multidisciplinary collaboration. The article is based on interviews with pedagogues specifically focusing on children at risk of social and emotional difficulties. The purpose of the article is to describe and analyse the reasoning behind pedagogical identification of children at risk and the match between observation, reasoning and action. Our point in this article is in no way to question the pedagogical profession, nor is it to advocate for a specific methodical approach to identification of children at

risk and the reasoning process behind this. Merely, the point is to present knowledge that could help to explain why some aspects of risk go unnoticed in the Danish day care system.

Identification, reasoning and professional judgment

Day-care pedagogues use professional judgment every day, every hour. Identification and reasoning are applied either in practice, observing the children playing or dining, deciding whether to intervene or not, or at formalized meetings. Nevertheless, this identification and reasoning is based on their professional judgments of complex, daily events.

Without suggesting that child abuse can be compared to the situation of children at risk of social and emotional difficulties in day care, the process of identification may be identical. Identification requires an ability to collect data, to reason and a context or culture in which analysis is not only accepted but encouraged (Munro, 1999, 2005, 2010).

Severe cases of child abuse are often characterized by omissions (Munro, 1999); they are accompanied by false negatives, i.e., an alarm should have gone off but did not. A distinction between analytical reasoning (Munro, 1999) and intuitive processes is relevant here. The two exist side by side and are not opposites but merely to be seen in a continuum. Analytical reasoning is conscious, logically defensible and has a clear procedure. Intuitive processes are more tacit and produces answers without using a logical step-by-step procedure. Intuitive processes are not to be confounded with common sense. Intuitive processes contribute to a holistic professional decision-making process without a step-by-step procedure but still based on experience as well as educational background. Analytical reasoning is time-consuming in the sense that data have to be collected before professionals may arrive at a decision. Intuitive processes may have a tendency to lead to mental shortcuts by overlooking a problem because it is applied in everyday practice without an explicitly structured step-by-step process. This has significant implications for professional judgment and reasoning. In complex situations, such as human interactions, there are unknown variables to consider and this poses challenges for analytical reasoning, whereas intuitive processes are faster. According to Munro (1999), an important weakness of human reasoning is the unwillingness to change one's mind. Heavy caseloads coerce professionals to have a tendency to be more selective and biased with regard to the information used.

Identification and reasoning are framed by the organizational culture and in the context of establishing multidisciplinary collaboration this becomes essential. Since the introduction of the concept in the beginning of the 1980s, organizational culture has become a very broad concept with many different definitions. The symbolic organizational theory (Alvesson, 2002) is concerned with interpretation of events, objects, utterances and ideas. Organizational culture can be understood as a social pattern; shared, shaped and influenced by the members of the organization and including values and assumptions. In addition, organizational culture is primarily characterized as ideational, that is, meanings, understandings and beliefs are central. Culture is exchanged between members of an organization because it is expressed in actions and therefore dynamic, situational and co-created (Alvesson, 2013). The organizational context creates meaning in everyday practice and is central in understanding professional actions (Ojala & Venninen, 2011). Existing guidelines, rules and heuristics of daily practice are elements of the culture.

From a somewhat different angle, Chris Argyris' introduced the distinction between single-loop and double-loop learning in organizational literature, also called model one theory-in-use and model two theory-in-use. He describes how to overcome organizational defences (Argyris, 1990, 2012). Although the concept of organizational defences concerns the inhibition of learning in organizations, defences also affect professional practice in the organization. An organizational culture inflicted with defensive routines is a culture in which the theory-in-use emphasizes the importance of being in unilateral control, to win and not to upset people. The virtues embedded in model one include principles of caring, respect for others, honesty in conversations, advocacy of one's own position and sticking to principles, values and beliefs. Although sympathetic, these virtues have a tendency to inhibit learning in threatening and potentially unpleasant situations in the workplace. Model-two thinking concerns the questioning of the cognitive strategies behind model one and is a kind of reflection on and change of the basic premises of model one. Using model two means a change in social virtues and actions. Model two implies seeking out valid information, making knowledge-based choices and paying attention to discovering and correcting possible errors based on critical reflection.

Methodology

The data set used for this article is part of a larger study. The study was designed as an organizational field study with the purpose of organizational development, to create a coherent practice of multi-disciplinary collaboration between day care and social services. Methodologically, primarily the tradition of developmental evaluation (Patton, 1994; 2011) was applied, combined with central concepts from participatory and pragmatic action research (Elden & Levin, 1991; Greenwood, 2002; Whyte, 1991: 1995; Greenwood & Levin, 2007; Greenwood et al., 1993).

A shared goal of development between researcher and field of study is central in the methodology of Developmental Evaluation. Therefore, it can only be carried out on the basis of a close relationship between the two. Developmental Evaluation is neither a specific design, per se, nor a model (Patton, 1994; 2011). The researcher's role is to contribute to developmental processes in an organization by presenting data from within the organization. Data collection and analysis is therefore an ongoing part of any research process within this tradition, thereby creating knowledge based on development of the field of study. The participatory tradition is represented in types of knowledge used in the study. Perspectives from both employees across disciplines and managers alike are exchanged in the developmental process of the organization.

Setting

The study was carried out in one Danish Municipality with settings in 18 day-care centres. We have no reason to believe that the specific day care settings participating in this study are different from day care settings in other municipalities in Denmark. Nor do we have data from other municipalities.

The Scandinavian welfare model is the foundation of Danish Society. With regard to multidisciplinary collaboration, this implies that day care and social services are divided into sectors by different legislative and financial systems.

Approximately 90% of all Danish children between the age of three and six attend day care every day. Pre-schools do not exist in Denmark. Day care is a pedagogically supported environment emphasizing social skills, language and motor skills. Nordic day care is based on societal values such as

democracy, sense of community and the right to be different (Bennet, 2010). The professionals working in day care are called pedagoguesⁱ. The pedagogues reject terms such as ‘teacher’ and ‘education’ to describe their practice (Jensen, Broström & Hansen, 2010). In addition, Danish day-care professionals have autonomy to plan, develop, implement and evaluate their pedagogical practice (Mølholt, 2008; Henriksen, 2012). Day care is only required to follow the guiding principles of legislation; it is not bound by specific child development programs or views of child development.

Children

The study focuses on children in a vulnerable position concerning social and emotional developmentⁱⁱ. When the study was initiated, the children were four or five years of age, showing minor difficulties in age-appropriate, stable, emotional and relational interaction and communication with other children and adults. The children may also have had certain life circumstances of concern such as a parent with mental illness. No interventions had been provided prior to the study. The children were selected by day-care pedagogues on the basis of this description, and they had not, prior to the study, been selected by the pedagogues as subjects of action. Nevertheless, the pedagogues were immediately able to identify the children suitable for this study and other children were identified by day care staff as needing additional support. Children with developmental disorders were excluded.

Data

The data set consist of cases of 14 children. The selection of cases for this article was based on a Strength and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) measurement of a total of 30 children at riskⁱⁱⁱ. The SDQ is an internationally developed screening tool which is standardized to a Danish context. It has the purpose of capturing the social, emotional and behavioural situation of children aged four to 16. The SDQ focuses on five different parameters: emotion, behaviour, hyperactivity/attention, peer relations and pro-social behaviour (Goodman, 1997; 1999). Both professionals and parents completed the questionnaire. The SDQ was administered three times during the study and only the researcher had access to results. Thus, the SDQ was not administered by day care to identify children at risk.

The SDQ is a valid and reliable screening instrument (Goodman et al, 2000; Goodman & Scott, 1999). The overall agreement between the SDQ and psychiatric diagnoses is high and the SDQ identifies only a few false negatives, i.e., the SDQ predicts no diagnoses, whereas the child may actually have a diagnosis. However, the amount of false positives, i.e., the SDQ predicts a diagnosis whereas the child has no diagnosis, is higher due to the dependence on the judgment of the informants. In relation to the target group of children, the selection was directed at children with emotional distress and behavioural difficulties (See table 1).

[Table 1 about here]

Fourteen interviews were conducted concerning the 14 cases; all interviews were tape-recorded. The municipal multidisciplinary consultant and the researcher (i.e. first author) were both present in the interview. Data consist of one interview per child, and all but one child had attended day care for approximately two years at the time of the interview, without being identified as particular causes for concern prior to the commencement of the study. The children’s primary pedagogue and manager of the day-care centre in question participated in the interview.

The pedagogues were asked to elaborate on three themes:

- I. Observation: which kinds of circumstances or behaviours are described as distressing in the child's life?
- II. Reasoning: how are these circumstances or behaviours explained?
- III. Actions: which interventions are planned to address the distressing circumstances or behaviours?

In addition, they were asked about the identification process in general.

The interviews were performed approximately two years after the study had been initiated, at a time when interventions regarding the target group of children were to be expected. In addition, the organizational and managerial (Villumssen & Kristensen, 2015) development process for creating a coherent practice of multidisciplinary collaboration had been initiated during this two-year period, addressing significant organizational barriers.

The analytical approach in developmental research

Based on the interviews, case descriptions with a similar storyline were created for each child, as a way of reducing and summarizing data into a comparable structure. The cases were created in a manner that closely reflect the characteristic language of the professionals (Poland, 2002) as well as using direct quotations. Then, the cases were analysed thematically (Braun & Clarke, 2006). As part of a validation process, the recordings were subject to an additional listening, to secure alignment between cases and content of interviews. The cases form a comparable basis for a thematic analysis.

The storyline of the cases provides descriptions of the professional view on the concern for a child and its family (observations), the explanations for the cause of the concern (reasoning) and finally interventions (actions).

Figure 1 displays an abbreviated case example. Each case is approximately one and half pages long; thus the data set for this article is substantial, adding up to approximately 20 pages. Consequently, abbreviations have been made for the purpose of analysis. To illustrate how such an abbreviation is made: one observation displayed in Figure 1 is 'Watches the mood of adults around her constantly – with the purpose of gain (to steal objects or food)' which is based on a quotation from the interview in which the pedagogue says:

'She is a child who displays the same behaviour as a child who constantly watches the mood of the adults surrounding her. Merely, she does this because she calculates the greatest gain (in reference to stealing). For instance, she takes food from day care and peers as well as objects belonging to peers.'

Observations are reported in the first two columns and the pedagogues' reflections on these observations are found in the last two columns. In the 'Action' column, the heading 'Contemplating' points to the actions day care is considering as a result of the interview. In the study, the methodological framework of developmental evaluation and action research was meant as an effort to promote reflexivity among the pedagogues; hence the actions the pedagogues are contemplating.

[Figure 1 about here]

Ethical considerations

Working closely with pedagogues' sensitive reasoning about children's distress requires ethical considerations during the process as well as during the phases of analysing the accounts. Primarily, we would like to point out that it takes courage to open up a professional practice to research and we greatly admire and are thankful to participants for doing so.

When conducting research, ethical considerations should be made prior, during and after. Ethical considerations are inherent in any action taken in this study. Ethical considerations become more important in qualitative studies where the number of interviewees is traditionally small, which increases the risk of identifying the individual pedagogues. The expert position of research is performative and the knowledge created by the world of academia is powerful (Hastrup, 2004). This powerful positioning of research can prevent the pedagogues from objecting or being critical. In order to deal with these sensitive topics, several actions were taken in this study. We will attempt to account for and discuss these actions.

The most important principle is that all pedagogues and the children they talked about are anonymous in all kinds of presentation of the results. All specific child and staff related information was confidential between the researcher, the multidisciplinary consultant and the specific day care setting. All information was anonymised before being used as the basis for a mutual learning process. This means that everybody should be confident that no one would be able to identify the source of any statements made in the interviews.

Secondly, studies with an explicit aim of organizational development require voluntary participation. Prior to the study, both managers and all pedagogues in the 18 day-care centres were introduced to the aim of the study, their role in the study as well as the fundamental premise that the study could only take place if they agreed to participate and that every day-care centre was at liberty to decline participation without repercussions. No one declined participation. This introduction of the study, as well as other organisational developmental processes, created a relationship between the researcher on the one side and the pedagogues and managers on the other side. This relationship is the basis for making change and commonly labelled in Action Research as positioning the researcher as a 'friendly outsider' (Greenwood & Levin, 2007). This position requires trust, allowing the researcher to provide feedback of any kind to the organization. The job of the researcher in this study was understood as providing descriptive feedback to an organization, not to judge, assess or determine which actions are to be taken. Even when the pedagogues and managers in day care agreed to participate, the problem was to ensure that participation remained voluntary, especially when meeting a critique. The challenging aspect of this type of research is that neither researcher nor pedagogues have any idea of the outcome, or the specific actions to be taken by the organization as a result of the outcome. In order to maintain participation, a reflection process was initiated, as described in the following.

Thirdly, after conducting the interviews and analysis, a feedback session was held with the managers from the 18 day-care centres containing the same points presented in this article. The feedback included selected cases, selected citations as well as the central and general points from the analysis across all cases. This feedback session was planned and executed with the participation of the municipal Head of day care. During the feedback session, time was allowed for group reflections as well

as feedback and questions to the researcher. In general interest was expressed. No objections were made.

After conducting the interviews, and prior to the feedback session, only one day-care manager telephoned the researcher (the first author). He put forward the point of view that during the interview, the pedagogues in this particular day care felt that the interviewer, through the line of questions, identified concerns about the children that they did not share. In addition, he pointed out that if pedagogues were to be concerned about the children participating in the study, they would need to be concerned about a sizable amount of children. The manager also expressed that being concerned about the children was perceived as contrary to their values of having a pedagogy that focuses solely on the strengths of the child and therefore the interview was perceived as oppositional to basic values in their pedagogy. The manager was acknowledged for his point of view and for providing this feedback to the researcher.

Fourthly, all summaries of the cases have been anonymised^{iv} and sent out to every day care setting with the purpose of supporting a mutual learning process. In case the individual day care could not identify their own cases, they were offered an identification of the cases concerning their particular day care and children. As mentioned, all cases closely reflect the characteristic language of the pedagogues and include direct quotations. No comments of disapproval were put forward to the researcher as a result of this learning process. Merely, they expressed wishes of learning and enlightenment.

Fifthly, in order to support a developmental process, the municipal Head of day care has appointed the municipal multidisciplinary consultant for a two-year position with the aim of supporting the individual day care centres in creating a more structured practice focusing on the identification of children at risk and multidisciplinary collaboration. This consultant elaborates further on the reflection process initiated during the feedback process. This process was initiated approximately a year after the interviews. In addition, this consultant received supervision from the researcher (the first author).

Findings

The analysis of the 14 cases displayed a number of themes. According to the scores in SDQ, all 14 children are described as children with emotional or behavioural problems. To exemplify how themes are derived from the cases, each theme is described primarily on the basis of an analysis of case no. seven (Figure 1). This case was selected because all themes are to some extent present in this case. Examples and citations from other cases will be used as well. In the analysis we focus on the match between the pedagogues' reasoning, actions and their observations, i.e. the pedagogues may very well observe problematic behaviour but their reasoning about this problematic behaviour may change the consequence of their observations.

Reducing family concerns and weakening multidisciplinary collaboration

This theme is concerned with two issues: First of all, when reasoning about the observations, the pedagogues seem to reduce possible family-related issues and concerns to problems related to the child. Secondly, when a concern is understood as related to the child, the actions taken will most

likely concern the child – as opposed to a larger context involving other professionals in a multidisciplinary context. The life circumstances of the child do not play a visible role in the reasoning process.

With regard to the first issue, case no. seven (Figure 1) illustrates how day-care pedagogues reason that emotional deprivation is the primary cause of the girl's behaviour. Emotional deprivation may explain observations of stealing and, to some extent, the child's emotional instability, her crying and constant contact-seeking behaviour. However, considering her poor relations to adults as well as peers, her clingy behaviour and negative reactions to staff turnover and the fact that there are no adult significant others in her home environment, the girl's behaviour and circumstances could also possibly point to severely affected relational skills, due to her parental and family situation. From this perspective on the many observations, the concern might also be family related.

As part of the reasoning, the pedagogues explain the child's emotional deprivation as a result of the mother abandoning the family; this raises another very interesting question: Can only a mother provide nurture and care? The day care staff do not consider the father's parenting skills. As a parent, the father should be able to fulfil the child's need for care and nurture. So, this is not necessarily a question of being in need of a mother, but a question of the father's inability to fulfil the needs of his child. In this sense, the main concern for the child would be related to a family issue.

In case no. three, a five-year-old boy is observed as becoming very easily upset when playing with peers, as lacking strategies for actions when excluded by other children, as having a great need for control as well as being popular among peers. At the same time, the pedagogues have difficulties getting a strong relationship with this boy, he rejects them. The pedagogues know that the parents received professional help concerning relations when the boy was an infant. Day care staff explain this behaviour as an expression of low self-esteem, whereby he becomes insecure and feels the need to be in control.

The boy's behaviour shows that relations with both adults and peers are a challenge to him. In addition, based on the knowledge that the family received professional assistance earlier, there is basis to reason that the concern could equally be linked to a family issue rather than being a result of low self-esteem in the child. To day care staff, the visible signs of concern are connected to the child, not to a possible family issue.

The point being made here is that there seems to be a tendency to individualize observations and thereby overlook central aspects of risk in the life circumstances of the children - possibly by reasoning and reducing family-related issues to originate from the child. This tendency makes the wider problems experienced by these children less noticeable in the everyday life of day care.

The second issue concerns professional actions connected to this sort of reasoning. Case no. seven (Figure 1) shows observations of a girl whose need for care and nurture is reflected in her behaviour. However, no actions are taken to address the family issues. Family issues and concerns are legislatively placed under the authority of social services and day care is obliged by law to initiate a multidisciplinary collaboration and intervention.

This has two consequences: 1) the actions taken have only been based on reasoning that involves a mono-disciplinary perspective; 2) the pedagogues do not use available knowledge about the girl's life circumstances to identify and determine the severity of the issues they have observed. Therefore, day care responds to the girl's behaviour with pedagogical interventions.

To sum up, when family issues are reduced to child-related problems and life circumstances are not used actively when reasoning and trying to understand a child's behaviour, central aspects of the child, the family situation as well as its needs, may be over-looked in the everyday life of day care. In addition, this kind of reasoning weakens multidisciplinary actions.

A non-interference strategy

This theme is concerned with the need for close collaboration with the parents. In case no. seven (Figure 1), it is interesting to notice that day care, as part of their reasoning, wonders what is going on in the child's home. However, they have not pursued their interest any further. They explain that they have a great fear that this will disrupt their collaboration with the father. When this fear becomes a dominant factor or when day care assumes that intervention will have a disruptive effect on collaboration, it seems to elicit a non-interference strategy.

This non-interference strategy is also seen in the reasoning process whereby parents who are considered as resourceful are not subjects of concern. For example, in case no. six about a child having severe behavioural issues, the pedagogue comments on a possible reason why the concern goes unnoticed as well as without actions. In relation to the parents, she says:

'Maybe for us, the challenge is that the parents seem so resourceful that we are not at all discovering that they may have a problem'

The importance of a close collaborative relationship with parents, as well as the perception that some parents are not considered as subjects of concern, seems to elicit a non-interference strategy and thereby minimal discussion and dialogue with parents about concerns about their child. Unfortunately, this non-interference strategy causes some of the risks faced by children to go somewhat unnoticed because the difficulties are not discussed in full with the parents and therefore cannot be acted upon.

The organizational context and culture

The organizational and cultural context of day care frames daily practice with regard to the identification process and mono- as well as multidisciplinary actions.

Identification of children at risk is typically handled through dialogue, either in daily practice or formally at staff meetings. Staff meeting agendas almost always include an item called 'children', where various children are discussed. A pedagogue says:

'It is not the same children we pay attention to at every meeting'.

Only children who attract attention in everyday activities are the focus for discussion. According to the pedagogues, attention is paid to children presently showing *visible* changes in behaviour, meaning that only children who attract attention are discussed and identified as being at risk. This could imply that the organizational context and culture of day care promotes a non-explicitly structured identification process concerning all children.

In addition, not all observations attract attention and the allocation of attention to some observations rather than others appears to be non-explicitly structured as well.

In case no. seven (Figure 1), actions are taken towards letting the same pedagogue match the child's need for care and nurture and, to some extent, emotional deprivation. However, as shown in the case, no steps are taken in relation to the observations that the child's position among her peers is vague and that her peer relations are unstable, or in relation to her family situation.

This implies that only some observations from the day-care context are acted upon, that is, some observations attract attention while others go unnoticed. This is not necessarily uncommon seeing as not every observation requires attention or action. However, seemingly, this selection process as to which observations are given priority is not subject to analysis – nor is it part of an organizationally framed process, and thereby a very important part of the analytical process becomes imperceptible. The significance of the behaviours somehow disappears during the process of reasoning. This non-structured process also implies that perhaps not every need displayed by the child at risk is being met.

Finally, regarding the organizational framing, in several cases, when asked why they have not involved social services in relation to a family concern, day care staff respond with similar, and sometimes circumstantial, causes. For instance, a day-care manager, with regard to case no. eleven, says that social services are:

'Not even close to being part of our line of thought. Our first thought would be to contact PPR [educational counselling]. And it takes a lot for us to contact a social worker (...).'

In case no. six, when asked why they have not acted on a concern with a multidisciplinary response, a pedagogue says:

'It's actually incredible that so many years have passed and we do not know what to do.'

In case no. eight, a pedagogue's response reflects her preconceived opinion of other professionals:

'What can she (a social worker) offer that we are not already doing or capable of?'

To sum up, the organizational context and culture frames a non-explicitly structured practice in relation to identification of children at risk. Not all observations attract attention and the allocation of attention to some observations appears imperceptible and unstructured. In addition multidisciplinary collaborations are not an obvious part of the day care culture. This has implications for identification of children at risk because it makes day care hesitant towards professional actions, especially actions that require a multidisciplinary response. In this sense the risks in the lives of the children become invisible in the everyday life of day care.

Discussion

In this article, we focus on the role of professional reasoning when it comes to identification of children at risk as well as the identification of professional actions in connection to needs of children at risk.

The analysis showed possible explanations for why some aspects of risk might become invisible in the everyday life of day care. When observations are individualised and life circumstances are not used actively when reasoning, aspects may be over-looked. In addition, this kind of reasoning weakens multidisciplinary actions. The importance of a close collaborative relationship with parents seems to elicit a non-interference strategy and inhibit professional actions, both mono- as well as multidisciplinary, because the difficulties are not discussed in full with parents, and thus cannot be acted upon. In addition, the organizational context and culture frames a non-explicitly structured practice in relation to identification of children at risk and multidisciplinary collaborations are not an obvious part of the day care culture. Both aspects seem to contribute to aspects of risk becoming invisible in the everyday life of day care.

In order to comprehend these findings, Argyris' (2012) theoretical concept on defensive routines is applied, amongst others, in order to shed some light on the everyday practice of day care. A child at risk from family-related issues may be a potentially threatening situation for day care.

In several cases, day care staff understand the child's difficulties as being related to the child rather than the family. This can be understood as an outcome of model-one thinking in day care that results in both defensive thinking and routines. As a consequence, the identification process (observations), the explanations for the concern (reasoning) as well as the professional actions become fragmented at best. In relation to model-two thinking, day care staff have observations of the child at risk; they do not, however, use these observations to make knowledge-based choices, to evaluate or correct actions taken in a structured manner. Therefore the practice has the characteristics of only model-one thinking.

The defensive routines and model-one thinking are both part of an organizational frame for pedagogical work and they may be significant explanations of why significant issues of risk become invisible in the everyday life of day care.

Another important part of defensive thinking (Argyris, 2012) relates to fear of disrupting collaboration with parents. This seems to create a non-interference strategy.

The pedagogues feel that if they confront parents with a severe concern, there is a great risk of jeopardizing collaboration with parents. Either the pedagogues do not confront parents and thereby do not disrupt the collaboration with parents. Or, they create a way of thinking that can avoid confrontation with the parents.

The fear of losing the collaborative relationship with parents can therefore be seen as a defensive routine, created by model-one thinking. As a result, the concern for the child at risk is not discussed or handled in collaboration with the parents. At best, the child is noticed and supported by pedagogical interventions; at worst, the risk to the child is overlooked and the concern for the child's well-being is not acted upon.

Another way of comprehending the fear of jeopardizing collaboration with parents is to look at the non-confrontational strategy. Maybe the motivation for avoidance is based on a strong organizational culture (Alvesson, 2013) regarding collaboration. When asked, day care staff emphasise the

values of a positive collaborative relationship with parents and in their own opinion they are quite good at creating and maintaining such a positive relationship. Now, in order to preserve such an organizational value and culture, the pedagogues are more likely to avoid confrontation with the parents for fear of compromising the relationship, and in this sense compromising their organizational values.

The organizational context creates meaning in everyday practice and is central to understanding professional actions (Ojala & Venninen, 2011). During the interviews, the pedagogues were asked about everyday practice concerning identification and whether they apply a specific methodology to identify children at risk. Seemingly, day care staff do not apply a structured or methodological approach regarding identification nor do they regularly perform reviews of all children.

This non-explicitly structured everyday practice could imply a non-explicit organizational cultural context (Alvesson, 2013) for framing identification of children at risk. The frame does not seem to support structure for the analytical process of observing, reasoning and acting. The analytical reasoning (Munro, 1999) in the everyday practice, as well as at staff meetings, seems fragmented. The everyday practice and observations as well as the staff meetings do not seem to frame or motivate analytical reasoning nor do staff members end up with a plan of action for the child in question. In several cases no clear plan of actions had been agreed upon. This implies that day care, as a shared process with colleagues and parents alike, cannot follow closely the development of a child at risk, nor can staff evaluate the actions they take.

On the one hand, the non-structured practice can be understood in relation to how these observations are handled and reasoned about in everyday practice. Perhaps, in everyday practice, children are identified based on intuitive processes rather than analytical reasoning (Munro, 1999). Intuitive processes are not structured step-by-step or logical, they are not conscious, and this serves well in everyday action in complex situations. Day-care pedagogues have to act and make decisions rapidly in complex everyday activities. As Munro (1999) points out, professionals make mental shortcuts to save time in an overwhelming daily practice. Such shortcuts eliminate the use of some of the knowledge available to the pedagogue, in this sense oversimplifying judgment. In this way, it makes sense that the pedagogues apply intuitive reasoning rather than analytical reasoning when it comes to identification of children at risk. The main challenge here being that intuitive reasoning cannot be trusted completely because it is unstructured and imperceptible (Munro, 1999). Now, this is not an argument to say that analytical reasoning is better or flawless. Merely, it is pointing to the fact that when observations are not shared amongst colleagues in an explicitly structured manner there's a possibility of overlooking risk, clouding judgement and thereby weakening the basis for helping children. The analytical reasoning and the structured framing of professional dialogue might add aspects to the intuitive processes and thereby contribute to a process where risk is not overlooked and where observations are given value based on a conscious and knowledge-based choice.

On the other hand, the non-structured practice can also be understood in terms of organizational culture (Alvesson, 2013). When the organization has no framework, no shared social pattern regarding systematic reviews of all children and analytical reasoning in cases of children at risk, then each pedagogue is left alone – and the use of intuitive processes might not be applied either. Culture is exchanged between the members of the organization, and structured reviews of all children and

analytical reasoning are not a significant part of the professional exchange. Identification and reasoning therefore becomes circumstantial as well as possibly imperceptible.

Conclusion

The analysis and discussion suggest that organizational culture frames a non-explicitly structured process of identifying children at risk. This may suggest that pedagogues in day care are left to their own devices and that the reasoning is not always made part of a deliberate dialogue and analytical process. The outcome of this suggests that problems and life circumstances of children at risk become somewhat invisible. When risks become invisible, it not only impedes the mono-professional help that children receive; it especially weakens provision of crucial multidisciplinary collaborative support to both children at risk and their families.

Our point in this article is in no way to discredit the pedagogical profession, nor is it to advocate for a specific methodical approach to identification of children at risk and the reasoning process behind this. Merely, our point is that if we are to identify and act according to the observations made by pedagogues, then the reasoning process needs to be supported organizationally.

This conclusion points to a great potential in Danish day care for developing an organizational culture and everyday practice that will support and motivate a more explicit use of a more structured identification process as well as a more analytically driven reasoning process when helping children at risk.

References

- Alvesson, M. (2002). *Understanding organizational culture*. London: Sage.
- Alvesson, M. (2013). *Understanding organizational culture* (2nd edition). London: Sage.
- Argyris, C. (1990). *Overcoming Organizational Defenses*. Needham Heights, MA: Allyn and Bacon.
- Argyris, C. (2012). *Organizational Traps: Leadership, Culture, Organizational Design*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Bennet, J. (2010). Pedagogy in Early Childhood Services with Special Reference to Nordic Approaches. *Psychological Science and Education*, 3, 16-21.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77-101. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Carr, A. (Ed.) (2002). *Prevention: What Works with Children and Adolescents?* New York: Brunner-Routledge.
- DePanfilis, D. & Zuravin, S. J. (2001). Assessing Risk to Determine the Need for Services. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 23(1), 3-10.
- Elden, E. & Levin, M. (1991). Cogenerative Learning. Bringing Participation into Action Research. In: W. F. Whyte (ed.), *Participatory Action Research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications Inc.
- Gambrill, E. & Shlonsky, A. (2001). The Need for Comprehensive Risk Management Systems in Child Welfare. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 23(1), 79-107.
- Goodman, R. (1997). The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire: A Research Note. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry, and Allied Disciplines*, 38, 581-586.
- Goodman, R. (1999). The Extended Version of the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire as a Guide to Child Psychiatric Caseness and Consequent Burden. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry, and Allied Disciplines*, 40, 791-799.
- Goodman, R. & Scott, S. (1999). Comparing the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire and the Child Behavior Checklist: Is Small Beautiful? *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology*, 27(1), 17-24.
- Goodman, R., Ford, T., Simmons, H., Gatward, R., & Meltzer, H. (2000). Using the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) to screen for child psychiatric disorders in a community sample. *The British Journal of Psychiatry*, 177, 534-539.
- Greenwood, D. J. (2002). Action Research. Unfilled promises and unmet challenges. *Concepts and Transformation*, 7(2), 117-139.

- Greenwood, D. & Levin, M. (2007): *Introduction to Action Research. Social Research for Social Change*. 2nd edition. Sage Publications.
- Greenwood, D.J., Whyte, W.F. & Harkavy, I (1993): Participatory Action Research as a Process and as a Goal. *Human Relations*, Vol. 46 No. 2
- Hammond, K. (1996). *Human Judgement and Social Policy*. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press.
- Hastrup, K. (2004): *Refleksion. Vidensbegreber og videnskab*. I: Hastrup, K (ed): *Viden om verden. En grundbog i antropologisk analyse*. Hans Reitzels Forlag
- Henriksen, H. (2012). *Om metodefriheden – og dens fjender*. Munkebo: Forlaget Fjordager.
- Jensen, A. S., Broström, S., & Hansen, O.H. (2010). Critical perspectives on Danish early childhood education and care: between the technical and the political. *Early Years*, 30(3), 243–254.
- Jensen, B., Jensen, N. R., & Andersen, T. V. (2005). *Kompetence- og metodeudvikling i daginstitutioner – om implementering af 'ny viden' i praksis*. København: Danmarks Pædagogiske Universitets Forlag.
- Mehlbye, J., Jensen, B., Nielsen, H., Thorgaard, T., Andersen, J., & Gundelach, S. (2009). Socialt udsatte børn i dagtilbud – indsats og effekt. Sammenfattende rapport. København: Indenrigs- og socialministeriet. Anvendt Kommunal Forskning & Danmarks Pædagogiske Universitets-skole, Aarhus Universitet.
- Munro, E. (1999). *Common errors of reasoning in child protection work*. London: LSE Research Articles Online.
- Munro, E. (2005). What Tools do we Need to Improve Identification of Child Abuse? *Child Abuse Review*, 14, 374-388.
- Munro, E. (2010). Learning to Reduce Risk in Child Protection. *British Journal of Social Work*, 40, 1135-1151.
- Mølholt, A. K. (2008). *Når det kommer til stykket, så er det jo vores hverdag, det handler om. En undersøgelse af pædagogernes arbejdsvilkår med særligt fokus på professionalisering og autonomi*. København: BUPL.
- Ojala, M. & Venninen, T. (2011). Developing reflective practices for day-care centres in the Helsinki Metropolitan Area. *Reflective Practice*, 12(3), 335–346.
- Patton, M. Q. (1994). Developmental evaluation. *Evaluation Practice*, 15(3), 311-319.
[http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/0886-1633\(94\)90026-4](http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/0886-1633(94)90026-4)

- Patton, M. Q. (2011). *Developmental evaluation: Applying complexity concepts to enhance innovation and use*. New York: Guilford Press.
- Plough, N. (2007). *Socialt udsatte børn. Identifikation, viden og handlemuligheder i daginstitutioner*. København: SFI.
- Poland, B. D. (2002). Transcription quality. In: J. F. Gubrium & J. A. Holstein (Eds): *Handbook of interview research: context and method* (pp. 629-649). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications Inc.
- Villumsen, A.M. & Kristensen, O.S. (2015): From management to leadership: A shift towards understanding the organizational complexity of multidisciplinary collaboration. *European Journal of Social Work*. In Press.
- Villumsen, A. M., & Kristensen, O. S. (2013). Hvorfor er det så svært? Sporarbejde i den tidlige tværfaglige indsats [Why so difficult? Trackwork in early multidisciplinary intervention]. Diplomuddannelsen på børne- og ungeområdet, København: Socialstyrelsen. http://www.boerneungediplom.dk/filer/Fil203_Model-for-tidlig-tvaerfaglig-indsats-og-bilag-3.pdf.
- Whyte, W. F. (Ed.) (1991). *Participatory Action Research*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications Inc.
- Whyte, W. F. (1995): Encounters with Participatory Action Research. *Qualitative Sociology*. 18(3), 1995.

Figure 1 – case example of case no. seven

OBSERVATIONS – GIRL (five years of age)	OBSERVATIONS – FAMILY	REASONING	ACTIONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Emotionally unstable, cries a lot, does not respond well to demands - Steals/takes objects or food from day care and peers - Plays mainly with peers when it comes to stealing - Watches the mood of adults around her constantly – with the purpose of gain (to steal objects or food) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Single parent/father - Mother abandoned family when girl was nine months old - Mother is a drug addict and a criminal - Basic needs are taken care of - Father has a bad temper and speaks in a rough manner to the girl - Father has a job and is very busy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Day care has been concerned all along, but their concern increases as the girl gets older - The child needs a mother and lacks nurture and care - She is not ‘filled up’ emotionally - neither is the father (when day care talks about the child, the father usually directs the 	<p>Pedagogically:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Meeting with father who seemed aloof and on his guard - Another meeting is scheduled <p>Contemplating:</p> <p>1) To let the girl stay in her group during the last year of day care (normally the children change groups and pedagogues the last year before school) to</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Does not demonstrate age-appropriate behaviour in relation to adults; clings a lot and constantly seeks adult care and physical contact (targeting a particular pedagogue) - Reacts a great deal to staff turnovers - Seems afraid of her father's anger - Insightful and intelligent child who knows more and worries more than she has to - Good at seeing connections when it comes to stealing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Father also shows concern for his daughter's well-being and recognizes the behaviour described by day care - No large family network that can provide nurture and care 	<p>conversation to himself)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The father's own childhood was not a very good one and he too lacked nurture and care, and as a youngster he got into trouble - The child steals because she is emotionally deprived - Day care wonders what is going on at home 	<p>maintain relations with her preferred adult</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2) To clarify the extent of the child's emotional distress 3) To meet with social services and health care nurse 4) To meet with social services and health care. However, they worry about their collaboration with the father
--	---	--	--

Table 1: The prediction of any diagnoses or emotional/behavioural difficulties of the SDQ in the selected group of children (N=14). Numbers indicate the number of children in different groups

SDQ	High risk 10% of the population	Medium risk 10% of the population	Low risk 80% of the population
Any diagnosis	7	6	1
Emotional difficulties	6	3	5
Behavioural difficulties	1	7	6

ⁱ Pedagogue and social pedagogue are not commonly used international terms but were introduced very early in Danish discussions on social welfare. In this article, pedagogue is used as a term to describe the professional who is educated (Bachelor's degree) to create a pedagogically supported environment for child care and child development. Social workers have different qualifications.

ⁱⁱ We apply 'children at risk' throughout the article as an overall concept for children at risk in general. In this study, however, the target group are children who are causes for concern in relation to social and emotional development and they have not been described as children at risk, but as children who raise cause for concern, or children in a potentially at risk position or situation.

ⁱⁱⁱ Fifteen children were originally selected on the basis of the SDQ. One child was excluded due to lack of qualitative information about the child's behaviour during the interview.

^{iv} Of course in most cases, it was possible for the individual day-care to identify themselves. The sole purpose here was to make sure that the individual day-care centre could not be identified by others if they did not wish to be.