Affects: Disciplining, negotiation and (in)appropriateness

**Abstract**

In this paper I will focus on affects in kindergarten and consider the work of Deleuze and Guattari and their understandings of affects in a poststructuralist theoretical framework.

I am interested in how affects are transmitted in kindergarten, how they are expressed both by children and kindergarten-teachers through different intensities and what influence they can have on children’s ways of becoming (in) appropriate children. I try to concentrate on why certain affects have to be disciplined? And into what? Are there any affects that are more (in)appropriate to transmit than others? And what impact does it seem to have on a child’s positioning options?

I will include voices from both children and kindergarten-teachers in addition to observation notes.

**Introduction**

To position this paper, it is relevant to concretise what my Ph.D. Project is about and where I speak from in my work.

My PhD project began in November 2010 and the aim for my project is to make a qualitative study of how bullying is constituted in kindergarten. My empirical work is based on observations and interviews with children and kindergarten teachers in a Danish kindergarten. I am not only interested in the children’s peer relations, but also in how the kindergarten teachers have an influence on these. More precisely I am interested in, how the children become (in)appropriate kindergarten children, and when certain episodes, positions, categories etc., are being recognized as tipping over into bullying.

My theoretical framework draws mainly on discursive psychology, post structuralism and cultural psychology. Thus I draw on an understanding of bullying as a social and cultural phenomenon and that bullying is not only about individual matters, but must be seen as a phenomenon constituted through many different forces. These forces could be the history of the child/adult, the history of the group, discourses, positions, physical environment, affects, technology etc. (see also Søndergaard, 2009).

All these forces may intersect with each other, and to understand the constitution of bullying we must take the specificities of every local context into consideration.

This way of understanding bullying also means, that positions and categories can’t be understood as stable and ultimate, but must be understood as fluid and able to negotiation and intersect (see Davies, 2000; Staunæs, 2004; Søndergaard, 1996).

**What are affects and why are they interesting?**

Contrary to my theoretical understanding of bullying, much bullying research emerges from the general assumption that the different positions in bullying, victim, bystanders and bullies, are stable and more or less always taken up by the same individual. (Olweus 1992).

Furthermore there is an assumption, that the two main positions in bullying – bullies and victims – can be recognized through different recognition structures. As Olweus claims, the victim is perceived, as having low self-esteem, is weak, depressed, anxious and insecure. Conversely the bully is aggressive, anti-social and displays a lack of empathy (Olweus, 1992). It would seem that some of these recognition structures are closely linked with emotions.

If I consider these assumptions and talk about emotions within a poststructuralist theoretical framework, emotions can be seen as ways of presenting yourself. Thus emotions can not be seen as individually constructed but must be understood only as meaningful through cultural and social resources (Wetherell & Potter, 2001, Gergen, 2002, 2010; Bloch, 2007). Emotions are being constructed through discourses and through interactions with others. This also means that in every (sub)culture and every context there will be some constructed norms of emotions.

These norms seem to have an influence on which emotions can be expressed, how they can be expressed and what position is offered to you through these expressions. If I put this understanding into the context of kindergarten, it means that children have to follow the norms of emotions, and some times have to suppress certain emotions or adapt them into the emotion culture. If they fail to conform to the ‘norms of emotion’ they can end up being recognized and positioned as inappropriate kindergarten children.

I tried to apply this understanding to my empirical work but there remained questions that I could not answer.

In my empirical work most of the children know and are able to articulate the rules about appropriate kindergarten ‘behaviour’. They know that it is inappropriate to kick, hit, yell, scream, bite etc, but nevertheless these ‘behaviour’ occur. Why?

Furthermore both kindergarten teachers and children talk a lot about emotions. They talk about sadness, anger, irritation, awkwardness, joy etc. but how can I capture these emotions in my analysis?

When emotions are being articulated directly it seems “easy” to catch them and drag them into my analysis, but everything becomes messy and difficult when emotions are not explicated through words, but instead through non-verbal communication, mime, sound etc.

In an attempt to grasp this ‘messiness’ I turned to Deleuze and Guattari’s theory of affects.

According to Deleuze and Guattari affects are becoming, and they are prepersonal, unformed and unstructured (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). Affects can be transmitted through every form of communication. For example tone of voice, facial expressions, breathing, posture etc. However, this does not mean that my feelings can become another’s. I will never be completely capable of making you feel what I feel, or to completely understand your feelings.

It is therefore useful to distinguish between affects, emotions and feelings.

“*Affect is the active discharge of emotion, the counterattack, whereas feeling is an always displaced, retarded, resisting emotion*” (ibid: 400)

Feelings are personal and biographical, emotions are social and are the projection of feelings, and affects are prepersonal. Affects are not a personal feeling but rather non-conscious experiences of intensity. Intensity that can be expressed through temperature, pressure, speed, etc. Affects are therefore about the ways bodies affect one another. (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987)

According to Colman affects in Deleuzian and Guattarian understanding: “*is the change, or variation, that occurs when bodies collide, or come into contact. As a body, affect is the knowable product of an encounter, specific in its ethical and lived dimensions and yet it is also as indefinite as the experience of a sunset, transformation, or ghost.*  (Coleman in Parr, 2005:11) And at the same time: “*A body’s function or potential or ‘meaning’ becomes entirely dependent on which other bodies or machines it forms an assemblage with*” (Malins, 2004: 85).

In my readings I will try to grasp why children, even though they seem to know how to ‘behave’, still ‘get into trouble’, and what consequences it seems to have on them becoming (in)appropriate kindergarten children. In this paper I am particularly interested in how (in)appropriateness is being constructed between kindergarten teachers and children. It is therefore important to be aware that I leave out some messiness in concentrating on these relations, and not simultaneously relations among only children or only kindergarten teachers.

The main purpose of this paper, is to analyse intensities and affects, how they intersect with positions, categories, power etc., and what impact all of these forces intertwined may impact upon a child’s potential to become an (in)appropriate kindergarten child. I will not be focusing on a concrete bully-example, but I will try to show how emotions and affects are meaningful to the ways in which children can position themselves and be positioned. Meanings that ultimately can have an influence on what episodes and positions are being recognized as appertaining to bullying.

In the analysis I will distinguish between feelings, emotions and affects. I will not concentrate on feelings (as these can never be completely undestood), but only on affects and emotions. Affects as presented above, and emotions as *formed* affects, by which I mean affects transformed into cultural recognizable emotions[[1]](#footnote-1). To elaborate my point, happiness, joy, sadness, anger etc., can be seen as only meaningful and recognizable through those affects formed and attached to it. Happiness can be recognized by smiles, laughter, a casual body etc. and the emotion by itself would have no meaning without these connected affects. In which case it would only be “empty words”.

I will attempt to understand affects in the empirical work, by looking/listening for several things. In the first instance I look/listen for spoken words and the ways emotions are being articulated. Secondly I will focus upon bodily expressions and actions to understand the affects. And finally I will look/listen for intensities.

**An affective story**

To guide the reader, I will start this first analytic move with an observation note.

*Jacob, Toby and Liam have come into conflict. Liam has been asking the two boys if they would play with him, but Jacob said no and pushed him away. Now Jacob and Toby stands close together as if to show they are two against one. Liam picks up a large brick and lifts it over his head. MARY[[2]](#footnote-2) comes along and apparently she has been aware of the situation. Without saying anything, she takes the brick out of Liam’s hand and throws it into the bushes. Afterwards she moves on as if nothing happened. When MARY is out of sight, Jacob and Toby throw themselves on top of Liam. Liam is now lying underneath the two boys. Liam is trying to move and everything seems very intense. Suddenly Liam escapes their grasp and gets on his feet. Jacob and Toby get up very fast and start to run in two different directions. Liam sees a piece of toy, picks it up and starts chasing Toby. Liam’s body is tense, he frowns and he shouts out very loudly: “I am going to scrape your skin off with this!” Toby is getting near SALLY. He is running fast, and he looks over his shoulder several times, and his eyes are wide open. When Toby gets to the adult he stops. He is breathless and he places himself behind SALLY. In between his breaths he says: “Liam teases me…”While Liam is passing SALLY, SALLY grabs his arm and pulls him towards her. His back against her stomach. She says: “Cool down. You are not allowed to hit!” (She raises her voice and frowns). Liam:” Let me go! Let me go! Let me go!!!!” (Liam is yelling and trying to wrench himself free from her grasp) SALLY: “Only if you don’t hit” She holds him even tighter and raises her voice a little more. Liam has now turned himself around so his stomach is against SALLY’s legs. SALLY lifts him up in his arms in a way so Liam’s face is now opposite her own. Then she frowns a little more and says firmly:” So now cool it!!”. Liam doesn’t answer, but he loosens his frowning and goes limp and SALLY relaxes her grip on him.*

**When anger goes mad**

Through my observation period I followed all three boys closely. Jacob and Toby often participated in different games, while Liam often got a “No” as an answer to his attempts to participate. In this observation Liam, Toby and Jacob are in conflict which starts from when Liam tries to gain access to Jacob and Toby’s play. In the moment where Jacob says “No” the tension increases. Jacob pushes Liam, Toby and Jacob are moving their bodies together, facial expressions become firm, and Liam picks up a brick to show that even though they are two against one, he is not giving up. MARY, who is aware of the situation from a distance, sets herself in motion, and without saying a word, she removes the brick from Liam’s hand. As if to say, ‘this is too much’.

As soon as MARY is out of sight Jacob and Toby throws themselves at Liam. They do not say a word, but every muscle of their bodies is tensed up. No one is laughing or smiling. The whole situation oozes of seriousness.

When Liam escapes Jacob and Toby’s grasp and gets back on his feet, he frowns and Jacob and Toby act on Liam’s facial expression by running. It is as if they know the situation can get even more serious. That even though Liam has not got a brick anymore, he is still a potential threat.

Relevant to the story is the fact that Liam is often articulated as a boy with a really bad temper. As one of the kindergarten teachers says: “ *Liam has a really short fuse and when it is being ignited he explodes… He is having difficulty controlling his temper and the other children get frightened. When he freaks out he has no filter… Then he just runs amok…”*

Liam is positioned as a boy who can not control himself. He “freaks out”, “has no filter” and “runs amok”. Maybe this is why Jacob and Toby choose to run. And maybe this is why Toby runs towards the nearest kindergarten teacher – SALLY. As Toby runs towards SALLY his eyes shows that this is a serious matter, and so does his speed, his wide open eyes and his looking back over his shoulder. The level of intensity is high, and Toby seeks help from SALLY. SALLY who has not seen what have happened before Toby comes running, acts on Toby’s affects and she seems to recognize them as a sign of the emotion fear, as she lets him stand behind her, as if she is protecting him.

When Liam comes along with his tensed up body, his frowning and his loud voice yelling: “*“I am going to scrape your skin off with this!”* his transmitted affects quickly seem to position him into the emotion ‘anger’ and “the danger” making Toby scared. Frowning, a tensed up body and yelling seem to be recognized as serious in an inappropriate way. If Liam had been walking slowly, smiling or laughing it would probably have called for another recognition.

It is in this exact encounter between Liam’s body (with his frowning and yelling), and Toby’s body (running with wide-open eyes and a serious face) that make certain positions effective. Toby is a boy in danger while Liam is the troublemaker and the one who needs to be disciplined and stopped. It is earlier narratives, the transmitted affects, the ways other bodies are being affected, intensities and the way these interact with each other, which helps position Toby and Liam in these ways. Toby as the victim and Liam as the perpetrator.

**Acting back on affects**

SALLY has not been aware of the situation with the boys. She had not seen that Liam was being excluded and that this episode could have initiated his affects. SALLY acts affectively back on what she sees and hears, and she recognizes and positions Toby and Liam according to their bodily expressions, voices and transmitted affects.

Perhaps her affects also are intermingled with her earlier experiences with Liam.

According to one of the kindergarten teachers something is “wrong” with Liam. He is a child *causing* trouble, not a child *in* trouble. Because of his bad temper his affects need to be disciplined before they ‘get out of hand’.

This narrative of Liam is very strong and during the period of time I spent in the kindergarten it occurred to me, that almost everyone drew on this narrative of Liam. If I read this narrative into my analysis it could perhaps explain why SALLY did not ask any questions about the whole situation. She positions in the light of earlier experiences and those affects being transmitted and recognized as certain emotions.

But what if Liam had supplied his transmissions with tears? What if he had been crying as well?

In my empirical work it appears, that if a child intersected affects recognized as anger with affects recognized as sadness it could call for another set of positions. Anger intersected with sadness could call for comfort while anger alone called for discipline and correction, which makes it appropriate to ask why Liam did not cry as well?

Here the poststructuralist theory can be useful. Of course I can not know for sure, but if Liam had been crying it could possibly have led to him receiving comfort, but in the same motion it could have positioned him in an unattractive way. Unattractive compared to Toby and Jacob, as crying can be a sign of weakness and abandonment, and thus could help to position him as the weakest and the losing party in their relationship. A position that would have made it even harder for Liam to win some of the definition of power in their relationship.

**We need some discipline!**

Further on in the observation, SALLY grasps Liam while Liam is yelling: “*Let me go! Let me go! Let me go!!!!”* and while he is trying to wrench himself free from her grasp. It seems that SALLY is being affected by these affects in a way that makes her conclude that Liam is still angry and she continues to restrain Liam. Since Liam does not calm down SALLY lifts Liam up until his face is opposite her own. At the same time she frowns and says with a certain raised voice: “*So now cool it!”*

Her frown and raised voice can be seen as her acting back on Liam’s transmitted affects. Her facial expression mirrors Liam’s, and Liam takes up her transmissions by relaxing his own frowning and the tension of his body. At that moment SALLY puts him down and loosens her grasp.

Transmitted affects affect other bodies and make them act back on these transmitters with new transmitters and so forth. The act from SALLY to Liam seemed not only to show this acting back and forth, but also that affects could be disciplined with affects.

When any child expressed affects like yelling, hitting and kicking etc., they called for discipline. This disciplining could be done by telling the child to leave the room, sit on a bench to think about “what they had been doing wrong” or their affects could be disciplined in the same way as SALLY did with Liam. A way the children recognized and articulated as scolding. But the disciplining could also happen when the children were happy. As an example too strongly expressed happiness could be disciplined by telling the children to “cool it!” or by telling the children to “Go outside”.

As I observed the children in kindergarten it occurred to me, that the children transmitted many kinds of affects and at the same time in a more “powerful” way than adults. Sometimes they would cry loudly, and sometimes jump around laughing and making tomfoolery. At no time did I observe such ‘behaviour’ from the kindergarten teachers.

This aroused my interest. Why did certain affects had to be disciplined? And into what? Were there any affects that were more (in)appropriate to transmit than others?

In the interviews with the kindergarten teachers, it became clear, that loudly transmitted affects weren’t recognized as appropriate because they produced unrest as in loud voices and fast movement, and therefore needed to be disciplined.

When asking one of the kindergarten teachers about unrest in kindergarten she responded:

*“[…] We spend a lot of time making the children quiet…*” and when I asked her why they need this quietness she said:

“*… I don’t know… Maybe it is a chaosthing… Like oh no no no… […] we have so many things we have to do and unrest makes us lose control”*

Loudly transmitted affects could lead to unrest which could lead to chaos and loss of control, and therefore it had to be disciplined into quietness. Apparently quietness was a sign to the kindergarten teachers, that there was a well-being among the children and that they could feel success and control within their work.

**This is enough!!!**

It was the kindergarten teachers who had the sovereign power to determine when rules and expectations were broken (for example through unrest) and the way SALLY disciplined Liam, was often recognized and articulated as scolding by the children.

Scolding took a lot of space in my interviews with the children, and according to them, scolding could be recognized in these ways: “ *Their* [the kindergarten teachers] *faces change colours from white to red”, “they are raising their voices”, “they get wrinkled faces”, “it is when they get evil”, “they get really angry”* and *“sometimes they grasp us and that actually hurts”*.

When the kindergarten teachers were scolding the children recognized it as a sign of anger or evilness, which seemed to be a paradox.

Scolding was used to maintain the rules/norms in kindergarten, but also for disciplining and taming affect. It was used as a discipline tool with the aim to normalize and maybe even as an attempt to neutralise unrest and inappropriate affects. When the kindergarten teachers used scolding everybody knew that somebody had broken a rule and crossed the line of appropriateness.

In the example with Liam, SALLY acted back on Liam’s affects by picking him up, grasping him, raising her voice, frowning etc. The affects Liam transmitted seem to be acted back on in almost the exact same way as Liam did it in the first place. It was as if SALLY tried to tame the intensities and affect transmissions by transmitting the same set of intensities and affects. And maybe she had success doing that, because one of the differences between Liam and SALLY was, that Liam was a child and SALLY was a kindergarten teacher.

As Deleuze and Guattari points out some bodies have much greater power to affect otherbodies (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987).

Mixed with positions and power, affects become recognized according to this mixture.

In continuation hereof loudly transmitted affects among children was recognized as inappropriate because they produced unrest, while loudly transmitted affects among kindergarten teachers was recognized as appropriate and necessary in kindergarten to maintain or produce quietness.

One could ask if disciplining affects actually made the feelings go away? If I had been hanging in the arms of a giant with no opportunities to win the battle, would I feel better?

According to the children they could not rebel against the kindergarten teachers. Rebellion against the teachers would lead to further scolding, which was not appealing. And when I asked the children what scolding felt like, some of them said: “*When they [*the kindergarten teachers*] yell at me I can’t breathe”, “It is really embarrassing”, ”it’s the worst” etc.*

It seemed that disciplining done through affect-transmissions recognized as the emotion anger, could produce other sets of affects and emotions. Apparently anger directed from kindergarten teachers against the children could produce emotions like anxiety and embarrassment. Anxiety since yelling, grasping and facial expressions in certain ways could be felt as a violation, because the kindergarten teachers already had the power of definition, and embarrassment because scolding or anger often was transmitted in intensities of high tones, tensed up bodies etc., and therefore mixed with power and positions made it possible for everyone to hear and see that you had done something ‘wrong’ and were positioned as an inappropriate child in kindergarten. If I revisit my data, it becomes clear, that affects attached to anxiety and embarrassment were often expressed silently. Not being able to breath, looking down into the ground etc., did not make any noise. Therefore perhaps these emotions needed no discipline or taming.

**Emotions as a resource strategy**

Even though Deleuze and Guattari writes that affects are unconscious, the children seemed to be aware which affects was being transformed and recognized as certain emotions.

An example to elaborate this statement follows:

*Three girls are playing in the sandpit, and two of the girls (Julie and Tammy) get into a fight because of a shovel. At last Julie wins the shovel, and Tammy scratches Julie’s hand. Julie gets upset and Tammy moves about 3 meters away from the other two girls.*

*Julie yells: “You are SO stupid…. You ARE so stupid…!” (Tears are rolling down her cheeks). Tammy looks at Julie with a serious glance, and then she calls the nearest teacher: “Julie says I’m stupid” (She uses a whining voice). None of the teachers around seem to notice, but Julie starts yelling: “No! I said you WASN’T stupid… You are NOT stupid..” (Her eyes are wide open) Tammy calls the nearest teachers one more time, still with a whining voice, and this time MARIA hears her, and starts moving towards the girls. When she gets there she says to Julie: “It is not okay to say anybody is stupid” Julie says: “But she scratched me!” (She starts crying again). MARIA turns around and looks at Tammy: “And it is not allowed to scratch anyone either”. MARIA leaves, and Tammy plays on her own while Julie and the other girl keep on playing together. After a few minutes, Julie gets up, walks towards MARIA, (who now sits at a distance), lifts up her eyebrows and then she says: “Tammy teases me..” It almost looks like she is about to cry again. MARIA gets up and starts scolding Tammy. Tammy does not seem to understand anything since nothing has happened, and while MARIA leaves, Julie smiles and says: “I told on you, even though you had not done anything, because you told on me before, when I said you was not stupid..”.*

If I look at the kindergarten teachers as “guardians of justice”, it is possible to read the example above, as an opportunity for children to negotiate justice through affects as a resource strategy. Crying, whining voices, regretful or sad facial expression could be used in the struggle to position themselves as the good and right over the other as evil and wrong. These affects often positioned the children as the weak and losing part, and thus often the part who needed defense and protection. A protection that could produce comfort or making the kindergarten teachers scold others.

The debate on justice was closely intertwined with positions, categories, power, discourses etc. And because of that it was not attractive for everyone to be positioned as the weakest part - like we saw in the case with Liam. But in the case with Tammy and Julie, Julie’s acts leave her with an attractive position because she is being positioned as the winning part of their fight.

Because the children knew what kind of emotions were (in)appropriate, they could use them in their negotiation of positions. So even though Deleuze and Guattari claim that affects could be transmitted in an unconscious way, the children knew what affects were attached to certain emotions. Therefore they could ‘trick’ the kindergarten teachers into acting in ways that could be productive and positive to their own position possibilities.

**Conclusion**

In this paper I have attempted to show how affects and intensities are mixed up with positions, categories, power etc., and how all of these movements take part in and become important to the becoming of subjects. I have attempted to show how affects are transmitted in the encounter with others, and what influence they can have on which positions becomes possible, and in what ways a child can be positioned and position oneself.

The first point I want to highlight is that the children had to transmit affects in silent ways to be recognized as appropriate kindergarten children. Affects with intensities such as being loud or running around were not recognized as appropriate because the kindergarten teachers perceived this as a loss of control on their part. Of course this does not mean that everything was done in complete silence where nobody moved, talked, cried, laughed etc. There were a lot of intensities. At the same it time is important to point out certain affects could be more appropriate in some places than others. As an example affects and intensities formed and recognized as happiness, which also could for example, be transmitted in loud and fast ways, were often inappropriate inside, but appropriate outside. It would seem that the measure of control differed been being inside or being outside. Perhaps this was due to the fact that there were often more kindergarten teachers outside enabling them to oversee the children more closely and as a result they did not lose control so easily, or because due to the physical differences between the different spaces ie. the divisions between rooms that exist inside do not exist outside.

But main point is, that children’s affects had to be disciplined and tamed into silent expressed affect, and because the kindergarten teachers had the power of definition they could ‘decide’ which emotions and affects were positioned as (in)appropriate. Mainly because a resistance against this power from the children, would or could call for more disciplining.

A second point I want to highlight is, that affects were seen as an individual matter, as illustrated in the case with Liam, Liam was positioned as a boy with “a short fuse”, having “a bad temper” and “not being able to control himself”. In this matter it was productive to look at Liam’s expressions in the concept of affects. This movement made it possible to understand the affect-transmissions as unconscious but yet productive. In practice it could therefore be meaningful to “off-individualize” Liam’s actions, and instead look at what affects make Liam act back in these ways. Bodies are always affecting and affected by others, and no one starts the affections – affects are always there.

My third point is, that it seemed, even though children transmitted affects in unconscious ways, they were still in some way aware of which affect-transmissions was attached to and recognized as certain emotions. In this case it was possible to use affect transmissions as a resource or, what could be called a ‘positioning-tool’, to position others and oneself in certain ways. As we saw it with Tammy and Julie, Julie knew how to express herself in a way that would be advantageous to her.

To summarise, my readings through Deleuze and Guattari opened up for possibilities to locate intensities within the empirical work and also analyse how affects was being transmitted and how bodies could affect and be affected.

When affects and intensities set in they will influence how and in what ways a child can be recognized as being an (in)appropriate kindergarten child. Movements that in the final analysis can be meaningful and co-constituting bullying.

Despite not focusing specifically on a case of bullying the point remains that affects and emotions are important and significant according to bullying, both because positions in bullying often are recognized and acted upon through emotions, affects and intensities, but also because positions, power, categories etc. never can be beyond affects.

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1. It is important mentioning that emotions are not standardized, and different researchers, teachers, children etc., may use different terms for the ‘same’ emotion. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. All the names of kindergarten teachers is written with capital letters. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)