



SCIENTIFIC FINAL REPORT – RESEARCH NETWORKS

Registration number, Östersjöstiftelsen: 22-RN-0001

Project manager: Robert Lecusay

Project title: *Transforming Early Childhood Education and Care in the Baltic and Eastern European Region: Revitalizing pedagogical perspectives from Yugoslavian, Finnish and Swedish Scholarship and Practice in the Field.*

1. Purpose of the research network

The purpose of the network has been to establish and sustain scholarly collaborations among junior and senior researchers and educators who engage with and study little or less known approaches to early childhood education and care (ECEC). Two approaches we discussed - the Creative Pedagogy of Play (CPP) and Liful Pedagogy (LP), associated with the work of Gunilla Lindqvist (Sweden) and Aleksandra Marjanović (former Yugoslavia), – represent alternatives to internationally dominant ECEC pedagogies, which mostly tend toward the schoolification of ECEC – that is, emphasizing predefined academic skills rather than creative capacities of children. As noted in our original proposal, both CPP and LP offer meaningful ways to counter these schoolification pressures on the systems of ECEC provision in each of the countries represented in the project (Finland, Sweden, and Serbia). At the time that the conference was convened, CPP and LP had yet to be the subject of formal scholarly comparison, even though both overlap philosophically in their focus on creative collaborations between adults and children as fundamental to ECEC. The focus on developing scholarly collaborations that drove the network project was motivated not only by an interest in these comparisons but also by considering what and how these comparisons contributed to developing new ways to understand, mitigate and counteract the adverse effects of schoolification in ECEC.

2. A description of the research network's activities funded by Östersjöstiftelsen

The grant funded a two-day conference (November 2 - 4, 2022, Södertörns Högskola) focused on the philosophies and pedagogies of Lindqvist and Marjanović. This Lindqvist-Marjanović conference (hereafter L-M Conference) gathered LP and CPP scholars from the US, Serbia, Finland, and Sweden to engage in public roundtables, presentations, and brainstorming sessions designed to put in comparative perspective the pedagogical and philosophical principles underpinning the LP and CPP approaches. Funds that remained after the completion of the conference were used to underwrite a study trip (May 3 – 6, 2023) for two of the doctoral students who participated in the conference: Maša Avramović and Shelbi Taylor, both doctoral students in the Department of Pedagogy and Didactics at Södertörns Högskola. Maša and Shelbi's doctoral projects draw on LP and CPP, respectively. Maša and Shelbi traveled to Helsinki to meet with another doctoral student who participated in the conference, Pilvi Lindberg from the University of Helsinki's Faculty of Education, whose doctoral project draws on CPP.

3. The output from the research network, for example, applications for research funding

The formation of student-to-researcher and student-to-student connections made through the conference and study visit yielded collaborative in-press and planned publications, as



well as planned conference presentations that draw on the scholarship of both students and researchers:

Ferholt, B., Rainio, A.P., Avramović, M. & Taylor, S. (accepted). Play and social justice in education: Challenging dichotomies that leave vulnerable the right of all children to play. *The Bloomsbury Encyclopedia of Social Justice in Education* (Volume 6: Language, Literacy, Youth, and Culture). Bloomsbury.

Avramović, M., Ferholt, B., Rainio, A.P. (accepted): Care-as-research approach challenging traditional dichotomies in social sciences. Paper accepted to be presented at 7th European Congress of Qualitative Inquiry University of Helsinki, 10-12 January 2024, Helsinki, Finland

Furthermore, the network's establishment has played a key role in continuing the effort to translate Marjanović's scholarship into English, a task spearheaded by network members Masa Avramović, Beth Ferholt, and Ana Marjanović-Shane. Although this endeavor began before the conference, it gained ongoing momentum through the connections made among participants during the event. The translations are the following:

Marjanović, A. S. (2022, final translation), A critique of the institutionalization of preschool education and theses for an outline of a conception of societal education as an open system, orig., Marjanović, A. (1987, "Kritika institucionalizacije predškolskog obrazovanja i teze za nacrt koncepcije društvenog obrazovanja kao otvorenog sistema." *Predškolsko Dete* 17(1-4), 403-411. (Transl. Ana Marjanovic-Shane)

Marjanović, A. S. (2022, final translation), Child play and creativity Marjanović, A., Dečja igra i kreativnot, 1977, Prosvetni Pregled, *Marxism & Education* (transl. Ružica Rosandić & Ana Marjanovic-Shane)

Marjanović, S. (2023, first draft translation), The controversial issues in public upbringing of preschool children, orig, Marjanović, A., (1987). Protivrečna pitanja javnog vaspitanja predškolske dece. *Predškolsko Dete*, 1987(1-4), 11-26. (Transl. Ana Marjanovic-Shane)

Members of the network will also be participating in three open, online symposia, planned for the spring 2024. Network member Ana Marjanović-Shane (who gave the keynote speech on Marjanović's work at the November conference) is organizing these symposia together with Professor Elin Ødegaard of Western Norway University of Applied Sciences, director for the Kindergarten Knowledge Centre for Systemic Research on Diversity and Sustainable Futures. The symposia are being convened to generate ideas for a proposed special issue of the *Dialogic Pedagogy Journal* on the topic of "Studies of Conflict and Courage in Children's Play: Dissonance, Dialogue, and Power." The members of L-M network will lead one symposium to consider possible article contributions to the special issue based on ideas generated from the L-M conference, and co-authored by the L-M conference participants.

Work to parlay the ideas generated at the L-M conference and in subsequent video conference meetings (spring and fall 2023) remains in process. The initial intention was to apply for a project grant from the Baltic Sea Foundation. This required that the lead applicant be employed as a researcher at Södertörn. However, in the middle of the grant period, the sole member of the network with this qualification switched employment from Södertörn to another university. We are now considering alternate project and network funding sources (e.g. Riksbankenjubileumsfunden, Nordforsk, and the Spencer Foundations' Transformative Grants) for applications, in the 2024-2025 academic year.

4. The research network's contribution to research and/or doctoral studies at Södertörn University

The conference, and activities subsequently spawned by the conference, contributed to the development of the research environment and activities at Södertörn, particularly doctoral studies in the education sciences research and education environment. The L-M conference



did this directly as it was open to and attended by doctoral students and researchers from Södertörn including those who were part of the conference (presenters, discussants) and others not directly involved. This was possible in part because we intentionally coordinated with Södertörn's Preschool Education Research Network (PERN) so that aspects of the conference were run as part of Research Days events, planned by PERN, that took place in the fall of 2022 (e.g., the keynote lecture given by Ana Marjanović-Shane for the L-M conference doubled as a lecture in the Research Days events).

The conference, subsequent video conference meetings, and a study visit have been particularly impactful at the level of doctoral research. As noted, Maša and Shelbi, the two Södertörn doctoral students in the network, leveraged the opportunities afforded by the network grant not only to strengthen their local collaboration but also to expand their work internationally through collaboration with Pilvi Linbberg and Anna Rainio at the University of Helsinki (e.g., the study visit), and Beth Ferholt at Brooklyn College. The study visit helped advance the individual doctoral projects by providing the students an additional platform for exploring Lindqvist and Marjanović's ideas and their application in contemporary ECEC settings (specifically, in this case, Lindqvist's ideas in the context of Finnish preschools – the doctoral students met with Finnish preschool pedagogues who are working with these ideas). As noted by Shelbi and Maša in a report they wrote about their visits, these exchanges facilitated the integration of Lindqvist and Marjanović's ideas into their empirical research and enriched their understanding of innovative research methodologies. At the same time, the visit expanded and strengthened their network of peer research support and dialogue. Finally, one can argue that the strengthening of Shelbi, Maša, and Pilvi's research feeds back into Södertörn's research environment by contributing knowledge and expertise about ECEC research given the number of undergraduate preschool teacher education students it serves. This feedback is also accomplished, for example, by the connections the network is making internationally with other ECEC educational and research networks (e.g., see Ødegaard's group above).

5. The contribution of the research network to the knowledge of the Baltic Sea Region and Eastern Europe

As shown in the responses above, the conference, video conference meetings, and study visits were successful in establishing and sustaining the research network. This network has and is contributing to a deeper understanding of regional issues facing the Baltic and eastern European region by the work it is doing to contextualize Marjanović and Lindqvist's pedagogies and philosophies in relation to specific challenges in education policy, research, and practice that currently and historically have been faced by the early childhood education systems in Serbia, Finland, and Sweden (e.g., schoolification, the question of organizational sustainability in and as early childhood education). By comparing ECEC practices in the region, the conference contributed valuable insights into how different countries are navigating similar challenges, enriching the overall knowledge base of ECEC practice and research. At the same time, the network's focus on revitalizing the pedagogical approaches of Marjanović and Lindqvist contributes to a renewed understanding of their relevance in contemporary ECEC practices, offering alternative perspectives and solutions to current educational and research challenges in the region and contributing to a richer understanding of the area's educational landscape.