

# “It’s Work That Has to be Done”

## Finnish school children working during their summer holiday

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### Abstract

*This article concentrates on Finnish school children’s work during their summer holiday, offering a contribution to the understanding of the meanings of work for children and the contexts in which it takes place. Based on interviews with children, the article focuses on the relation of work to other activities in children’s everyday life, in particular school work. The meanings for the children of paid work in the summer holiday stem from comparing, with school work and with what adults do as their job. An adult work context is experienced as rewarding, as well as being needed, doing “real” work, that is being able to replace adults in their jobs for some time.*

### Introduction

The 20<sup>th</sup> century was a time of the institutionalisation of childhood, the creation of specific spaces in which children were supposed to prepare for adult life under the guidance of adults specialised for that purpose. Homes, schools and day care centres became the primary spatial and social contexts for arranging the daily lives and social relations of children. In addition, childhood spaces became specialised in terms of activities planned to go on in them – as did most other spaces in society as well. The main ac-

tivities of children in this childhood construction have become play and learning – in contrast to adult activities going on elsewhere in society. Institutionalised childhood has framed a clear distinction between “proper” childhood places on one hand and the “out of place” – a concept which refers to children’s dislocation from the places that are commonly regarded as normal for childhood in public images (Connolly & Ennew 1996).

In this construction of a “proper” childhood, working life had no place whatsoever. Working life typically represented the “harsh realities of the adult world” (Stephens 1995:14) that children were to be protected from. In the industrial area the substitution of children’s manual work in factories with school and learning seemed a linear and unambiguous process. Children’s contribution to society was transferred from working life to education, and school work became children’s proper activity. An extensive reorganisation of children’s times and spaces took place (Zelizer 1985, Qvortrup 1995). Finland has by and large followed the same path as other Nordic and Western European countries, however with delay, due to later modernisation of the economy and later urbanisation. An understanding of self as a working being in agrarian society structures many older people’s memories of childhood (Korkiakangas 1996).

Studies reveal that work is still part of children’s life also in the wealthier parts of the world. Children’s work activities are, however, easily rendered invisible behind the ideology of the “non-working child” in modern society. The economic, social and cultural context of children’s work in late modern society is evidently quite different from industrial society, thus also changing the meaning work has for children in their everyday life. Although the close connection between children’s work and family poverty is not altogether in the past, it is far from sufficient to explain children’s work in contemporary society. There is even some research evidence showing that children who are better off economically and socially might work to a larger extent than children living in poorer circumstances (Middleton & Loumidis 2001:27–29). Children work for money and to have an income and consumption opportunities of their own. Children’s motives for working are, however, not purely instrumental. Participating in work activities is experienced as rewarding: children can extend their social networks and at least momentarily feel part of an adult world. Although the working conditions are often far from ideal, children mostly

like having a job<sup>1</sup> (Rahikainen 1996, Myers 1999, Morrow 1994, Mizen et al. 1999, 2001).

This article is about the meanings and contexts of children's work in contemporary Finnish society. Children's work is in the article discussed in a relational context, focusing on *the relation of work to other activities* in children's everyday life, in particular school work. Changes in working life influence this relation. The expanding service sector in particular offers children part-time and seasonal jobs which have irregular working hours and which are often not tied to a specific working place. Changes in working life more generally point to a less clear distinction between work and non-work and between working time and leisure time in late modern society in comparison to industrial society. Atypical working hours and flexibility have spread, and work has become more project oriented (Sennett 1998, Julkunen & Nätti 1999). Part-time work beside school work and seasonal jobs during holidays, or a combination of these, has become the most widespread forms of school children's work in the Nordic countries (Rafnsdóttir 1999). The demand for child work, however, easily fluctuates; during economic recessions the figures for (officially registered) child work goes down (Suomalainen lapsi 2007).

In late modern society, it has become more difficult to treat work as a distinct activity, opposed to other activities. The differences between play, learning and work have become more blurred: aspects of playfulness are absorbed into work, at the same time as children's play has become a more serious business of dealing with complex social constellations, information flows and demands on time and space management. Demands for efficiency, productivity and achievements are familiar to both educational institutions and working places; contemporary child policies underline the close connection between investment in children and the economic and cultural success of the future information society. Children's most demanding work is actually school work (Hengst 2007, Strandell 2007, 2009, Qvortrup 1995)! Consequently, it becomes increasingly difficult to treat work as an exclusively adult activity in contrast with children's play and

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<sup>1</sup> According to official statistics, 54% of Finnish 16-year-old and 13% of 14-year-old children received income from work in 2004 (Suomalainen lapsi 2007:216). According to a Nordic survey done in 1997–1998, 42% of Finnish young people aged 13–17 worked for pay during their summer vacation (Rafnsdóttir 1999:15, 23). Figures from other European countries likewise show considerable amounts of work done by children (Rafnsdóttir 1999, James, Jenks & Prout 1998:101–123, Morrow 1994). The figures vary, indicating difficulties in measuring the phenomenon as well as definitional ambiguity surrounding the phenomenon.

learning. Working life and school has become more a both /and question for children; participation in working life has become a normal and routine part of their everyday life beside other activities.

In this article, the focus is on children's paid work during their summer holiday. Children's work during summer holidays in particular, which in Finland are longer than in many other countries, has more seldom been subject to research. When discussing children's work in contemporary society, part-time work outside school during the school year or children's attitudes towards working have been more in focus (Morrow 2007, 1994, Leonard 2004, 2002). When comparing paid work and school work – which is a central theme in the article – this is important to keep in mind.

Tobias Samuelsson (2007:56) makes a useful distinction between “work” and “job” when discussing school children's work in Sweden. While “work” refers to an activity, “job” refers to a position and a place where work takes place. While different kinds of work activities are part of children's everyday life, a “job” is more clearly connected to the adult world and is thus more difficult for children to access. Work – often full time – in a long period free from school obligations thus touches closer upon “job” dimensions of work than do other work activities in children's everyday life.

## **The study**

The study addresses school children's work during their summer holiday. It is based on interviews with 15 school children aged 14–18 who worked during their summer holiday or for part of it. Although summer jobs are in focus, children's part-time work during school terms is to some extent included. The interviews were carried out in Turku, which is one of the bigger cities in Finland, located on the southwest coast.

The children who participated in the interviews were recruited in two Swedish speaking schools,<sup>2</sup> a compulsory secondary school and an upper secondary school, and were interviewed during the late spring and summer. A letter presenting the project was distributed to the pupils by the teacher in the classes that had been chosen for the project. Interested chil-

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<sup>2</sup> Finland has a Swedish-speaking minority of ca 6%. The majority of the pupils in Swedish-speaking schools speak Swedish as their mother tongue, however some are bilingual, speaking both Finnish and Swedish.

dren with experiences of work were asked to write down their name and phone number and return the paper to their teacher, in case they wanted to participate in the study. Girls showed greater interest in participating in the project; only four of the interviewed are boys. Because gender is not the analytical focus in the article, attention has not been paid to questions of gender.

The focus in the article is on children's experiences of work primarily in relation to children's societal status as *school* children. The institutionalisation of childhood places children in a specific relation to adult society and creates a common basis for experiences and social identities. The child's identity as a pupil or learner, social control through specific organisation of time and space, and curricula profoundly shape children's experiences of being a school child (James et al. 1998:41–47). Age is the basis for the societal positioning of children. Age, then, and the children's reflections on age, age differences and age boundaries in connection to work and jobs are in focus in the article.

In the interviews, the children were asked to tell their "work history": about earlier jobs, how they had got them, and how they had experienced them. They were asked to tell about their working places and the social relations at the working places. They were further asked to compare their jobs with other everyday activities, in particular their school work. With the exception of hobby-related jobs, which seem to be overrepresented in the data, the jobs the interviewed children told about represent fairly well jobs children typically have in Finland<sup>3</sup> (Rafnsdottir 1999:31–53).

How should work be introduced as the theme of discussion in interviews with children? In the construction of modern childhood, work is reserved for adults, while children have been banished to the worlds of play and learning. One result of this has been that children often do not recognize the work they do as work (Solberg 1997, Samuelsson 2007). In addition, alarmist discourses about child labour in poor areas of the world have permeated conceptions of child work. The global context of child labour, in which labour is often discussed in terms of misery and slavery, and in which campaigns against child labour gain visibility, exerts a strong influence on the meanings of children's work, also in more prosperous countries (Myers 1999, James et al. 1998:101–106). How can this be dealt with methodologically? In a social constructionist understanding, interview talk

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<sup>3</sup> In a study by Rafnsdottir (1999) there is one large job category which is named "Other", which probably contains different types of jobs that are not easy to categorise – such as children's hobby-related jobs.

is always the outcome of the interview situation; questions of *how* are as important as questions of *what* (Holstein & Gubrium 2004). In a qualitative interview the interviewer invites the interview person to tell a story rather than asking for specific answers to specific questions. Both parties are necessarily active in constructing meaning in the interview situation (ibid.). In order to create a space in the interview situation for the children to tell about their experiences, we indicated that we regard children's work as a socially acceptable phenomenon, as an activity among many other activities in the children's everyday lives. By giving the children some examples of activities that in their mind might not always count as "real" work, such as delivering newspapers, looking after children or walking dogs, we tried to signal a broad and inclusive definition of what we were interested in.

Four themes can be distinguished in the analysis of the data: in the first theme the children state that working during the summer holiday is something they both want and have to do; it is a non-questioned part of their life. Difficulties in accessing the labour market reveal children's dependence on family networks for getting a job. In the third theme children's work is discussed in terms of place and belonging; in the fourth theme meanings stemming from explicitly comparing paid work and school work are in focus.

## **The normal thing to do**

Mizen, Pole and Bolton (2001:46, 53) approach the question of children's work as a relation between choice and constraint, freedom and necessity when studying children's work in Britain. When discussing British children's experienced voluntariness of working, they noted that entering employment was not a matter of simple choice but rather a means of taking part in the "normal" routines and relations of childhood, primarily through earning money. They regard paid employment as a normative feature of contemporary British childhood and a more or less normal element of urban culture and lifestyle.

When asked why they work and what place working for pay occupies in their everyday life, the children in the study told both about wanting to work and "having" to work:

That's how things are, all young people work and should work actually, and want to work, but it's not so easy to get a job.

The children interviewed said that they felt some pressure to have a job. The pressure was embedded in their social relations with both their parents and peers. Parents often expressed their opinion about the matter, while the influence of peers was more indirect: when "all the others" work, working felt like the normal thing to do. The pressures were of a different kind. The children referred to a certain age when one has to start in order not to "fall behind". They referred to a competitive situation, feeling that the demand for jobs exceeds supply. They referred to a natural "rhythm" in their life, to their feeling that "everybody else does it" and to their willingness "to become one of them".

*Would it feel strange not to have a job?*

Well, everybody I know, most of them have a job. (The speaker does not have a job at the moment)

... it's just that you can get the feeling that you become one of those who take up the rhythm of working ... so many will do it soon anyhow... I guess I will also have some kind of job next year.

I have just had in mind to enjoy my summer holiday, but you should, when you reach this age you should have a summer job.

When discussing parents' influence on the children's choices to work or not work, it was evident that the parents were mostly in favour of the first alternative. According to what their children said, the parents thought that children's working during summer holidays is something of a cultural taken-for-granted, but partly for other reasons than those revealed in the children's peer networks. It was evident that children felt some pressure from their parents to seek and find a job for part of the summer holiday. The parents were those who reminded their children to ask for a job, who suggested what kind of job to look for and where to find it, and who often also helped their children to find a job. Having a job was for them both acceptable and desirable:

*Why does your mom want you to have a job?*

Because it's a natural thing, at least here in our Nordic culture, it's a natural thing that sixteen-, seventeen-, eighteen-year-old people should have a summer job, that they should earn their money in their own way.

The "wanting" side of the duality of both wanting and feeling pressured to have a job is fairly easy to connect to individualised meanings of working associated with earning money for one's own consumption, autonomy and individual choice, which are often referred to in research on children's work (Morrow 1994, Rahikainen 1996).

In the children's own preferences – eagerly supported by the parents – the attraction of having a summer job was contrasted to another activity children readily engage in when they have free time – "doing nothing", whatever that doing nothing is. In relation to "doing nothing", having something to do was regarded as a more preferable option. The children thought that time would pass too slowly without a job.

*Is earning money the most important thing in having a job?*

In summer the most important thing is to have something to do.

It's not fun either to have nothing to do!

Well, otherwise they [parents] do not mind, but they too think that you should do something instead of just hanging around.

Parents' eagerness to support their children in finding a summer job seems to reflect a fear of losing control over their children, due to a lack of structure and schedule in their time use, and a need to keep them away from improper places and activities (James et al. 1998:38, 51). The summer holiday for Finnish school children is about 11 weeks long, which is quite a long "non-scheduled" time. Having a job is here carrying a function which parents often give to children's hobbies: to keep children away from bad influences from peers and to guarantee moral qualities (Hoikkala 1993:92–96). During the summer holiday there is no risk that children's work for pay interferes with their school work, which can be the case when children work during the school year.



Positive attitudes towards working in summer time are connected to the fact that the summer vacation is the most suitable part of the year for having a job because it is a long period away from school (Samuelsson 2007:55).

## **Restricted access to the labour market**

When looking at how school children get their jobs and at their status as actors on the job market, a somewhat different picture emerges. The naturalness of having a job that the children articulated when expressing their general attitude towards working fades. The children referred quite often to the age limit of 18 years as a barrier to finding a job. In particular, when it comes to getting the more qualified and interesting jobs, the age limit of eighteen years was experienced as an artificial and unnecessary barrier. Most of them complained about the difficulty of getting a more qualified and interesting job if one is under eighteen years of age:

I think it's ridiculous because I don't think I'm less good at a job this year because I'm seventeen than what I'm going to be next year when I'm eighteen, but still it makes a great difference as to what kind of jobs I can get.

The experience of the age limit of 18 years as a barrier is a bit surprising in light of the fact that a child is allowed to work if he has reached the age of 15; with restrictions this is valid also for 14 and 13 year olds<sup>4</sup> (Young workers' Act 998/1993). However, there are also restrictions on the work that can be done by a person under 18 years of age, collected in the Young workers Act (998/1993). The purpose of the Act is to protect young people from work that can be hazardous to his or her physical or mental development. For example, a 15- to 17-year-old person's working hours must fall between 6 a.m. and 10 p.m. Minna Autio (1998), who has studied young workers at McDonald's hamburger bars, notes that the prohibition for under 18-year-old persons to work after 10 p.m. is an effective barrier against employing persons under 18 years.

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<sup>4</sup> A person may be admitted to work for at most half of the school holidays if he has reached the age of 14 years or will reach that age in the course of the calendar year and if the work in question consists of light work that is not hazardous to his health and development and does not hinder school attendance (Young workers' Act 998/1993).

The age limit of eighteen years seems to pose more restrictions than what the legislation as such poses, at least this is the children's experience. By defining the age of majority, 18 years is a both cultural and institutional age limit categorising children and adults as two different categories, adults on one side, and those who are still developing on the other. It restricts children's claims on access to space "owned" by adults (Matthews et al. 2000), in this case working life space, and reduces children's opportunities to access jobs. As Tobias Samuelsson (2007:55–56) has noticed, children have a very weak connection to that part of the labour market where adults are employed, although work is part of children's everyday life.

The children in the study thought that they are badly recognised as applicants for a job. Turning to employment offices or answering advertisements in newspapers were experienced as more or less useless channels for finding a job if you are under eighteen. When official channels for entrance into the labour market fail, children become dependent on social contacts and networks for gaining access to the labour market. This is valid in particular for those jobs that in the children's own categorisation represent "real" jobs and not just any type of work. The children were quite aware of the fact that they were badly recognised as applicants for a job.

Parents, older siblings, relatives, parents' friends and parents' positions and social contacts in their own working places appeared to be the most fruitful channels for children to get a job. Sometimes peer contacts could be used to get a job. Just asking around – alone or together with peers – in places known by peers or family members could prove successful.

Most people get jobs by using contacts. One of my friends, her family has a café so she works there. Another friend works at Company because her dad works there and... Everybody who is working gets the jobs through contacts, I mean everybody who is under eighteen.

I tried other channels also but it is so difficult. Most of them want you to be eighteen. (The speaker has got her job through her father's fiancée.)

Well, I filled in the form from the employment office, and everything else I could think of as well. But then you just have to ask around but that's... I was sixteen at that time, so it's not very much you can get.

Dependence on family and peer contacts, social networks, information, institutional rules and restrictions in the process of finding a job is clearly an unsatisfactory condition for the children. Many times they would like to and would be prepared to use the “normal” channels into the job market, if they were only allowed to do so. Another aspect of children's dependence on social networks and contacts is that it may favour the more prosperous families and children, making children's work something of a privilege – quite contrary to the “old” child labour in which the connections to family poverty were strong.

## **Place and belonging**

How do school children find their places in working life in a social context which is characterised by a certain degree of cultural acceptance of children's work, coupled with restricted access to it and dependence on family and peer contacts and networks?

A place can be understood in a physical, social and symbolic sense. The physical dimension of place points to particular locations, while social dimensions of place point to position, status and situation (Olwig 2000:33–36). Belonging to a place is expressed in the meanings given to that place. Belonging to a place must be understood as being embedded in power structures and relations. As seen above, boundaries are always a question of power relations. On the one hand they work to establish insiders, those who belong to that place, and on the other hand outsiders, those who do not belong to that place or whose belonging is ambiguous (Rose 1995:89, 98–99). The power relations of major importance in this context are age-related relations of exclusion and inclusion. There are limits to children's place-making in working life, the positions and the status they can obtain, and the identities they can develop.

In the previous section was discussed the children's growing dependence on parents, social networks and peers in order to get a job. In the following a *reversed* dependence is displayed in the meanings the school children attach to their participation in working life: a feeling of being indispensable in the work place. Work is a place of belonging through their

contribution, which the children experience as both necessary and rewarding.

Well... maybe you can learn many new things and then you can feel being important, that you have a role somewhere, that you have something to do, that you can be helpful and what you do is needed. You feel older when you have a job.

In this example working means more than just earning one's own money and having something to do. The short quote contains six incentives of working for pay. Four of them – to be important, to have a role, to be able to give a hand and to belong – tell about a will to be part of something that is experienced as rewarding. Also, feeling older when you have a job indicates that working is connected with the adult world.

To be sure I'm not sitting there in order to learn, but in order to get things done, things that have to be done, and I get paid because what I'm doing is needed, I think these are two different things.

But they are really needed (the pipettes) you can notice that when heaps of empty boxes are coming in, and I mean... in the same way picking strawberries is needed. It is needed as well, because if nobody picks the berries then it's totally useless to raise them, because if you don't pick them and sell them then they will make no profit and then the whole idea is gone.

There would be a crisis, for sure, because then people could not go for a holiday and the whole thing wouldn't work.

The school children displayed an awareness of being part of something larger and a feeling of responsibility to do their part. They were convinced that their contribution was needed and a necessary part of the whole, a link in the production chain, and that they could replace adult workers and keep the wheels running. They work because "that's a job that has to be done" and because "you realise that you can really be of great use!" The children felt responsible for doing their job well, because otherwise they would cause problems for others, who are dependent on their contribution.

In the Nordic countries the great majority of children's jobs are found in the service sector (Rafnsdottir 1999:31–53). The importance of young

labour in the expansion of the service sector has been noticed by Mizen et al. (2001:52) as well, who have studied British school age workers. They find it inappropriate to talk of specific child jobs or a particular market for children's work. The integration of the interviewed children into "normal" jobs then seems to form a basis for their claims on being treated as adequate workers on the same level as adults.

In part of the discussions with the children, a few signs of a "work identity" could be distinguished. In some cases the children regarded their work activity rather as "helping", a categorisation which is in accordance with the actor's position as a child. Especially some of the jobs that the girls told about were conceived of by them rather as helping their parents, relatives or neighbours than as "real work". One girl who had done cleaning work at her parents' work place for several years stated that "I have never thought of it as a job, it's more like helping mom and dad with their jobs". Childcare is a typical working task which young girls are frequently occupied with and which is easily conceived of as "helping". The children are here pushed back into a proper child status in which children's contributions get their meaning largely in a family context.

Children's hobby-related work represents another type of activity, the work status of which is often blurred for the children. Working with horses, drama groups or camps for smaller children or as a Moomin character at Moomin land<sup>5</sup> are examples of this category. While being extensions of the children's hobbies, their status as work remains ambiguous.

## **School work and paid work**

The children were invited by the interviewer to compare paid employment with school work, and they willingly accepted the invitation. The focus was on the children's work in their summer holiday, without, however, excluding other forms of paid employment. The comparisons offered a fruitful and lucid way of discussing the differences between places and questions of belonging. Because school is so central in children's lives, comparisons between paid employment and school work naturally made up considerable parts of the interviews. Comparing is not a question of what

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<sup>5</sup> Moomin land is a theme park in Naantali, a small town near Turku. School children work in summer time in the park as different Moomin characters, which also do some jobs, for example, selling items in the kiosk or guiding people around.

is more or less necessary or valuable for the individual or for society; comparisons just bring out the different meanings children attach to school work and paid employment and the different roles these play in children's lives.

Both school and paid jobs self-evidently belonged to and occupied a place in the children's lives. The children felt responsibility for doing their best in both places. School and work are just different kinds of places, with different kinds of responsibilities:

*Isn't your school work needed?*

No, it's only for yourself. If somebody has promised to pay you then you have to try... Of course you should do your best at school also, but that's mostly for yourself, learning is for yourself.

Asked about differences between school and working for pay:

Differences, well... I was thinking of responsibility. Of course you have responsibility at school also. You are responsible for your own learning, no one else takes any notice really. But at a job you are more responsible for other people's things and like that, and money and like that.

When you study at a school you have to be useful for yourself or so. But now I'm doing a job for other people.

Contrasting paid employment with school work brings out a deeper dimension of being needed. In comparison with school work, children's paid employment clearly fills another place in their life. Attending school is conceived of as a kind of investment in one's individual future, while working for pay is doing something with others and for others, as part of a whole. The choice of terminology to describe the attitude towards school work can be understood against the background of the instrumental value school education has for the children. Its value lies in the future, as the benefits of school work will be realised only in the future. The difference between "being needed" and doing something "for oneself" lies in the different time perspectives between the two spheres of activities in children's daily lives.

What is striking is that children talk about their jobs roughly in the same terms as adults do. They seem to make few distinctions between children and adults as workers. The work they talk about is not work for children; it is “work that has to be done”, either by adults or by children. The children’s experience of inclusion rests on viewing work as a web of interdependencies and as chains of tasks that have to be accomplished. If one chain fails, all the subsequent chains will fail as well. The children make their place in working life by being indispensable. They turn the dependence relation around; instead of being dependent on adults – as children are often depicted – adults become dependent on them. Making oneself “needed” can be regarded as a way of claiming access to a space in which the presence of children is ambiguous and in which their opportunities both to influence things and to gain access to the more qualified jobs are limited. In this respect, working life can be said to be a space largely “owned by adults” (Matthews et al. 2000). Children’s place-making in working life can be understood as a reaction to adult “ownership” of working life. The results confirm what studies of children’s own preferences concerning types of work have revealed: “Like adults, children value work that results in status (including respect and appreciation), skills, responsibility and money” (Levinson 2000:127).

A crucial aspect of the children’s claim on access to working life and in their identity constructions is a much coveted equality with adults. The downplaying of the differences in adults’ and children’s positions is highlighted when children contrast paid employment to school work, where children’s position as learners and adults’ position as teachers function as each others’ opposites. In working life age segregation mixes with age-integrating practices. Consequently, children can obtain more equal positions with adults than what is the case in school. Working life represents one of the spaces in society in which some equalisation of children and adults as social actors is possible (Alanen et al. 2004, Strandell 2007).

## **Discussion**

Working during the summer holiday is a specific category of child work. It has much in common with children’s part-time work during the school year, such as a weak connection to and position in the labour market. The division of labour in society positions children as learners outside working life, a fact that profoundly influences children’s experiences of work.

There are, however, also differences between work during the summer holiday and other types of work children carry out. Taking place in a fairly long period free from school work, summer work brings children closer to being “normal” workers and evokes more “job” dimensions of work (Samuelsson 2007:56) than other forms of work done by children. Against this background children’s comparisons with adult workers and their questioning of age barriers become understandable.

In the both/and perspective of combining work with other everyday activities, school children’s work identities are strongly relational, based both on comparing activities and comparing their conditions with those of adult workers. School work and paid jobs are embedded in different time perspectives: school education is an investment in the child’s individual future, while having a job is here and now, accomplishing socially rewarding tasks that other people are dependent on and getting money for one’s own needs. In relation to just hanging around, having a job receives a meaning as having something to do.

The identities of “being needed” that children develop in working life can be understood relationally as well – in an age perspective. The positive meanings of work which stem from “being needed” are connected to downplaying age-based differences, to seeing oneself and one’s contribution as at least close to equal of that of adults, to being able to do adult work and replace adults, and to having “real” jobs. Little in the school children’s accounts reveals that they are actually children – they talk like anyone who has and does a job, and like anyone who has to find strategies for combining different activities into a functioning everyday life. Making on a discursive level oneself indispensable and depicting working life as a web of interdependencies turn the relation of dependency upside down; making “them” (adults) dependent on “us” (children). The work children are doing is not work for children; it is “work that has to be done”.

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