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Here we like *playing* princesses – newcomer migrant children's transitions within day care: exploring role play as an indication of suitability and home and belonging

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ABSTRACT

Using the concept of *suitability* to describe newcomer migrant children's connection to multiple fields of social and cultural relations, we explore a newcomer migrant girl's transition from an introductory group for migrant children with a refugee background into a mainstream day-care group. Inspired by sociocultural and transitional research, we assume that newcomer migrant children can fall into a liminal phase due to the loss of cultural references. Framed around the situated and contextualised nature of the girl's remembering and reconstructing of *home* and *belonging* through role play, we explore how roleplay discourses might be understood as cultural scripts or laminated productions reflecting particular representations of social and cultural attachment.

KEYWORDS

day care; transition; newcomer migrant children; role plays; suitability; home; belonging

Introduction

Generally, a vast body of educational and transitional research has focused on various aspects of children's transitional processes when moving from day care into school. This article draws attention to a much-neglected aspect in transition research, namely, newcomer migrant children's transitional experiences when going from introductory groups for children with a refugee background into mainstream day-care groups. Research reveals that entering new educational surroundings generally causes children to experience tension and anxiety (Broström 2002). According to Broström, a *smooth transition* is influenced by children's access to formerly established friendships, as these form part of children's secure bases. Upon entering a mainstream group, newcomer children (four to five years) will most likely encounter existing friendship alliances which have, over time, created their own social and cultural routines, also referred to as peer cultures (Corsaro 2011). Based on a nine-month long ethnographic study of newcomer migrant children's initial year in day care, previous articles written in relation to this study have shown how newcomer children experience mainstream day-care groups comprising multiple social fields characterised by competition, struggle for position, and relational aggression (Kalkman, Hopperstad, and Valenta 2015, 2017).

This article directs particular attention to the meaning of role play during the transition from an introductory group for children with a refugee background into a mainstream day-care group, through the experiences of one girl. Drawing upon relevant social theory, we argue that transitions cause a breach with social, historical, and cultural reference points, leading young migrant children to enter various phases of *liminality* (Turner 1996). Framed around the situated and contextualised nature of social negotiations and processes of reconstructing *home* and *belonging* (Ní Laoire et al. 2010), the article demonstrates how role play reflects a sense of *suitability* (Broström 2002; Woodhead and Brooker 2008). Viewing role play as a culturally determined activity (Brooker 2010; Fleer 2009; Kirova 2010), we understand its scripts to be composed of *laminated* or layered time-space events (Clark 2010; Wohlwend 2007). Focusing on how migrant children's sense of suitability within present and former places of childhood is reflected through their role play, the aim of the article is to contribute to a broadening of knowledge surrounding how migrant children's 'suitability' and 'home and belonging' are intertwined with their distant and immediate social connections and attachments. This knowledge, we hope, will help day-care practitioners to gain insights into newcomer migrant children's socio-cultural transitions and support them through their various phases of liminality.

Theoretical and conceptual framework

Transitions and liminality

Understanding refugee children's migrational journey as a major transition that causes additional shifts in children's socially and culturally recognised conditions within the family (Vogler, Crivello, and Woodhead 2008), we are inspired by ecological and sociocultural theories on transition. In this article, we understand transitions or 'rite of passage' to be dynamic processes guided by three phases of liminality (van Gennep 1960; Turner 1996; Vogler et al. 2008). These three phases are described as follows. The first is the pre-liminal phase, characterised by children's awareness of separation from prior social and cultural places of childhood. The second, 'liminal' phase, is a period of margin in which a child feels like a 'sociocultural passenger', remaining at the threshold of multiple intersecting sociocultural worlds with few or no sociocultural reference points to either their 'past or coming state of being' (Turner 1996). The post-liminal phase marks the child's new status and reincorporation into their new sociocultural surroundings. In this article, a 'rite of passage' perspective is used to draw attention to transitional shifts in newcomer children's social status and particular indications of their readiness to take on responsibilities within their new social and early childhood educational surroundings (Vogler et al. 2008). Vogler et al. argue that very young children might be relatively unaware of experiencing a pre-liminal phase because this is essentially about social participation, reconition, and children's breach and establishing of new relationships. However, at quite early ages, newcomer migrant children are most likely to experience a pre-liminal phase due to their loss of social and cultural reference points, which can include both temporary breach with immediate caregivers and permanent loss of their distantly located friendships. Preceding the pre-liminal phase, the *liminal phase* propels the newcomer child into sensing that she is required to develop and negotiate new and intersecting identities such as that of a child in a global northern country, a pupil in day care, and a

potential friend for her peers. Finally, the post-liminal phase marks the child experiencing the fact that she has been assessed by her social surroundings as having adapted herself 'adequately' and has proven herself to be able to perform her cultural identities in cohesion with the local identity discourses. A rite of passage perspective is seen as highly useful. Its holistic nature reveals multiple aspects of the transitional process guiding newcomer children's socialisation when transferring from, in this case, an ethnic and culturally diverse introductory group into a more ethnic and culturally homegenic mainstream group. In the following section, we draw attention to how role play can be understood as central to newcomer children's meaning-making processes when transistioning between various phases of liminality.

Role play as an indicator of social fields of attachment, home, and belonging

In order to scrutinise the underlying meanings in children's everyday expressions, such as, 'here we like playing princesses', it is necessary to approach childhood socialisation as a highly interpretive and reproductive process with newcomer migrant children being required to develop an understanding of local day-care *peer cultures*. Peer cultures are defined as children's relatively 'stable sets of activities and routines, artifacts, values, and concerns' (Corsaro 2015, p. 19). In this article, we understand newcomer children's role playing to comprise cultural scripts (Kirova 2010) in which particular social and cultural identities are consciously and unconsciously put forth, taken up, negotiated, and rejected (Wohlwend 2007). Defined as the relational dimension of personal identity, children's *belonging* is viewed as the fundamental psychosocial 'glue' that is made observable through their role-play performances: their scripts reveal how they've been and are socially and culturally connected to people in place and time (Woodhead and Brooker 2008). Central within migrant children's reception and negotiation of cultural identities and belonging will be whether or not they are considered *suitable*, assessed as looking suitable, dressing suitably, speaking suitably, behaving suitably, and playing suitably (Woodhead and Brooker 2008). If assessed as *unsuitable*, itinerancy and disconnectedness in newcomer children's appearance and behaviour can follow (Vogler et al. 2008). Recognising role play as a form of *border crossing*, without the requirement of abandoning their existing cultures (Mullholland and Wallace 2003; Sirriyeh 2010), newcomer migrant children's role-play performances within their new surroundings could be seen as cross-cultural meaning-making instances.

Drawing attention to the concept of home, which has long been associated with domestic spaces of security, we follow Ní Laoire et al. (2010) and conceptualise home in terms of movement. This means that we connect home with multiple fields of social and cultural attachment and belonging. As such, this article makes an effort to contribute to a growing body of research that acknowledges the importance of relating various sites of belonging to migrant children's various spheres of everyday life (Ní Laoire et al. 2010; Olwig 2003). Through role play, we assume it is possible to identify some complex aspects related to newcomer children's transitions and their historical and present transformation in relation to their participation and belonging in both distant and local cultural activities (Brooker 2010). By peeling back the sociocultural time-space layers in children's performances, it becomes possible to identify the transformation of newcomer children's participation within culturally valued activities, thereby revealing to us, perhaps, how their

participation has changed over time and has guided them from being a novice to being an expert (Brooker 2010). Along their migrational journeys, children have encountered multiple spheres of everyday life, and in these spheres, they most likely have tried to establish some form of cultural identification and perhaps even belonging. Combined, the perspectives of Brooker and Ní Laoire et al. are interesting because both describe various aspects of how young migrants' identities are shaped 'on the move' and how their lives and, as such, their belongings are characterised by mobility (Ní Laoire et al. 2010).

Laminating the distant onto the present

In order to make meaning from their childhood experiences, newcomer children are seen as using their role-play scripts to explore and create meaning out of complex and locally anchored 'ideas, rules, norms, events and various other phenomena' (Löfdal and Hägglund 2006, 181). By laminating or layering distant identity discourses onto local ones, newcomer children ensure that their role play is strengthened and stabilised; repeating themes across the layers of play (Wohlwend 2007). By layering distant talk and action onto immediate role-play situations and contexts, their cultural scripts display 'connections to multiple social fields of attachment and belonging [within] various spheres of life' (Ní Laoire et al. 2010, 157). This means that newcomer children's role-play performances are laminations of multiple layers of socially constructed space (Wohlwend 2007) which each in their own way have contributed to the formation of children's multiple and fluid belongings. To illustrate: by layering distant talk and action onto present role-play events, both in its fantasy and more rooted forms, which have their origins in everyday society (e.g. playing family, doctor, soldier, construction worker, bus driver, teacher), role-play scripts allow newcomer children to explore particular and local cultural knowledge (Corsaro 2009; Kirova 2010). Children perform within these instances powerful narratives that display particular conceptualisations of *who* to be and *how* to be in a particular time, place, and culture. Newcomer children's places of belonging refer as such not only to relations but also to places of childhood, which, after having been invested with memories and meanings, become cultural extensions of the self (Nsamenang 2008b) and integrated as settings for their cultural scripts. The question then is how the framing of a role play, e.g. the setting of and expertise exhibited in preparing a family meal and a princesses-and-dragons role play, can help us to understand better newcomer children's belonging and suitability within time and place.

Methodology

This ethnographic study investigated, from September 2013 to June 2014, newcomer migrant girls' (four- to five-years-old) sociocultural transition into a Norwegian day-care institution one year before starting compulsory school. The ethnographic approach has been chosen because this was considered to allow for the observation of critical phenomena that relate to the newcomer children's daily routines, of which role play is central. Otherwise, we assume these critical phenomena would be difficult to detect (Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco 2001). In designing a framework for exploring what facilitates newcomer girls' integration and inclusion in everyday social reality in day care, a participatory approach was chosen. In planning the research, we recognised that

researching the social processes of integration and inclusion would require ‘not just a set of methods but rather a particular mode of looking, listening, and thinking about [observed] social phenomena’ (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007, 230). Our distinctive analytical attitude demanded – over a prolonged period of time – a commitment to exploring complex ideas and multiple social realities. The migrant girl, who is the focus of this article, and referred to by the pseudonym Bahja (four-years-old) from the Middle East, joined the day-care institution in September 2013 and started her participation in the introductory Badger group. This introductory group’s aim is to give children with a refugee background an introduction to the Norwegian language and culture over the course of a day-care year. Accompanied by her younger brother, referred to by the pseudonym Mihran (three-years-old), Bahja spoke fluent Arabic and had already learned some Norwegian. Bahja enjoyed her days in the Badger group but was transferred away from her brother and friends into the mainstream Fox group after approximately three months. In line with governmental day-care policies, socialising with majority-language speaking peers was argued to be the best thing for Bahja because she would be starting school the following year. In the Fox group, the girls, including Bahja, enjoying engaging in role-play activities. However, Bahja experienced some challenges in terms of inclusion. Regularly observed in social struggle with the girls in the Fox group, Bahja requested daily to play in the Badger group. After it was observed that role play would be an important aspect of Bahja’s opportunity to perform her cultural identities, questions formed surrounding how her role play might reflect her multiple social and cultural attachments. Based on the Mosaic Approach (Clark 2005; Clark and Moss 2011), participatory observation in both formal and informal settings was combined with participatory methods to create enhanced environments for participants to reflect and act upon particular aspects of their *immediate* lives (Hart 1992). However, this article focuses on the observational material, focusing particularly on Bahja’s self-chosen and child-led role play instances. The nature of the role play observed and how it fits into established patterns of action has been well documented (Kalkman, Hopperstad, and Valenta 2015). Within the mainstream group, the girls’ play performances were routinely complex role play or speech activities characterised by frequent negotiations and in-depth discussions of the development of its content. Central to these negotiations were themes, roles, and virtual settings. The *in situ* role-play performances in both the introductory groups and the mainstream group were observed, and insights were gained into the existing complexities and ambiguities within peer relationships, which are often exhibited through children’s power and status within their group (Evaldsson and Tellgren 2009). Generally, in the mainstream group, fantasy themes were introduced by the girls with a high status and with reference to fairy tales, Norwegian folklore, and popular children’s literature. Within the introductory group, the role-play scripts were often based on more rooted performances, such as playing family, making dinner, and taking care of the youngest children in the group, which was often initiated by Bahja herself. In the mainstream group, as opposed to the introductory group, Bahja struggled to participate in both the negotiations and the actual role plays. The latter was challenging because she was required to have particular linguistic skills, cultural knowledge, and a fair amount of status. In the absence of linguistic skills and status in the mainstream group, Bahja was seen by the girls as a liability; a threat to the group members’ ability to interact and preserve their interests (Kalkman, Hopperstad, and Valenta 2017).

Role play instances are powerful narratives reflecting various aspects of Bahja's life, and, in this study, focus is placed on two of Bahja's *in situ* role-play observations, located in both her former and present day-care groups. These vignettes are analysed and discussed as two excerpts of role play. The first was from the introductory group, a rooted performance inspired by domestic activities – *preparing a family meal* – and the other was from her new group and was fantasy inspired – *princesses and dragons*. Both observations paid special attention to Bahja's 'suitability' and how she can be seen as attempting to create a layered or 'laminated' role play, performing particular cultural identities by relying on specific competencies and particular cultural knowledge.

Observation one: preparing a family meal

In the introductory group, a boy referred to by the pseudonym James (three and a half-years-old and originating from the Horn of Africa) and Bahja's brother Mihran (three-years-old) accompany Bahja. James and Mihran are seated at a low table onto which Bahja is placing cups and plates. A discussion arises between Bahja and James about the dinner she is preparing for the boys. James; 'I want spaghetti!' Bahja looks at James and says, 'No. I am making macaroni!' One of the practitioners sitting on the sofa overhears the ongoing discussion and intervenes by saying, 'Stop arguing and play'. Bahja stops, looks at James, and says 'OK', agreeing to make spaghetti. Bahja turns around to fetch the 'ingredients' needed for making spaghetti. As she rifles through a case containing empty boxes and cartons, Bahja returns to the table. Holding a miniature wok pan, Bahja blends her ingredients, quickly stirring the spaghetti sauce with a spoon. After a minute or so, she checks the consistency of the sauce, holding her spoon up high and letting the 'mixture' fall down into the pan. When Bahja is finished checking the sauce, she offers James a sample of it, holding the spoon to James's mouth. Tasting the sauce, James approves, nodding his head and making a confirming sound 'hmmm'. Then Bahja redirects her attention to her brother and offers Mihran a taste sample. Mihran, like James, agrees that it tastes good. Bahja smiles and seems pleased, turning around to fetch some more plates and bowls. As Bahja does this, Mihran touches the wok pan standing on the table and yells out 'ouch', pretending he has burned himself. Bahja is quick to respond and comforts Mihran, stroking him over his chin and face. Suddenly Mihran says, 'I don't want this plate', and once more, Bahja quickly reacts by serving Mihran's food onto another plate. James, having left the table, re-enters the scene carrying a large spoon in his hand, stating, 'this [spoon] is for the macaroni'. Bahja looks somewhat annoyed at James and says, 'I don't want that spoon!' The practitioner comments, 'Bahja, you should use the spoon for the macaroni'. Bahja then glances at her, flutters her eyes, and says, obviously annoyed, 'I am not making macaroni!' Then Bahja looks at James and says, 'OK, it is macaroni' and takes the spoon James offers her. Continuing to make macaroni, Bahja finishes her dish, calling out, 'everybody come and eat'.

Interpretation observation one: reflections of suitability

Within this observation – *preparing a family meal* – it seems Bahja and the others reflected 'suitability' in their role play through their individual and collective actions. The following observation suggests that Bahja experiences that she is the right person in the right place:

'Holding a miniature wok pan ... blends her ingredients, quickly stirring the spaghetti sauce with a spoon. After a minute or so, she checks the consistency of the sauce, holding her spoon up high and letting the 'mixture' fall down into the pan.' Her fulfilment of a particular 'cultural expectation' (Woodhead and Brooker 2008) is echoed through the other participants' reactions to her skills: 'When Bahja is finished checking the sauce, she offers James a sample of it, holding the spoon to James's mouth. Tasting the sauce, James approves, nodding his head and making a confirming sound 'hmmm'. Then Bahja redirects her attention to her brother and offers Mihran a taste sample. Mihran, like James, agrees that it tastes good.'

Understood as a cultural script (Kirova 2010), this laminated production reflects aspects of children's immediate and distant settings. Seeing the role play as referring to Bahja's sociocultural belonging, her highly skilled and rooted performance seems to fit with research indicating that girls within the global south frequently frame their role play around domestic activities, reflecting local tradition (Corsaro 2009; Edwards 2000). Presumably influenced by historical contexts and transformation of participation in cultural activities (Brooker 2010), Bahja's performance of the 'mother identity' is then shaped through her social interaction and participation within distant and immediate sociocultural relations.

Another point of interest is that there is amongst the participants a collective capability of accessing the activity and roles distributed. As a collective production, the success of this *lamination* can be considered as being due to participants' individual capability to revisit original events, the family meal in their homes. Following Wohlwend (2007), it is possible to identify how the layering of individual and distant experiences onto the present enables the participants to reconstruct a family setting and perform socially negotiated and accepted cultural identities. This is illustrated by Mihran when he:

... touches the wok pan standing on the table and yells out 'ouch', pretending he has burned himself. Bahja is quick to respond and comforts Mihran, stroking him over his chin and face. Suddenly Mihran says 'I don't want this plate' and once more, Bahja quickly reacts by serving Mihran's food onto another plate.

Mihran's refusal and Bahja's patience might reveal something about both their cultural identities within the family setting, with Bahja as a girl having more responsibility for taking care of younger members of their family. Inspired by Nsamenang, it is possible to see how children's performances of particular adult identities reflect the ways that 'parental and community 'nurture' has channeled and nudged [children's] biological characteristics to fit a specific cultural niche' (Nsamenang 2008a, 18). In this context, we can see that it is possible to identify how Bahja's 'cultural niche' is reflected through her embodied knowledge of how to *be* a mother and how to *act* as a mother. Within this situation and context, Bahja's role play reflects a strong suitability, which is reflected through a shared and meaningful engagement activity in which she was enabled to re-make and remember home and belonging (Ní Laoire et al. 2010).

In this observation, we have discussed how Bahja reflected her *suitability* through role play. In the following, however, we discuss how Bahja, after her transition to the mainstream group, seemed to experience being *unsuitable* to partake in role play with her peers.

Observation two: princesses and dragons

It is 9:30 in the morning. Most children in the Fox group have arrived. The atmosphere is settled. Some of the children are playing; others are still finishing up their breakfast. Standing in front of the door leading to one of the side-rooms are the girls. Laughing and talking loud, they are clearly engaged in the preparation of one of their routine-based fantasy role plays of princesses and dragons. As the girls put on their pointy princess hats and silky gowns, they negotiate their roles, discussing and explaining to each other what they will do and how they will do this. When done, they instantly begin their play, some running around as princesses yelling that the dragons are coming, others pretending to be the dragons, ready to capture the princesses and take them to their prison towers. As the girls play, it seems that none of them have noticed that Bahja has arrived in the Fox group this morning. Somewhat hesitant, she remains standing in the door opening, leaning on the door post with one foot in the group. Here Bahja remains, observing from a distance the girls playing. Some of the girls run past Bahja into the cloakroom, ignoring her as they pass her by standing in the door opening. One of the princesses has been caught by the dragon and is taken to the dragon's lair. She screams for help. Bahja produces a faint smile. While the play develops, Bahja remains standing in the door opening for several minutes. Then, having received no invitation to join the girls, she walks into the group and with a somewhat sad expression on her face, she passes the girls by, unnoticed. Walking into the group, she spots Kris, the first author, observing her. Bahja begins to smile and walks over to him. Passing him by, she stands behind him and opens a large wooden chest. From this chest, she takes up a silky gown frequently used by the other girls in their role play. Holding it in front of her, she examines it closely. Then she puts on the gown, and when she is finished, she smiles at Kris, asking him, 'Do *you* want to play with me?' 'Certainly, Bahja,' Kris replies, and instantaneously, Bahja starts narrating and takes more content from the chest. Even though enthusiastically narrating, the first author notices how Bahja struggles with finding Norwegian words and as such supplements with Arabic and body language to communicate her intention whenever she notices that Kris doesn't understand her. But, without any doubt, the first author understands that Bahja is narrating her own version of the princess and dragons role play, as routinely performed by her peers. The girls continue their play. Bahja seems happy.

Interpretation observation two: reflections of un-suitability

Even though Bahja had visited the Fox group regularly before her transfer; Bahja's relation to the girls in Fox was not as strong as those she had with her peers in the Badger group. Bahja's experiences with social competition, exclusion, and relational aggression with the girls from the mainstream have been well documented, and previous research has addressed the fact that another aspect of the generally accepted positive view of mainstream day care for newcomer migrant children existed (Kalkman Kalkman, Hopperstad, and Valenta 2017). Here it was revealed that social exclusion and relational aggression are embedded in everyday and seemingly harmless activities in the mainstream group, communicated through, e.g. the girls sharing of their self-made artefacts with one another, in relation to which Bahja's was declined repeatedly, thereby confirming her status as 'outsider'. With this knowledge in mind, when comparing the first observation with the second, Bahja's reluctance to join the other girls from Fox – *standing in the door*

opening observing the girls play – might reflect a sense of unsuitability. Observing her peers initiating their role play, it appears that Bahja wants to join them, but her hesitation indicates a weakened sense of belonging and an experience of itinerancy and disconnectedness from the social surroundings (Vogler et al. 2008). Bahja's hesitation might, on the one hand, be seen as a reflection of her position and status in the group, and on the other hand, it could be seen as an indication of her sense of *unsuitability*, informed by the intersection between her own and her peers' social and cultural practices. If so, it could be interpreted that Bahja felt she looked unsuitable, dressed unsuitably, spoke unsuitably, behaved unsuitably, and played unsuitably (Woodhead and Brooker 2008). Simultaneously, her reluctance within this particular situation and context could indicate a pre-liminal phase (Turner 1996) in which she feels separated from the former places of her childhood. We understand that this intermingling of her status and her position within the peer group, the local cultural and historical knowledge caused Bahja to remain standing 'on the outside' looking in:

... leaning onto the door post with one foot in the group. Here Bahja remains, observing from a distance the girls playing. Some of the girls run past Bahja into the cloakroom, ignoring her as they pass her by standing in the door opening.

Moving on, why did Bahja approach the researcher? Over the course of nine months, Kris had spent considerable time with Bahja. Exploring Bahja's take on social reality in day care, they had formed a relationship based on mutual trust. During their time spent together, Kris always placed great emphasis on creating a safe environment with enhanced opportunities for Bahja to communicate her thoughts and opinions. Listening to Bahja became primarily an ethical concern, aimed at ensuring she felt recognised and that she experienced being safe, cared for, respected, and included (Woodhead and Brooker 2008). Over time, this reciprocal relationship created a particular belonging, informed by the research situation and context. This relational dimension can be interpreted as emphasised by Bahja herself: upon spotting the first author, she begins to smile and walks over to him. After putting on a princess gown, she smiles at him and asks, 'Do *you* want to play with me?' In contrast to the play sequence in observation two, Bahja's invitation to the first author to join her in her role play can be seen as a reflection of a social process in which they had established a *suitable* relationship, having come to understand herself as speaking suitably, behaving suitably, and perhaps due to the establishment of cultural references, playing suitably. With belonging defined as 'the relational dimension of personal identity, the fundamental psycho-social 'glue' that ... connects people to each other' (Woodhead and Brooker 2008, 3), we feel this reflexive stance is important because it can help to explain how newcomer migrant children's suitability within various liminal phases relies on their relational experiences set within multiple social and cultural spheres of daily life. Bahja's sense of empowerment, exploring particular ideas, rules, norms, and events (Löfdal and Hägglund 2006), indicates a strong suitability. Informed through relational acceptance, Bahja is located in a post-liminal phase, her negotiated status and position empowering her to express personal agency and creativity. As such, the relationship allowed Bahja to sense she was contributing, take on responsibilities, and fulfil particular roles (Woodhead and Brooker 2008). At the same time, being confident enough to integrate her own historical and cultural references into her play, she was able to freely laminate talk and action from distant time-space events onto the present

event (Wohlwend 2007) without the fear of negative perception. This is illustrated in the following observation. Bahja:

... takes up a silky gown frequently used by the other girls in their role plays. Holding it in front of her, she examines it closely. Then she puts on the gown and when finished she smiles at Kris, asking him, 'Do *you* want to play with me?' 'Certainly, Bahja,' Kris replies, and instantaneously Bahja starts narrating and takes more content from the chest. Even though enthusiastically narrating, the first author notices that Bahja struggles to find Norwegian words and as such supplements with Arabic and body language to communicate her intention whenever she notices that Kris doesn't understand her.

Conclusions and looking onward

Even though we recognise that migration is a major transition in an entire family's life, we have placed children and their childhood at the centre of our analytical attention (Corsaro 2015). By focusing on children's self-initiated and self-governed role play in two distinct day-care settings, we have come to an understanding of role play as cultural script (Kirova 2010).

By doing so, we have revealed additional aspects of newcomer migrant children's transitional experiences and have emphasised the fact that role play can inform day-care practitioners' understanding of a breach in the children's culture and relations. Nevertheless, more research is needed.

Furthermore, we have explained how the various phases of liminality can be useful for illuminating how newcomer children are required to negotiate new and intersecting identities. By theoretically combining the liminality concept and the concept of lamination, we were able to describe more dynamically how role play reveals important aspects of newcomer children's negotiation of a sense of belonging in time and place (Woodhead and Brooker 2008). One of the most interesting findings of this study is that, on the one hand, there is a collective aspect of role-play activity, and within this, the distribution of roles is important, and, on the other hand, the success of the child's lamination within the collective production depends on: (1) the participant's individual capability to revisit original events; and (2) the participant's ability to recognise cultural identities, social activities, and local traditions. A successful lamination will contribute to children sensing a strong suitability based on a shared and meaningful engagement within their social and cultural activity. A further finding relates to Broström (2002) who indicated that a *smooth transition* and sense of suitability is influenced by children's access to formerly established friendships, as these form their secure bases. Newcomer migrant children entering a mainstream group can, however, encounter an environment that is stripped of any social and cultural reference points; this makes their transition a 'risky' undertaking with much at stake. With children generally protecting their peer cultures and interests, newcomer migrant children are most likely aware (consciously or subconsciously) of the danger of becoming stigmatised as 'the other', standing on the outside looking in. If newcomer migrant children are aware of the risks related to their social and cultural attachments, they most likely will initiate their delicate interplay, e.g. a princess role play, in such a fashion that it frames them as *able* to perform particular cultural identities in cohesion with the recognised local identity discourses. If successful, they can negotiate their way onward, gradually becoming more included, and over time, they will

negotiate a status which enables them to perform and share their distantly located *re*-makings and *re*-memberings of home and belonging. However, with the understanding that these negotiations of identity and belonging within new social, cultural, and linguistic surroundings will 'involve intersecting relations and identifications on different scales' (Ní Laoire et al. 2010, p. 157), it is important that practitioners have the opportunity to develop awareness of how various migrant children's ways of being can evoke responses from peers.

Understanding that migrant children use particular events and roles in their role play not to cross cultural borders but rather to explore them, we have come to understand the transitional process as not linear, from pre-liminal to liminal and finally post-liminal, but full of everyday transitions in day care, causing migrant children to experience various phases of liminality to be interlinked. With migrant children moving in and out of various contexts and situations, each context and situation will demand from the migrant child particular social and cultural knowledge. Therefore, we conclude that rather than a linear and fixed transitional process, newly arrived young children may experience a daily fluctuating sense of belonging, moving into various liminal phases due to the influences of their immediate and new social and cultural surroundings. Even though the body of research on the nature and complexity of global south migrant children's conceptualisations of home and belonging and early childhood peer cultures is growing, more research is needed. In the process of writing this article, we were struck by the fact that comparatively little is known about the topic addressed and that much of the research informing day-care practice and policy in the global north is informed by a limited understanding of migrant, refugee, asylum, and other children with a transnational background in regard to their social, cultural, and historical contexts (Kirova 2010). We understand that a direct result of such limited understanding is that migrant children's social and cultural 'knowledge [performed through their role play] is not only disqualified, but its existence denied' (Cannella 1997, cited in Kirova 2010, 75). An important aspect in relation to practitioners' developing knowledge and insight can be seen in relation to the role of the researcher. We understand that some of the critical phenomena revealed in relation to newcomer migrant children's transition within day care were detected through active participation, the researcher using an extended range of modalities to create meaning. By doing so, the researcher's role became an important aspect within the interpretation of the newcomer migrant girl's role play, giving insight into her social worlds. The role of the researcher became an 'architect': a creator of social spaces and opportunities in which multiple instances of listening could occur; at other times, the researcher was more of an intermediary, himself relying on the perspectives of different groups and individuals (Clark 2010). The researcher as a listener and observer may suggest further ways for practitioners to support newcomer migrant children in and through their various liminal phases.

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