

# The School Playground as a Meeting Place for Hard of Hearing Children

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**ABSTRACT** *The school playground is the main social arena for children attending classes for hard of hearing pupils, where they can meet and mix with other children. Their social interplay with other children is rather restricted during their spare time. For the hard of hearing children in this study, their school environment has shifted from one dominated by spoken language (at a mainstream compulsory school) to one dominated by the use of sign language (at a special school). Video-camera observations of the children playing during school breaks showed that, at the mainstream school, the hearing and hard of hearing children used the school playground in an unequal way. The hard of hearing children played at the periphery of the playground and the hearing children in the central interaction areas. In the special school the hard of hearing children played in the central interaction areas and often with deaf schoolmates. Thus, in the integrated environment the hard of hearing children were socially excluded and in the segregated environment they were socially included.*

How children use a school playground may be influenced by its design, but also by the relationships between the children and by their imagination. Adults determine the design of playgrounds, but in most cases the children decide what to do there. For both adults and children, connections with special places can be material as well as social and inventive. There is a link between the social and the spatial (Hayden 1999:43, Matthews, Taylor, Percy-Smith & Limb 2000). A special place may equally produce social relationships or be produced by such relationships. Children often create the play and its site simultaneously – the two become intertwined – and they experience their environment with all their senses and feelings (Skantze 1989). Every site carries its own story and significance, and these may vary over time and between different groups of individuals.

Children usually spend most of the day at home or at school. Although the political goal at school is inclusion, everyday life for disabled children is not automatically inclusive (Ytterhus 2004). Meeting and relating to other children are, as far as the children themselves are concerned, important and central to the activities at school; this fact is, however, often invisible in research into activities at school.

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1501-7419 Print/1745-3011 Online/05/0200073–18 © 2005 Taylor & Francis  
DOI: 10.1080/15017410510032163

The aim of this study is to investigate the participation and equality of hard of hearing children in their relationships with schoolmates of the same age, and the interaction between them in schools practising different usage of language. Do hard of hearing children, attending classes for hard of hearing pupils use the school playground in the same way in a school with hearing schoolmates as they do in a school with deaf schoolmates? Do hard of hearing children experience a sense of belonging and equality with hearing or deaf schoolmates, or do they feel as if they were outsiders?

### **The School Playground: a Place for Meetings**

The school playground is, during the breaks, a world occupied almost exclusively by children. Social interaction occurs in the playground without any immediate control by adults. The school playground is a public place often open in the afternoons, evenings and weekends for other people than teachers and pupils. Children do often use the school playground in the afternoon just to play with their friends. Children and adults can in the evenings take part in activities organized at the school by voluntary organizations etc. In Sweden the school and the school playground is a place where the public have admission and take part in a lot of different activities. Mats Lieberg (1992) describes how youngsters use public places in many different ways. He distinguishes between the intended use of places, their actual use and the symbolic meaning in actually using them. Lieberg argues that for a place to be regarded as a public place, the fact that it is open and accessible to all is not enough. It is necessary that the school playground is used in such a way that nobody feels unwelcome or subordinate if it is to be regarded as a public place in both the spatial and social senses of the word.

A school playground may function as a free zone for the children without any direct control by adults; a place where the children themselves decide upon their activities. During their breaks, pupils may visit different places in the school playground, the classrooms, staircases and other localities, depending on what kind of interaction with their schoolmates they want to have or have just had. Above all, the school playground is the place where hard of hearing children can meet with hearing pupils in compulsory schools and with deaf pupils in special schools.

### **Horizontal or Vertical Relationships**

In the process of interacting with and relating to one another, children explore the social meaning of norms and develop their social and communicative abilities (Frønes 1994, 1995, Jansson 1996, Evaldson & Corsaro 1998). Relationships with schoolmates are unique, and interaction with schoolmates cannot be replaced by interaction with parents or other adults. Playing with others of the same age becomes an important part of the secondary socialization process and of identity development. Children's relationships with one another are ideally horizontal, i.e. equal as regards

social status and reciprocity, while their relationships with adults are unequal and vertical (Hartup 1989, Jansson 1996).

Social interaction and social competence are not just qualities pertaining to individuals; they are *social in character*, and they are linked to and depend on all those involved in a process of interaction (Jansson 1996). Interaction may be defined as a social interchange between two or more individuals whose actions are mutually interdependent (Nordström 2002). With recurrent interaction a relationship may develop. The relationship is affected by previous interaction in which the individuals have been involved, by their expectations of the social interaction processes yet to come, and by the image they have (in mind and thought) of themselves and the other person. This image can be linked to the group to which the individual belongs and in the light of which they interpret their own situation (Hyman 1942, Østerberg 1991).

Social interaction may be horizontal and equal or vertical and unequal. If the interactions and transactions involved in relationships with schoolmates are carried out from a vertical position, i.e. in a relationship marked by dependency and dominance, this is a sign of inequality. In horizontal relationships there may be frequent occurrences of unequal interaction while the children by turn learn from each other. However, these relationships are still basically horizontal. From the perspective of the child with a disability, horizontal relationships to others of the same age may be altered towards relationships of a more vertical character, i.e. relationships characterized by inequality and dominance–subordination, as a consequence of dependency or functional dissimilarities leading to inequality in social status and power.

### **Peer Relationships and Life Satisfaction**

An American study into life satisfaction among deaf and hard of hearing youths living in residential settings or attending day-school programs compared with a group of hearing peers showed that the deaf and hard of hearing groups in both kinds of school setting reported lower life satisfaction than their hearing peers (Gilman, Eastbrooks & Frey 2004). This study indicated that there were fundamental differences in the quality of peer relationships and social support between the deaf and hard of hearing youths and their hearing peers. A Swedish study showed that hard of hearing children attending mainstream classes and special settings in mainstream schools were less satisfied than hearing peers with their social situation (Tvingstedt 1993). A study from New Zealand showed that hard of hearing students more often experienced a sense of loneliness than their hearing peers (Kent 2003). Hard of hearing children living in different countries and attending different types of school settings seem to be less satisfied than hearing peers with their peer relationships.

In an American study researchers tried to increase the acceptance of and social interaction between deaf or hard of hearing children and their deaf, hard of hearing or hearing peers (Antia & Kreimeyer 1996). The intervention, when deaf, hard of hearing and hearing children were taught social skills such as sharing materials, assisting peers, etc. significantly increased interaction

among deaf or hard of hearing children but not with hearing children. The model did not increase social acceptance of deaf or hard of hearing children by their normally hearing peers.

Social and behavioural scientists, who have inquired into how children relate to one another, declare that it is, to a great extent, a myth that children acquire their attitudes and values from the adults surrounding them at home, at the day-care centre and at school (Hill & Rabe 1994:06). Children develop their thoughts, attitudes and values to a great extent in interaction and relationship with other children. Adults get only some glimpses now and then of the socialization process that goes on between children. Hill and Rabe's study of 49 children in the age range 3–8 years showed that children of different ages perceive each other in different ways. The children had been given a number of pictures of children in various situations and asked to comment on them. The children thought that similarity was an important starting point for friendship. The results showed that children are able to dissociate themselves from a disabled child and to stigmatize that child by attributing the child negative qualities. This was done without any signs of empathy whatsoever. A study of moral reasoning about inclusion and exclusion, as regards gender and race rather than disability, also showed that age was important; older children (13 years) were more likely to allow exclusion than were younger children (7 and 10 years) (Killen & Stangor 2001). The vast majority of children used moral reasoning and rejected exclusion, but when group functioning was threatened the children justified exclusion.

### **Insecurity and Fear in the Stigmatized Child**

Social exclusion is a complex concept, denoting lack of equality, alienation and being an outsider. The concept of social exclusion grasps an important dimension of the social hierarchy, just as the concepts of marginalization and stigmatization do. Stigmatizing events may be understood as a factor that accentuates the negative spiral of a process leading to social exclusion (Matthies, Närhi & Ward 2001).

The process of stigmatization involves both stigmatized and stigmatizing individuals. Stigma is a social construction. The concept of stigma refers to and describes a relationship (Coleman 1997). Erving Goffman's use of the concept of stigma refers to a quality that is deeply discrediting (Goffman 1972). Goffman claimed that being disabled may stigmatize an individual. The process of interaction has a significant role when someone is labelled deviant. The children studied in this project have got a disability that might be stigmatizing; it might give them a subordinate position in the social hierarchy in relation to the majority of the children at the school in question.

Changing schools and moving from one social context to another may imply that both what is defined as not desirable and the consequences of the stigmatizing attributes will be changed. The process of stigmatizing others is crucial for maintaining the existing social hierarchy. Moving the hard of hearing children from an ordinary compulsory school to a special school is a

change of social context that may result in a change in the relevant definitions of what is desirable or not desirable, and therefore stigmatizing.

### **Methods**

This article presents empirical data from video-recordings of a group of hard of hearing children playing at two different school playgrounds. In 1994 a total of 29 hard of hearing children were observed for the first time with a video-camera at a compulsory school where they had hearing schoolmates. Six months later 18 of these children were observed again with the video-camera when attending a special school where they had deaf schoolmates. The same hard of hearing children were studied in an environment using spoken language or sign language. This study was based mainly on analyses of the children's mutual interaction. 11 children, due to their age, attended another school in the city, which is what hard of hearing children normally do.

This study comprised children in classes for hard of hearing pupils, in a Swedish town of about 120,000 inhabitants. Since 1937 the city has been a centre of education for hard of hearing pupils (SOU 1998:66). From 1976 the classes for hard of hearing pupils in the city were organized by the special school, but located at a compulsory school. In 1994 the classes for hard of hearing pupils moved from the compulsory school to the special school due to a need for more space for hearing children at the compulsory school. Prior to that the move had been discussed for at least ten years. The dominant discourse in the Swedish school affecting the decision was primarily a social model about communication and language. The discussion was about what would be the best environment for the hard of hearing children and how they would be given opportunities to become bilingual. That deaf and severely hard of hearing children are given opportunities to become bilingual is a part of the Swedish discourse since 1981 when sign language officially was recognized as the mother tongue for deaf people (Preisler 1999). Most of the children (22) were looking forward to the move and their parents (21) thought it would be a good decision, but the teachers were ambivalent (Brunnberg 2003, Ahlström & Preisler 1998).

29 children attending classes for hard of hearing pupils at the junior and intermediate level (1st–7th grades) participated in this study, i.e. the sum total of all children attending classes for hard of hearing pupils in the city. Classes were small, each of them including only 3–8 children. The children were in the age range 7–14 years when they changed school. The education in the classroom was arranged in the same way in both schools by use of spoken language.

The children's average scores from audiometric evaluations have not been measured in this study but the respondents all have such severe hearing impairments that they are prescribed hearing aids. However, not all of them use their hearing aids all the time. In addition to their reduced hearing capacity many of the children also had some other disability. 6 parents said that their child had one additional disability: 3 children had a visual disability,

1 had attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and 2 had MBD (Ahlström & Preisler 1998).

### **Procedure**

Video-recordings were made in order to study the social interplay between hard of hearing and hearing respectively deaf children. The video-recordings took place in both school playgrounds, during the long break when, in most cases, all the children were together.

Twelve breaks were recorded at the compulsory school during 1994, when the hearing and hard of hearing children at the junior and intermediate level were playing in the school playground. During one of these recording occasions the hearing children were not present. At the special school the children's play was recorded during six breaks in 1994. This was carried out towards the end of the first term at the special school. Hard of hearing pupils at junior and intermediate level were video-recorded at the special school. The classes at the upper level and one of the classes at the intermediate level were located in another school building so they were not included in the recordings.

This study is a part of another study in which the hard of hearing children have been interviewed (Brunnberg 2003) as have their parents and teachers (Ahlström & Preisler 1998).

### **Theoretical Perspective**

The central approach in this study is from a social perspective, not a spatial one. Consequently, descriptions of sites, places and localities are rather sparse. The concept of marginalization designates a position in the periphery of a delimited space. The social meaning of the marginalized position may be interpreted as a subordinate and/or vulnerable one. In some more overall descriptions, based on a social, relational and interactionistic perspective, I shall use the concepts of social exclusion and stigmatization. These two concepts do not emphasize a position in a room or delimited space, as does the concept of marginalization, but a social position in relation to others who are active in stigmatizing and/or excluding processes. Marginalization or having a marginal position makes visible and visualizes the spatial position.

### **Analysis**

In analysing the videotapes the children's actions were studied from an interactionistic perspective. Their non-verbal communication was studied. No frame-by-frame microanalysis was made. At first the study focused on overall interaction in each school playground in order to form a complete overview of this. Subsequently the analysis was deepened and in study of the various breaks and scenes, focused firstly on the overview and then on a more detailed level; but always returned to the overall perspective.

Division of the video footage into scenes was carried out while looking at the videotapes. A scene is a videotaped course of events, which describes the social interplay of the hard of hearing children with other pupils – hearing or deaf – during the breaks. When the video-camera changed focus, e.g. zoomed in on a new course of events, a note referring to “a new scene” was made in the text. When the children finished some ongoing activity, a new scene was demarcated. Sometimes several different courses of events were recorded in the same sequence of images; they are described as different scenes.

Twice as many breaks were videotaped and analysed for the compulsory school as for the special school. Despite the fact that considerably more time has been documented on video for the compulsory school than for the special school, there are almost the same number of scenes from both schools. This is probably due either to the photographer’s own activity, i.e. the event recorded has been focused on for a shorter time, or to an increase in the number of activities of the children, or both. Table 1 shows the number of breaks and different scenes that were recorded.

Of the 66 scenes of activity at the compulsory school, 55 were recordings from breaks when hearing children were also present in the school playground. Three scenes were recordings from inside the classrooms of the hard of hearing children at the same breaks. So 58 scenes were from breaks common to the hearing and hard of hearing children. Seven scenes had been recorded during a break when the hearing children were absent from school and one scene was recorded outside in the school playground when the hearing children had already gone into their classrooms. At the special school the 58 scenes were recorded when hard of hearing and deaf children were present in the school playground.

**Video-Recording as a Research Method**

Video is a useful means of recording observations. It is increasingly used by researchers (Ahlström & Preisler 1998, Graue & Walsh 1998). A video-recording makes it possible to study social interplay in more detail than by direct observation. It is, however, impossible to record by video or by direct observation every moment and detail of the social interaction that occurs in a school playground during a break. The observer or photographer always makes a selection. That selection is controlled and directed by the situation and seldom given close consideration. Prior to making the recordings for this study, the choice of recording technique was considered closely. It was

**Table 1.** Video-recorded material: number of breaks and scenes

| School            | Number of breaks | Number of scenes  |
|-------------------|------------------|---|
| Compulsory school | 12 × 20 minutes  | 66 scenes, out of which 58 scenes were from breaks common to hard of hearing and hearing children |
| Special school    | 6 × 20 minutes   | 58 scenes from breaks common to hard of hearing and deaf children                                 |

decided to give priority to situations where hard of hearing pupils interacted with hearing or deaf schoolmates.

Children, who are observed or recorded on video tend to accept the presence of the researcher and the video-camera after some time (Thorell 1998). The children in this study sometimes behaved like actors in front of the camera; however they were not disturbed from their activities except for some short moments. In spite of this, the presence of the researcher and the video-camera might have had some influence on the interaction of the children. Those parts of the interaction process they wanted to keep secret in relation to the adults at their school probably stayed secret and were also hidden from the researcher. Bullying, for example, was perhaps avoided during the recording sessions. Nevertheless the validity of the recorded material is probably satisfactory, in that it gives a good picture of the interaction among the children.

## Results

Mats Lieberg (1992) describes in his study *Att ta staden i besittning (To take over the city)* how young people use public places in the city in many different ways. The categorization of the empirical data in this study has been inspired by Lieberg's study. It has, however, been modified and given its final form during the analyses of the video-recordings from the school playgrounds. The results of this study show that places may function in various ways in social interaction processes: as retreats, as look-out places, as interaction areas, as boundary-zone places and as hiding-places. There are sites in the school playground where the observed children interact, but also places of retreat to which the children go when they want to be alone and undisturbed. In the school playground there are also delimited areas for keeping look-out; they may also function as outward retreats. Such places are restricted areas where it is possible for the child to monitor and get an overview of the activities of the other children while *not* themselves taking part in the ongoing interaction. The boundary-zones at the periphery of the school playgrounds operate as main roads of transportation between the different buildings and the school playgrounds. They are also used as areas for playing. During scheduled teaching time (i.e. during classes) the classroom is of course the place for interaction. During the breaks the classroom may just as well be a place for interaction as a retreat or a hiding-place (Lieberg 1992).

The hard of hearing children's interaction both within the group and with their schoolmates altered when they changed context from a school with hearing schoolmates to a school with deaf schoolmates, as can be seen in Table 2 and the descriptions below.

### **The School Playground: a Place for Meetings between Hearing and Hard of Hearing Children**

The school playground of the compulsory school is large, with an outdoor environment of varying character. There are two asphalt playgrounds (a big

**Table 2.** Video-recorded scenes with hard of hearing children in different areas

| School            | Number of scenes   | Scenes showing play or games in interaction areas | Scenes showing children staying in boundary-zone places, hiding, retreats or look-out places | Scenes showing hard of hearing playing/interacting with deaf children |
|-------------------|--|---|--|---|
| Compulsory school | 58 scenes from breaks common to hard of hearing and hearing children | 9   | 49   | 5   |
| Special school    | 58 scenes from breaks common to hard of hearing and deaf children    | 50  | 8  | 27  |

school playground and a small one), a huge green area with lawns, bushes and stones, and a gravel area, where, among other things, some swings are located. Nearby there is also a forest area. Several different buildings, standing by themselves, comprise the school. Some buildings had just one floor. The architecture of the school playground was better than average, with a lot of space where the children could play with or without toys on asphalt or grass. The classrooms of the hard of hearing pupils attending special classes were located in different buildings all over the school due to the need for special technical support and the risk of disturbance if too close together. During the breaks most of the hard of hearing pupils went out into the school playground. The oldest pupils, grade 6–7, were also allowed to stay in their classroom during the breaks, if they wanted to. The reason for this was, according to the teachers, that the pupils of grade 7 were older than the other children at the school.

The hard of hearing pupils often stayed on the periphery of the small or big school playground during the breaks. Several children among the older ones stayed in their classroom. They seldom played in the interaction areas at the central parts of the school playground. The hearing pupils played in these interaction areas. The hard of hearing children used instead boundary-zones close to the thoroughfares, look-out places or retreats as playgrounds for their activities.

During the 58 scenes when hearing and hard of hearing children were present in the school playground at the same time, in 9 (16%) scenes the interaction areas in the school playground were used by the hard of hearing children; 27 (47%) scenes show the hard of hearing children playing in boundary-zone areas, i.e. sites at the thoroughfares or the green areas near the school playgrounds; 22 (38%) scenes show them staying at look-out or hiding places. Several hard of hearing pupils stayed very close to the cloakroom doors – their retreats – at the beginning of the breaks or, during some breaks, all the time.

In the seven scenes recorded when the hearing children were absent from school, the hard of hearing children more often played in the central interaction areas of the school playground. They were playing in interaction areas in five (71%) of the recorded scenes and in boundary-zone areas in two (29%) of the scenes. This means that the hard of hearing children occupied a much-delimited space in the school playground, i.e. they did not take up a great deal of room, when the hearing children were also there. The stairs leading to the children's own classroom often filled the function as a look-out place during the breaks; as did certain parts of the school playground.

In one scene, one of the hard of hearing pupils stands alone at the stairs to the classroom. The door is open. Two other hard of hearing pupils from the class come out. One of them runs out into the school playground, the other stays at the stairs with the pupil already standing there. The child who ran out into the school playground returns to the stairs for a short chat; then returns to the school playground. The pupil is walking around alone in a hopscotch pitch delineated on the ground at some distance from the stairs leading to the classroom. Neither of the other two pupils appears in the school playground. Some minutes later, all the children in the class are sitting on the stairs leading to the classroom.

This can be interpreted as if the school playground for the hard of hearing children did not seem to be a public place but rather a place where the interaction with children of the same age might not be on equal terms but unequal and unsafe. They often chose to spend the break in look-out place, i.e. the stairs. There they had the refuge place nearby, and they could simultaneously survey the social interplay going on between other children without running the risk of any confrontations. Playing alone, contacts outside the main interaction areas or chats with other hard of hearing pupils of one's own group were the alternatives to the risky project of confronting and meeting with other children. The look-out places were the ones often preferred by the hard of hearing pupils. The classrooms of the hard of hearing children and the hearing children were near to each other and mixed in the school buildings so there was nothing about the placement of the classes that could explain the inequality in the school playground.

Many hard of hearing pupils seemed to go to the look-out places at the beginning of the breaks in particular. They also went to look-out places when they needed to recover from rejected attempts to make contact, or from not having been invited to participate in the ongoing play activities. There were children who were often alone and who seldom played with other hard of hearing pupils or with the hearing children.

There were also children who mostly took part in interaction with classmates of the same age in the special classes, but who went to the look-out places when they had got into a conflict or when they did not find anybody to play with. All pupils, except the oldest ones, were expected by the adults to be outdoors during the breaks. Some of the older pupils chose to stay in the classroom during the breaks.

During one of the recorded breaks there were no hearing children in the school playground. The social interplay within the group of hard of hearing

pupils, the way they used the school playground and, to some extent, the play changed considerably when the hearing children were absent from the school playground. Boys and girls from the special classes continued to play together. The hard of hearing pupils took over the school playground and moved across its play-areas much more freely, even though they still also played in areas where they usually played. They played together in a different way. New contacts were tried out within the group and new types of play were tested. Also those children who otherwise used to be outsiders, i.e. out of contact with their hard of hearing schoolmates, were now taking part in the play activities. During this break some conflicts also occurred between the children.

### **Fellowship and Conflicts Between Hearing and Hard of Hearing Children**

During the recordings carried out while the hearing children were at school, the hearing and hard of hearing pupils played together in common activities on five (9%) occasions. Moreover, they had contact with each other in a few other situations; but these contacts were literally collisions while they were playing in separate groups close to one another. On these occasions everyone tolerated the play activities of the others and no occasion resulted in conflicts.

While playing together with the hearing children, the hard of hearing pupils moved around more freely in the school playground. On one occasion an unusual toy, belonging to one of the hard of hearing children, aroused the curiosity of the hearing children. They did not play with that toy together, but it stimulated contact between them. On two other occasions the oldest of the hard of hearing pupils were playing land hockey together with hearing children much younger than them.

On the fifth occasion a rather large group of hard of hearing pupils, of various ages and of both sexes, were playing a bounce-the-ball game in an interaction area in the big school playground. Hearing children joined the game by taking their place in the queue. They were thereafter part of the game without any questioning or rejections. The hard of hearing girls, however, had some difficulty keeping their place in the queue. The hard of hearing boys tried to push in, whereas the hearing boys did not.

Play and games which required several children playing together or in which the hearing children's curiosity was aroused were those in which hearing and hard of hearing children were induced to take part in some common activity. In these cases the interest in the activity could transcend the various ages of the children. In constructing teams the disability showed itself to be more important than age.

Ten (17%) of the recorded scenes with both hearing and hard of hearing children staying in the school playground showed conflict between the hearing and the hard of hearing children. The conflicts could be about who should have the first right to a certain area – conflicts about space. The hearing children of both sexes were the ones with power over the use of space in the playground.

In one scene one of the girls from the special classes goes out into the asphalt school playground. She finds a hopscotch pitch marked out on the asphalt and starts playing hopscotch. She plays alone. Two hearing boys come running along dribbling a ball. The girl from the special class continues to play hopscotch and the boys are kicking the ball. After a couple of minutes the boys are dribbling and kicking the ball from both sides of the girl playing the hopscotch, one on each side. She has to wait until they have kicked the ball over and across the hopscotch pitch. The boys move around a little but they still stay close to the hopscotch. The girl stops playing and looks at the boys. The boys disturb her playing but she does not speak to them.

It was as if the hearing children had an attitude of natural self-confidence. They could play wherever they wanted to. They did not respect the fact that a hard of hearing girl already occupied the space. She did not protest about the behaviour of the hearing boys. The videotape showed that she just withdrew from the situation and that she returned when the boys were no longer there.

Two other similar occurrences were documented during the recordings. On one occasion two hard of hearing boys were forced to move away from a brick wall where they were throwing a tennis ball, because some hearing girls took over the wall and started to use the space for their own games. The hard of hearing pupils did not protest; instead they went to look for a new place to play.

On another occasion, the hearing children took over the space used by the hard of hearing children for their play activities, but this time the rejection was carried out in terms of open conflict. The hard of hearing children were sometimes also confronted with negative contacts from the hearing children making an 'idiot sign' in front of their faces.

### **The Hearing Children in Power in the School Playground**

It was mainly the hearing children who moved around the central parts of the interaction areas in the school playground. The hard of hearing children played at the periphery of the playground. This can be interpreted as though the hard of hearing children did not use the playground on equal terms with the hearing children but were spatially marginalized. There was, above all, a lack of social contact between the groups and several hard of hearing pupils seemed to be afraid of meeting and mixing with the hearing pupils. The hard of hearing pupils were rejected several times, by the hearing children, from the places in which they were playing. The hard of hearing children just moved away without any protest. Both boys and girls of the special classes were socially and spatially subordinate to the hearing boys and girls. The hearing children were the ones in power in the school playground. The marginalization of the hard of hearing children may be understood as a part of the stigmatization process.

The marginalization and stigmatization that took place in relation to the hearing children seem to have brought the hard of hearing children together. The hard of hearing children had contact above all with their schoolmates, but pupils from different classes often sought contact with one another. The

hard of hearing children of various ages and of both sexes were playing together *within* their own group instead of looking for playmates of the same age and sex among the hearing children. There were also hard of hearing pupils who displayed a more closed pattern of interaction; they played almost only with their schoolmates. And they too could play with schoolmates of both sexes. Some of the children were rarely included in the social interplay in any active way; they were often to be found beside the other children. Several children among the hard of hearing pupils showed certain insecurity in the social interplay. The insecure children were also those who had several impairments.

### **The School Playground: a Place for Meetings Between Deaf Children and Hard of Hearing Children**

The school playground of the special school is smaller than that of the compulsory school, and it is not varied to the same extent. The school playground contains an asphalt area without any stationary toys and playing tools, a smaller playground with toys and tools, a gravelled football pitch and a lawn area. The special school is in the middle of town, next to some built-up areas with frequent and heavy traffic. The school comprises four buildings standing by themselves; some of them are barracks, temporarily located there until permanent buildings are constructed. The classrooms of the hard of hearing pupils are located in three different buildings. The hard of hearing children are spatially integrated in the school just as in the compulsory school. Next to the special school there is a pre-school where sign language is used. The school playground with toys and playing tools is also arranged for children from the pre-school. The pre-school children were mostly in the pre-school building during the video-recorded long break for the children at the special school. At the special school there was normally an adult present during the breaks.

The hard of hearing pupils used the school playground of the special school in a different way from that of the compulsory school. During the breaks in special school they stayed mainly in the central parts of the interaction areas of the school playground and not, as in the compulsory school, just at the periphery. Several hard of hearing and deaf children also played together regularly. Some of the hard of hearing pupils played football with their deaf schoolmates during all of the video-recorded breaks. The group of hard of hearing children was too small to have two football teams and not all of the hard of hearing children were interested in playing football. If the hard of hearing children wanted to play football they had to play with the majority group of children. This did happen in the special school but not in the compulsory school. In the compulsory school the hearing children, mainly boys, played football with other hearing boys. In the special school both deaf and hard of hearing children also stayed in other central parts of the interaction areas of the school playground. They interacted sometimes with one another, but the most frequent pattern to be

seen was hard of hearing pupils playing together with other hard of hearing pupils.

The hard of hearing children had a quite different pattern of activity and interaction with their deaf schoolmates, compared with their pattern of activity and interaction at the school including hearing schoolmates. The deaf children and the hard of hearing children occupied different areas of the school playground on equal terms. When break-time started, the hard of hearing children went into the interaction areas. Occasionally they stayed close to look-out places.

In the school playground of the special school, the hard of hearing children played different games from in the school playground of the compulsory school; but they also played the same games as they did before, however now in a different way, since there were a greater number of children who played together at the special school.

The hard of hearing pupils seemed to feel safer at the special school than at the compulsory school; this conclusion is based on the fact that they obviously dared to play in the interaction areas. In 50 (86%) of the recorded 58 scenes, the children played in interaction areas in the school playground of the special school; this happened in only 9 (16%) the scenes from the school playground of the compulsory school.

The school playground of the special school functioned as a public place in the eyes of most of the hard of hearing pupils, a place that they dared to use in the same way as did their deaf schoolmates. Both hard of hearing and deaf children stayed in the central interaction areas of the school playground at the special school.

### **Fellowship and Conflict Between Deaf and Hard of Hearing Children**

In 27 of the recorded scenes (47%) at the special school, hard of hearing and deaf pupils played or talked with one another. At the compulsory school the hard of hearing pupils only occasionally played with their hearing schoolmates.

At the special school a frequent activity during the breaks was playing football. Hard of hearing and deaf children played together during all the recorded breaks at the special school. It was, above all, boys who played football, but some of the girls also played on many occasions. The football games were characterized by a friendly tone. Everyone who wanted to be a part of the football playing was welcome to join the team. The teams were composed in various ways. Hard of hearing and deaf children often played in the same team. The hard of hearing and deaf children also had short moments of contact with each other in the school playground where toys and playing tools were located.

The children at the compulsory school mostly spent their time shooting at a land hockey goal or playing other ball games instead of football. The hard of hearing and hearing pupils played with each other only a few times. On these occasions they played land hockey and formed two teams: the hard of hearing

children against the hearing ones – older hard of hearing children played with much younger hearing children.

The children attending classes for hard of hearing pupils, however, mostly played with their schoolmates or with children from other classes for hard of hearing pupils, if they did not play football as their main activity during the break. There was a sense of fellowship between them and of belonging together, which transcended grade and age boundaries.

### **Discussion**

Society defines and sets the ultimate frames of the socio-cultural context and the context of language in which the hard of hearing child grows up. These frames vary with time and place. In Sweden, school is an important part of the everyday life of all children from the age of 6–7 years right up to adulthood. In school they meet adult significant others who are not their parents, and also significant others who are schoolmates of the same age. The significant others are adults and children who have central roles in the life of the children and who, in addition to the family, offer a fundamental setting for the development of social and communicative abilities, for the child's self-confidence and development of identity (Frønes 1994, 1995, Jansson 1996, Demo 2001).

At compulsory school the hard of hearing pupils played their games at the periphery of the school playground. The hearing children played and moved around mainly in the central interaction areas. The hard of hearing pupils played, above all, in boundary-zone places, which often functioned as thoroughfares. The hard of hearing children also spent much of the time during breaks in look-out places. The relationships between hard of hearing and hearing pupils in the compulsory school are to be understood as primarily vertical in character. Hearing and hard of hearing children in the compulsory school used the school playground on unequal terms. In the empirical data (i.e. the video-recordings) many occasions were documented in which hard of hearing children were rejected from places in which they were playing by hearing children, both boys and girls. When this rejection happened the hard of hearing children did not protest but accepted it. A plausible interpretation of this is that the hearing children had the power to decide over the use of the school playground and that the hard of hearing pupils were subordinate to the hearing pupils. The video-recordings also showed that the hard of hearing children played in places other than their usual ones when the hearing children were away from school for one day. The relationship between hearing and hard of hearing children may be described as characterized by dominance–subordination, i.e. a hierarchical relationship. Thus, after all, the school was not a public place in the sense that hearing and hard of hearing pupils could use it on equal terms. The hard of hearing children, both boys and girls, were spatially marginalized in the compulsory school, and they were socially excluded and stigmatized both as individuals and as a group.

Analysis of the video-recordings from the special school, at both junior and intermediate level, showed that hard of hearing and deaf children used the school playground area on equal terms. Deaf and hard of hearing children played together during the breaks. At the special school a social fellowship and a sense of belonging emerged between many of the hard of hearing and deaf children. The hard of hearing children played football together with the deaf children or they played together in other ways. This may be interpreted as though the hard of hearing and the deaf children at the special school were able to relate horizontally to each other.

The change brought about as regards the special classes for hard of hearing pupils who were observed in this study, could be described as such: *excluding integration* became instead *including segregation* (see Haug 1998). It can be argued that the implications of the change of school-context from compulsory school to special school were, as regards the hard of hearing pupils, a change in interaction. The interaction changed from one characterized mainly by vertical relationships when both hard of hearing boys and girls were subordinated by hearing boys and girls, to one characterized mainly by horizontal relationships where hard of hearing boys and girls played with deaf boys and girls. The children's sense of belonging together, sometimes expressed by them as a sense of being "almost alike", may be interpreted as a sense of fellowship rooted in their self-image and identity. The sense of belonging together may differ between different children. The relationships of the hard of hearing children to the majority group of children at the school were changed and this implies, among other things, that disability seems to be more subordinating than gender.

Another study, carried out in the same city at the same time, of 25 children with intellectual disabilities in special classes, also showed that relationships of children with disability to children of the same age with no disability were vertical in character (Nordström 2002). Children with disability often seem to become assigned a subordinate position in relation to children without any disability (Tvingstedt 1993, 2001, Antia & Kreimeyer 1996, Nordström 2002, Brunnberg 2003). The results from these and other studies raise the following issue: is it best for children with a disability to have vertical relationships with their schoolmates of the same age, or to have primarily horizontal relationships with their schoolmates just as children without a disability often have? If the answer is that they should primarily have horizontal relationships to children of the same age, new issues about integration and segregation are raised. A school characterized by equality and social inclusion pre-supposes that no category of children in the everyday life at school is subordinate to another category of children. Relationships between children that are primarily vertical may lead to stigmatization and social exclusion.

The hard of hearing children as a group were socially excluded and marginalized in the mainstream school. During breaks the hard of hearing children often stayed in boundary-zone places, refuge, or look-out places. The hard of hearing children were integrated in the

mainstream school but socially excluded. Most of the hard of hearing children did not describe the same feeling of being outsiders in the special school as in the mainstream school and they played mostly in interaction areas and often with deaf children. The hard of hearing children were socially included in the segregated milieu at the special school. However, the hard of hearing children's social situation was not perfect in the special school either. The hard of hearing children with multi-disabilities had difficulties in both the mainstream school and the special school.

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