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In dialogue with children. Children's experiences of everyday life in residential care

The PhD-study is an ethnographic exploration of children's experiences of their everyday life while living in residential care in Denmark. An everyday life perspective captures the variety of different aspects and arenas in a child's life. The objective is to explore how the children move between and connect the variety of social arenas, which their everyday life is composed by while living in care and as a contextual setting the study also explores in which way institutional and pedagogical practises and processes – formal as well as informal - influence everyday life of the children.

The study is carried out in three residential child care units in Denmark. Fieldwork periods of two times three months encompasses participant observation in the units, following a selection of children in schools, after-school care and leisure activities, participation in staff meetings, interviews with the children, including charts that the children drew of their significant relationships, and charts of time spent on different activities during a week, and a survey with the staff about the children's different relationships and activities.

As a part of exploring the children's own perspectives of their everyday life while being in care each child was given a single-use camera for a week, to take pictures of what is important to them in their daily life. As I am now analysing the photographs, my presentation will focus on the methodology of using cameras. I will discuss the use of visual methods as a participatory research method with children. How the photographs together with a follow-up interview give access to situations or arenas that researchers usually do not have access to; to see photographs as an ethical alternative to research methods controlled by researchers, a method where the children are active in the research process, and as a general upgrading of children's everyday knowledge. Empirical cases will suggest that the method likewise can be used as a pedagogical tool. Ethical issues will be addressed, as well as some preliminary findings.